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“Selection of a suitably skilled design team will be important whatever the procurement route.”

From Placemaking Issues - Public Buildings: Process: The relevant project skills are needed regardless of procurement route

**Text: Placemaking Issues - Public Buildings**

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 **Public Buildings**, 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**

Public buildings form an integral part of the fabric and civic identity of our towns and cities continue to be a major part of Scotland’s construction output. Investment in the quality of our community infrastructure - our schools, health centres and libraries - is key to building successful places and creating sustainable communities. Cultural buildings too - arts centres, museums and visitor centres of various scales - provide a significant public role and can become an important source of civic, regional and national pride.

In addition to lessons learnt and support on varying scales and types of projects through Design Forum, A+DS also provides information and advice to public sector clients on healthcare and education buildings through our **Healthier Places** and **Smarter Places** programmes.

**PROCESS**

### **Involve design consultant early to get maximum benefit**

Involvement of architects, landscape designers, and artists at an early stage in the design process can bring a particular set of skills to a project to help achieve maximum value to a project and site. A strong overall design idea, integrating a landscape and architectural vision, can help create a memorable project with positive impact and experience for the community and visitors.

### **The relevant project skills are needed regardless of procurement route**

Different types of building procurements, such as traditional vs. design and build, will give varying degrees of design control throughout a building contract on such aspects as material selection and the quality of detailing, and may have a bearing on the quality of the outcome. Selection of a suitably skilled design team will be important whatever the procurement route.

### **Procurement which values design skills**

Design team procurement options vary across sectors and organisations, however the process offers the potential to seek the best design skills for individual projects and to value the positive effects of good quality design as an intrinsic and important part of the process of team selection. Processes such as Quality Based Selection seek to establish the most suitable and qualified provider of construction services, separately from the consideration of price, thereby allowing clients to assess value in the procurement of design services, as opposed to purely cost.

In addition, competitive design selection processes, such as international design competitions, can help get the best out public buildings and generate flexible and imaginative solutions. The benefits of running a design competition can include:

- inviting fresh thinking
- promoting a site or a proposition
- making a step change in the quality of an organisation's work
- attracting talented design teams
- assessing a range of approaches to design challenges
- delivering real innovative thinking within technical and financial constraints

Further reading:

On 3 October 2012, the Deputy First Minister launched a review of the way Scotland's £2 billion public construction contracts are awarded. The Crawford review is due to be published this summer.

A+DS Health Programme have made a joint publication with SFT, sharing lessons on achieving expectations in terms of quality and affordability: **Quality and Efficiency - Value for money lessons and performance measures from the Primary Care Reference Design Project.**

CABE have provided guidance on running design competitions, which can be found **here**.

### **Collaboration and participation with communities is important**

A collaborative design approach between community and stakeholders can successfully feed into the development of a project. Opportunities to give the community an active role at an early stage, through community participation and public events, can help to scope out local knowledge and opinion and contribute to the development of project briefs.

### **Design quality is important at all stages**

In order to achieve a quality of place, a high level of design ambition and commitment will need to be maintained through the delivery of the project. There is potential for design quality to come under budgetary pressures and be compromised

by procurement processes and it is important to guard against a process that sees cost analysis as the sole driver, but rather one consideration in achieving the bigger gains possible through the project.

## STRATEGIC DECISIONS

### **Cohesive decision-making can add value to a project**

Councils can play a critical role in establishing and giving cohesion to a joined up vision and approach between stakeholders. Asset use and resource planning affect communities, and cultural buildings can be located to inspire confidence, create employment, support minority groups. Project teams have a role in presenting the bigger picture in order that clients may consider long term, in addition to immediate, benefits of investing in a quality outcome and a place based approach.

### **Strategic approaches can support surrounding infrastructure**

By co-ordinating public transport, pedestrian and cycle routes strategies, user numbers can be maximised, sustainable transport promoted, access routes made active and hence safe and pleasant, and there can be knock-on benefits to the surrounding areas from the placement of the building function.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

### **Utilise environmental modelling**

There are advantages in utilising modelling techniques, such as daylight modelling, ventilation and environmental impact studies, to help explore optimum configuration of buildings and quality of internal and external spaces, and to demonstrate the overall performance of a building and how it would impact on surrounding areas. Early and accurate modelling combined with a holistic approach to sustainability, in terms of asset location, transport, and knock-on regenerative effects will be more successful than later addition of technical solutions.

