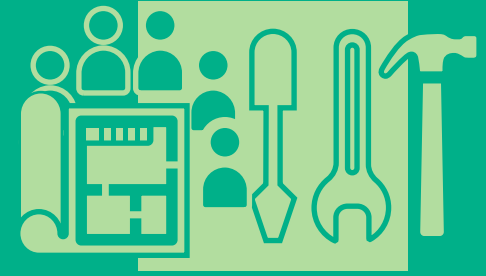


Mini case study

Quality Audit Tool, Moray Council



This case study explores the use of a Quality Audit tool to influence housing developments. The tool is part of a range of ways Moray Council influences design quality, including the Local Development Plans (LDP), placemaking policy, masterplanning key sites and training for elected members. Embodying the place principle, the tool brought together council departments to collaborate and allowed for consistent responses to developments.

Project and Approach

Moray Council developed the Quality Audit tool to enable a consistent approach to the assessment of design and place quality across the authority. Placemaking was one of three policy priorities in the 2015 local plan. From this, the Quality Audit tool was developed to address design and placemaking issues with developers.

Developed in-house through a multi-disciplinary team across all relevant departments, the audit encourages a holistic approach to design. Moray Council researched Scotland's Place Standard along with their own urban design guide. The tool details criteria that developers involved in housebuilding and placemaking should reach. Comprising twelve categories under three broad themes of buildings, such as movement and open space/landscaping, Moray Planning Officers carry out the audits in consultation with developers on developments of ten units or more.

2-4 audits are completed every month, with each typically taking 1-2 hours. Early engagement is encouraged. It is free to use and criteria are arranged

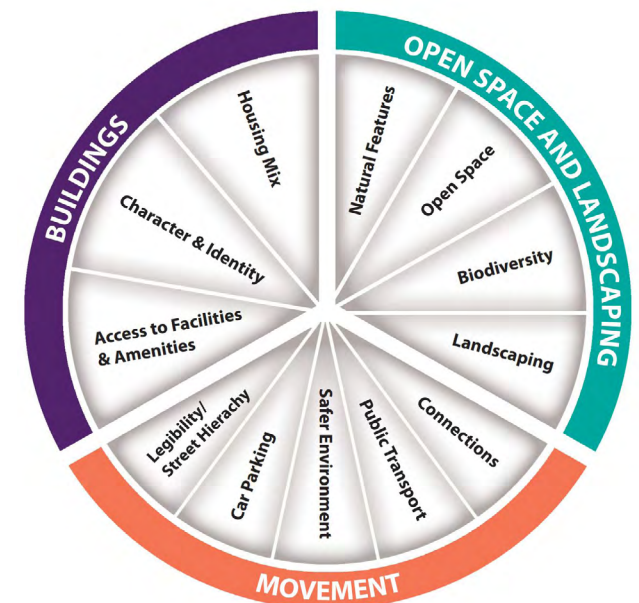
according to a red, amber and green rating (with green being the highest attainment level). This system allows planners and developers to find the measures needed to reach high-quality development.

Outcomes

Following the adoption of the Quality Audit, Principal Planning Officer Eily Webster describes the results:

"Generally, we've seen much better connections created within developments, particularly in the surrounding areas around the new housing. In terms of the location of our open space, this has developed as a central feature rather than being tucked away and the open space is shared between private and public housing. Improvements in open space and its connectivity is creating safer and healthier physical environments."

"Parking issues were improved... We moved away from parking to the front of the house and located this to the side and rear."



“Improvements in open space and its connectivity are creating safer and healthier physical environments.”

Eily Webster, Principal Planning Officer at Moray Council.

Challenges

“In general, we’re seeing changes coming through but not as much as we would like. We don’t feel that we’re quite there yet in terms of character and identity for volume housebuilding. In areas such as unified palette of materials, street structure and planting hierarchy, there is still work to be done. We’re moving this forward with an updated Quality Audit tool in the new plan.”

Going Forward in 2020

“It’s an ongoing process and we are looking at refining the (second iteration of) the Quality Audit:

“**Simplify:** We want to distil it to as simple a policy as we can to make it as user friendly as possible, so we have

1. Reduced the categories from twelve categories down to nine, as we felt there was some repetition in the original Quality Audit document.
2. We changed the criteria to red and green assessments, dispensing with the amber category. Amber was too easy to achieve and led to tweaks whereas we are looking for fundamental shifts in the design principles.”

“**Streamline communication:** We always encourage early discussion with developers in advance of the submission of an application to influence the design and convey the requirements of the policy and Quality Audit. Face to face communication aided by the Quality Audit makes discussing the steps that can be taken to move from red to green much simpler and clearer. We are currently developing further guidance on how to achieve green in the Quality Audit to give developers a greater understanding of the Council’s Placemaking requirements.

“**Keep meetings small to achieve the best results:** We have found that when you get more than six people at meetings the outcomes are harder to achieve, focus is lost. A small team led by Planners, allows for clarity and consistency. Meeting face to face in a small group is also the most efficient use of everyone’s time.”

Conclusion

The real strength in the auditing process, according to Eily Webster, has been to raise aspirations to deliver better outcomes. While there is still progress to be made, all services are working collaboratively towards that outcome.

Getting everybody from different council departments to sit around the table and hearing everybody’s point of view is invaluable. Generally, we always come out of meetings with an agreed way forward and this approach doesn’t lead to any potential situation where departments can be played off one another looking for different things. Everyone has signed up to the same approach and this presents a very strong front to developers.

The approach also provides support internally as each department feels that it has the support of each other. That’s why people are all committed - there is a sense of working together for the greater good.

I believe that the QA is easily transferable to authorities, both large and small, urban and rural.

Moray Council’s second Quality Audit, which has gained full support from NHS Grampian, the Woodland Trust and Scottish National Heritage, is due to come into effect by summer 2020 on the adoption of their new LDP.

“Moving forward, Placemaking is the primary policy in the new Moray Local Development Plan 2 - anticipated for adoption in Summer 2020. This reflects that Placemaking brings together and is key to delivering wider national policies, plans and strategies such as health and well-being and preventative planning. The Quality Audit tool and process was developed from the LDP2015 to consistently assess and clearly convey with developers whether their proposal complies with the Council’s Placemaking policy. Where proposals do not meet the terms of the policy, the measures to achieve this are set out in the Quality Audit.”



Eily Webster
Principal Planning Officer at
Moray Council.