



Housing to 2040: Summer Engagement Workshop Report

Highland & Island Growth at Dunbeg Phase 3, Oban

Commissioned by



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This is a 300 - house development here [at Dunbeg]. We have not built anything like this in Argyll and Bute for decades and it's only been made possible through Scottish Government investment.

Fergus Murray, Head of Development and Economic Growth, Argyll and Bute Council

Introduction

This first workshop by A&DS and Scottish Government of the Housing to 2040 summer engagement series was held in July 2019 in Dunbeg, Argyll and Bute with a focus on Highlands and Islands growth. Our aim was to take a snapshot of housing delivery and learn from it, by discussing the housing being constructed at Dunbeg and draw wider lessons for housing growth in the Highlands and Islands.

The group used the Place Standard tool to discuss the outcome for residents of the emerging housing. This included group of planners, developers, designers and community representatives who were joined for the discussion and a site visit by Kevin Stewart, Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning.

Phase three of this development will deliver 300 affordable houses, in the first significant growth area outside Oban’s urban core. We discussed the opportunities realised and issues faced by practitioners during the course of delivery. We tested the outcome of their work with community representatives.

The project is characterised by a strategic partnership approach to delivery between Link Housing Association and Argyll & Bute Council, and a design-led approach that has been influential in procuring the housing. This helped address the moorland and village setting for the housing and challenges associated with accessibility of local infrastructure for new residents. The aim was an integral extension of the existing community of Dunbeg.

This outcome-focussed workshop follows A&DS earlier engagement with Link Housing Association and Argyll & Bute Council at the design stage of the Dunbeg phase three housing.

Workshop Overview

Organisations Represented	Participants ranged from local councillors to council officers, designers, builders, housing association representatives and the Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Date held	July 2019
Status of site	Housing under construction

This report has been prepared by Architecture and Design Scotland. It includes outputs from a series of workshops commissioned by the Scottish Government. The views expressed in this report reflect the output from the sessions. The views are not those of the Scottish Government or A&DS.





Housing at Dunbeg, Phase 3

Senior Planner, Sybil Johnston, introduced the proposal for Dunbeg, explaining how the project dates back to Argyll & Bute’s Structure Plan in 2002 and how growth of the site has been coordinated around nearby infrastructure improvements.

The allocations for housing in the Argyll & Bute Local Development Plan flowed from constraints to the growth and immediate expansion of Oban. The availability of land at Dunbeg was a significant consideration, despite issues of relative isolation to be overcome. The delivery of 300 mixed tenure affordable homes in Dunbeg phase three forms part of the larger Argyll & Bute Strategic Housing Investment Plan development of 600 homes at Dunbeg and Ganavan.

The Council had sought design-led solutions and established the Dunbeg Development Corridor Masterplan. The involvement of Link Housing Association and a skilled design team have helped to overcome the site issues and constraints. A range of strategic actions and a collaborative partnership approach were required to build capacity and integrate a series of wider investments and policy decision.

Government funding has also played a crucial role in the development of the site, benefitting from the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) and the Affordable Homes Supply Programme.

A skilled approach to placemaking design has been instrumental. The aim is a people-centred street design carefully integrated within the village, natural woodland and coastal setting.

Site Overview

Location	Dunbeg, near Oban, Argyll & Bute
Numbers of units	300 at phase 3 of 600 planned overall
Size of site	6.18 Ha. (Phases 1-3)
Housing mix	One and two bedroom flats, two – four bedroom houses. All are affordable, mid-market rent, rent-to-buy, social rent and mid-market sale.
Organisations Involved	Link Group Housing Association (incorporating West Highland Housing Association), Argyll & Bute Council.
Design Team	Elder & Cannon Architects with Gillespies Landscape Architects and G3 engineers.
Year commenced	2018 (Phase 1 construction)







Session 1: Outcomes for the Community

In an interactive session, the group – comprising councillors, project team members and planning officials – used the structure of the Place Standard to discuss the qualities of the emerging housing at Dunbeg and anticipated impact on the lives of individuals and the community. A record of discussion and a full image of the Place Standard is included in the appendix.

Eight of the 14 themes gained high scores reflecting positive perceptions of the policy and investment background, meeting of local housing needs, the procurement process, the quality of design of the planned housing and longterm planned stewardship by the Housing Association. Proposals were seen to have built strongly on the site and landscape qualities and characteristics, creating a series of smaller neighbourhood clusters likely to result in attractive streets as well as housing.

Three themes were given medium scores reflecting a perceived split between residents' experience of routes within the housing, perceived to be well designed, and the access road character and key linkages to and from the existing village of Dunbeg. Three themes were given low scores reflecting concerns around the social experience of the proposed housing and which will be very much dependent on plans to build up local service and community capacity over time.

Overall the assessment reflects both the strengths and potential weaknesses of a major housing expansion in a Highland setting.