### **Sharing services**

Mixed uses within public function buildings can make most efficient use of resources, and hence create an inherently sustainable outcome. Such buildings might also extend opening hours, which leads to better supervision of external spaces and richer community engagement.

## CONTEXT + LAYOUT

### **Public buildings can regenerate communities**

Public buildings that act as hubs at the centre of local life have an important role to play in facilitating community participation and cohesion and have the potential to revitalise an existing place as well as fostering renewed civic pride. Community buildings, such as schools, health and community centres, have the capacity to act as generators to enhance and help build a context for an area, establishing a small microcosm of public realm around it, and making a positive contribution to the place in which they sit.

### **Site strategy and landscape**

Developing a coherent landscape strategy will require consideration of the clarity of circulation and movement around a building, connectivity to car parking and public transportation access, clarity of approaches to different arrival areas, quality of experience when entering, and foyer spaces' visual relationship with public space and landscape. Desire lines for pedestrians arriving from local communities, or on public transport should be reflected in the layout of the site, its entry points, routes to, and access into, the building.

### **Optimise the potential for site utilisation and activity**

Effective and efficient layouts can help to maximise the utilisation of the site and avoid the creation of residual spaces

around the building. Where appropriate, and where projects can be substantially improved, there may be value in exploring the potential for gaining access to additional land outwith a site boundary for more positive use to allow, for example, latitude in a building layout, improved boundary, setting, threshold, wayfinding and accessibility.

### **Public realm transforms the benefit of new public buildings**

Public realm can create a setting for a public building, an expression of people being invited into the space, and an expression of its function expanding beyond the walls of the building.

### **Turn roads and streets into positive thresholds for public buildings**

It is now recognised that the streets fronting public buildings need to respond more to the creation of a place, as opposed to simply a means of delivering vehicular traffic to the proximity of the building. More imaginative solutions are being found for integrating the needs of traffic management with the ambition to reclaim public realm for the pedestrian, linking internal and external public realm in a more coherent way.

## **BUILT FORM**

### **Reuse of existing public buildings to retain identity**

Public buildings can form an important part in the identity of a town or city. Adaptive reuse of significant existing buildings, through skilful integration of new and old elements, can help to preserve the cultural memory and character of a place whilst providing modern usable and accessible facilities to meet the needs and aspirations of the client and community. Reuse of existing fabric may also allow more of a project's budget to become available to improve the quality of the internal spaces, public realm and entrance. New additions to existing buildings should be addressed in a homogenous manner considering appropriate massing, scale and materials to respect and compliment the character of existing buildings and parts being retained.

See Historic Scotland's publication **New Design in Historic Settings** for further reading.

### **Activate and engage with the surrounding context**

Cultural buildings, such as museums, art centres and visitor centres should seek to engage actively with the surrounding external environment through, for example, opening up building frontages to reveal prominent views into and out of the building, incorporating feature entrances, lighting, covered seating areas, cafes and exhibition spaces spilling out onto the landscape and / or streetscape to help activate the surrounding area in the day and evening.

### **Stand-alone iconic buildings**

Due to their size, stand-alone buildings such as stadia and arenas will be seen as major objects 'in the round' and landmarks in the landscape, city- or townscape. This represents an exciting design opportunity and challenge, in terms of how the building's form will relate to surrounding developments, public realm, and landscape features, both in the foreground and background.

A strong building concept, response to the site and well considered interior can contribute greatly to the quality of the user experience and integration into the wider context. The scale of surrounding spaces needs to consider the potential to accommodate the movement of large crowds, but also the need to offer a human scale.

### **Managing the potential negative impact of large scale car parking**

Generous areas of parking and servicing required by large public buildings that attract substantial visitor numbers will need careful integration into the public realm and surrounding context. This is particularly important where a car park is the first area that visitors will encounter when arriving, thereby setting the scene for the experience that follows. A solution that is part of an overall landscape proposal and which responds to the significance of the place and its setting can be developed, for example by creating a series of compact car parking areas, or using art and / or lighting to define a series of character zones and assist wayfinding to and from a venue from areas that are a distance away. Potential for shared parking between neighbouring facilities may also be advantageous in terms of making best use of available resources

and space.

## Image credits

Image 1: Bernt Rostad



Image 2: A+DS



The above is extracted from the Architecture and Design Scotland website [Àite](http://aite). 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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