Post-workshop note: After the workshop, a new Dunbeg Development Group was established on the 20th of November with renewed purpose to 'get community facilities' for the site.





Session 2: Lessons Learned for Housing to 2040

A&DS identified six lessons arising from the session 1 discussion - each lesson with wider relevance for the workshop theme of Highlands and Islands growth. Lessons included opportunities, threats and ideas that could be transferable to future housing strategy and provide input to the consultation process for the Scottish Government Housing to 2040 Vision.

Lesson 1:	Lesson 2:	Lesson 3:
Economic Anchor	Design Quality	Local Facilities
<p>Proximity to the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS), HIE and Dunstaffnage reflect a strong link to local employment for residents.</p> <p>The benefits and potential were clear. However despite this proximity a more integral approach would be possible, including use by the new community of some of the space within these buildings, developing opportunities for local business start-ups and shared facilities.</p>	<p>Good design of buildings, streets, landscape elements and road infrastructure were considered pivotal to success in this context.</p> <p>Design had had a key role in creating quality in the new street environment, in managing the challenges of building in a sensitive landscape setting and overcoming site constraints such as the steep local topography and what could otherwise have been a disconnect from Dunbeg village.</p> <p>These requirements cannot be considered a 'one-off' and are likely to repeat in similar Highlands contexts elsewhere.</p>	<p>The provision for local social needs alongside housing has been challenging to deliver in terms of financial models for housing delivery. This could arise again for housing in more isolated locations.</p> <p>Essential to support health, wellbeing and quality of life the provision of a new hub of local social facilities or the evolving of existing hubs has yet to be realised. Adaptation of the school or the SAMS/HIE buildings present opportunities. The appointment of a community support officer could be critical to building community capacity, strengthening links with the existing community and realising the opportunities in the area through enabling work with stakeholders.</p>



Lesson 4:

Linking Streets

The design and attractiveness of the new street linking the new housing with the existing village, school and shop will influence the extent to which these local assets are accessed at different times of the day and year, how convenient for residents, how inclusive for children and other vulnerable groups to use, how accessible on foot or by bicycle as well as by car.

Views differed on the qualities realised. However it had not been possible to extend the 'place-before-movement' people-centred approach developed amongst the housing along the link road. This key gateway street form was limited to materials and characteristics currently adoptable and maintainable by the Council in terms of local roads policies.

Lesson 5:

Car Dependence

There were questions around whether the housing location and form would perpetuate car dependence.

Factors included:

- distance to Oban to access key services (3.5 miles) i.e. new population in a relatively isolated location
- parking standards anticipating car use that may be overprovision in terms of future behaviours and impacts of climate change
- limited access to suitable village services such as local grocers.

Lesson 6:

Barriers to Engagement

Efforts to consult and engage local people prior to development were limited by a number of factors:

- consultation fatigue at an early policy stage
- proposals too abstract at an early policy stage
- difficulties believing in and trusting drawings including three dimensional work 'I will know whether it works when I see it built'.

A new Dunbeg Community Trust has been established to assist in delivering the community woodland and offer opportunities for active community participation, with the ambition that new residents will also take the opportunity to join this organisation.



Session 3: Final comments and reflections

Fergus Murray, Head of Development and Economic Growth, Argyll and Bute Council

"There's a need to work together and involve the community, to let them understand where we're going and what we want to achieve with the resources we have available. And we need to highlight that we need support from the bigger agencies like the government if we are going to make these step changes."

Kevin Stewart MSP, Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning

"It is important to hear from all stakeholders about their visions for how our future homes and neighbourhoods should evolve to 2040. The workshop in Dunbeg was a great opportunity to hear folks' views on some of those issues and how providing good homes and great places are equally important."

Next Steps

The findings of the workshop series form part of the feedback to Scottish Government to help inform their Housing to 2040 vision and a route map, which is expected to be published in summer 2020.

Photo Credits

Images courtesy of A&DS, Elder & Cannon Architects, Gillespies, The Link Group and Kevin McGlynn.





Appendix: Place Standard Evaluation

During session 1, the whole group discussed the Place Standard's 14 themes. For each theme the group highlighted what is working well and how this was achieved - **see assets**. The participants also highlighted challenges faced and issues that remain for residents - **see issues**.

The themed dialogue is set out in full below, with each theme assigned an indicative high, medium or low score by the group.

Moving Around. Medium Score

Assets:

- Strong features include streets that prioritise pedestrians, using good practice 'shared space' principles highlighted in Designing Streets policy guidance.
- Roads construction and planning applications were run in parallel to achieve an integral place-based approach.
- The layout opens up a broad network of walking and cycle routes linking residents to the coast.
- The previous village infrastructure was insufficient. Tax Increment Financing funded the new link road infrastructure and made the development possible. National Planning Framework 3 helped unlock investment in the area. Investment in improvements to the existing Dunbeg shore road, the link into the site, helped integrate the new housing to Dunstaffnage and the existing village services. Once the

planned roundabout is in place on the A85, a strong link back to Oban will also exist and improve on the present cul-de-sac arrangement.

- Accessibility was considered for all ages. Steep moorland topography affects the off-road walking but designers had mitigated this and created alternatives, with attractive, carefully designed informal routes through consultation with local groups.

Issues:

- Alternatives to car dependency has been a concern, particularly in absence of a direct link road to Oban.
- Plans to extend the 'shared space' design approach back into the village has been frustrated by local adoption policies that have limited the rollout.
- Gradients could be challenging for some users. The access road provides a crucial lit route to the primary school, shop and the Dunstaffnage Marine Laboratory area. And so, the quality of these routes is important. Yet designers and council officers held differing perceptions on how to achieve an attractive route for walkers and cyclists, resulting in a 'distributor road' character.
- A cycle route gap along the coast needs to be filled in.
- Accessibility to the wider landscape will be limited due to steep topography.

Public Transport: High Score

Assets:

- The scale works well for bus operators and, despite the relatively early phase of the development, a bus service is already running to the local schools and nearby population centres.
- Widening local roads was also required to improve the bus route.

Issues:

- There are plans for a park-and-ride to Oban in future, which could further reduce car dependency.

Traffic and Parking: Medium Score

Assets:

- Parking is well integrated amongst the groupings of housing to minimise impacts.
- A hierarchy in design of house frontages, street elements and details support low vehicle speeds to help bring traffic levels to a minimum and provide a safe environment for cyclists and pedestrians.

Issues:

- It was suggested that the relative isolation of the site and adoption of current parking standards may in practice sustain a culture of car dependency without providing sufficiently compelling alternatives.
- The future planned extension to the link road from Dunbeg to the A85 and Oban, whilst proving improved links may also generate additional traffic.

Streets and Spaces. High Score

Assets:

- A skilled design team built on the qualities of the site to produce design quality and strong place-based characteristics for the housing layout.
- The planned streets are designed to be distinctive and attention was given to the landscape characteristics, responsive architecture. Layout patterns break up the mass of housing into scaled neighbourhoods of close-knit clustered housing framed by new woodland planting,. Street trees, surface textures and walking routes woven in are part of an integral approach integrating landscape elements with the housing.
- The Kirk road improvement sets the environmental and cultural

change arriving into the site. 'An excellent introduction to the new housing'.

Issues:

- Whilst the high quality place-based design approach used was key to the progress and success of the Dunbeg proposals the group were concerned about the replicability of the skills used and attainability of similar standards set for other sites. The special conditions drove the change in this case.

Natural Space: High Score

Assets:

- Attractive ancient woodland, the beauty of the coastal landscape and views out to sea are major assets that have directly influenced the phase 3 housing layout. These qualities have been protected through the proposals including complimentary new woodland planting between development blocks that break up the scale of the housing whilst framing open views to the sea.
- The site will be integrated with the existing core paths network to provide direct access for residents into the neighbouring landscape.

Issues:

- For the development of rural or moorland sites extra attention is required to protect the natural landscape and to find sustainable ways of maintaining it.
- Issues with reflective metallic roofing affected the earlier phase 2 housing, with complaints from the island opposite.

Play and Recreation: High Score

Assets:

- There is a variety of informal and formal play spaces for children and young adults. Participants felt the spaces available would ensure the site was family friendly.
- A Multi Use Game Area is provided and a variety of types of play space integrated in the play strategy. Opportunities were also taken to include informal play in the streetscape design.
- Informal recreation spaces are also available through access to natural landscape.
- Efforts to enhance facilities available in local schools were encouraging as was work to engage with local schools to improve buy-in.

Issues:

- Nothing for parent toddler groups - limited by ability of development finance to deliver local facilities without significant government interventions..
- Local schools need to assist in integrating the play spaces offer with their pre-existing local services, particularly for toddlers

Facilities and Amenities: High Score**Assets:**

- There are outdoor amenities and opportunities in the area.
- The council intend to improve facilities available in local schools.
- The appointment of a community support officer raises the potential to build capacity for improved facilities over time e.g. the HIE building has a creche with potential for use as a shared facility and this would need to be established through dialogue.
- Current retail offer is a newsagent in the village.

Issues:

- Allocation and site acquisition were driven by availability and land ownership rather than accessibility to local services.
- Despite doubling in the population size of Dunbeg the site and site masterplan have no community space provision such as a meeting hall, nor any on site retail space. The capacity for facilities at the school is untested.
- Facilities benefitting residents will largely be remote, in Oban.
- With a lack of accessible local retail or indoor social spaces, with steep site gradients and remote access to the village, the group were concerned that walkable local facilities will be out of reach by new residents.
- There was a concern that this would create car dependency and a lack of community cohesion.
- There is a lack of policy guidance for retail spaces and demand for new retail may only mature at the end of the development process with new population in place.

Work and Economy: High Score**Assets:**

- There is good local access to skilled jobs in the fishing industry, HIE expansion and future workspace at the marine centre. This was part of the reason for locating housing expansion at Dunbeg.
- There is room for businesses to grow onsite and nearby.
- Construction has involved local contractors.

Issues:

- Participants found an inherent dependency on the facilities of nearby population centres and more could be done e.g to build small business units into the development.
- There should be better links with neighbouring areas.

Housing and Community: High Score**Assets:**

- A broad mix of tenure options are available, including assisted purchase and social rental. Options include housing suitable for families and for different life stages, with a 'good' number of adapted housing. This has been essential to prevent population decline.
- Design is to Housing for Varying Standards.

Issues:

- There is still an affordability gap for low earners and some non-waiting list needs. The site would benefit from more action on local letting initiatives and meeting private market demand. Considering the nearby local employers, there was a noted lack of high quality housing to retain skilled workers.
- Although the housing meets affordability standards, many Phase 3 units require a substantial deposit, a barrier to young professionals /those in their early 20s . They have experienced difficulty in affording a deposit and would benefit from other options such as mid-market rental. Needs to keep up with local economic development and growth of short-term lets in the area.
- Supply has yet to meet waiting lists for social housing.
- There should be scope for self-build in future

Social Contact: High Score

Assets:

- Design in neighbourhood groups and greater proximity helps bring people together - echo of traditional highland village, contact with neighbours etc.
- Informal outdoor recreational space has been carefully integrated.
- Intent to appoint an officer to support community capacity building could be a significant asset.

Issues:

- However concerns related to lack of a focal point or meeting space for the new housing.
- Also a disconnect from both the village facilities in Dunbeg and Oban. Design and the new infrastructure provided can only go so far in overcoming these issues. Gradients for example create separation between old Dunbeg and new Dunbeg. Access to cubs and brownies, for example would be in Oban – by car.
- A joint community facility could bring together the existing and new Dunbeg neighbourhoods. Shared use of underused space at SAMS and HIE buildings nearby provide as yet unrealised potential (Wildlife Trust and Community Council have used the SAMS building).

Identity and Sense of Belonging: High Score

Assets:

- There is seen to be a sense of belonging in 'old' Dunbeg
- Distinctive housing has been designed with potential for strong architectural identity. The appointment of an award winning architect and designers has created this opportunity. Design fitting into the landscape setting and highlighting local qualities and characteristics are expected to build local identity.
- Intent to appoint community development officer to support residents to meet local needs creates an opportunity to build local capacity - to help integrate the new community via the school and existing SAMS and HIE buildings.
- Work to link to Dunbeg Primary School and to strengthen characteristic woodland and path networks will help.

Issues:

- As for Social Contact discussion the current sense of community identity is considered to be limited for the earlier phases of housing.
- Participation levels in consultations by new residents was low.
- Lack of a community facility or a focal point to build identity around.
- Disconnection with the rest of the Dunbeg risks 'us and them' differences.

Feeling Safe: High Score

Assets:

- The area is perceived to be safe and there are not considered to be crime or safety issues.
- New housing design prioritises natural surveillance opportunities for public space from adjoining houses, with both car parking and housing clustered together and well lit.
- Good street lighting is planned and specific designed spaces for young people to gather safely .

Issues:

- Route between the site and Dunbeg village slightly remote for walking home late at night.

Care and Maintenance: High Score

Assets:

- The longterm interest of Link Housing Association is the key guarantor and a high standard of maintenance is planned. Roads will be maintained by the council, public spaces by Link Housing Association and sustainable drainage by Scottish Water.
- This position was established by the council via planning conditions and by Link Group via tenancy conditions.
- Tenancy conditions provided by the housing association should ensure individuals care for their properties.

Issues:

- Funding maintenance for unadopted roads may be a challenge as budgets become further limited.

Influence and Sense of Control: No Score

Assets:

- This question was considered difficult to answer properly in the absence of resident participants.
- Good opportunities were provided for community consultation and engagement. This included an early open forum that involved the local community at a strategic level. It included public events which were well attended and animated, and regular liaison meetings with the community council.
- No one was against the development.

Issues:

- Issue with consultation fatigue. Community 'consulted to death' when the proposals were more abstract and difficult to engage with.
- Issue with confidence in evaluating the qualities to be realised based on drawings, despite the extensive and attractive three-dimensional illustrations produced. The real proof of concept comes when it is built and with phase 3 as yet unbuilt, it remains difficult to evaluate.

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If you are interested in getting involved with our work, contact us at info@ads.org.uk

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