



Housing to 2040: Summer Engagement Workshop Report

Town Centre Regeneration at Arnott's Backland, Paisley

Commissioned by



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Repopulating the town centre is a major plank of our regeneration strategy for the future of Paisley. We need to bring more people into the town centre...to be able to do that we need to change the conditions of the centre, it's been very dominated by commerce and retail for decades; the residential population has declined and was down to a few hundred people. To flip that we need to act in a holistic way to make the town more attractive

Stuart McMillan, Regeneration Manager, Renfrewshire Council

Introduction

The second workshop of the 'Housing to 2040' summer 2019 engagement series was held in July in Paisley, with a focus on town centre regeneration. Our aim was to take a snapshot of housing delivery and learn from it, by discussing the regeneration of the Arnott's Backlands site in Paisley, which is currently under construction. A practitioner group who had been involved in delivery and community group were joined by representatives of the Scottish Government's Planning and Architecture Division and the Housing to 2040 Team. We used the Place Standard tool to discuss the qualities of the planned housing. From here, we plan to draw wider lessons for housing growth in town centres.

As part of a wider masterplanning process for Paisley town centre, Arnott's Backland is a joint venture between the Park Lane Group and Renfrewshire Council to bring a derelict town centre site and heritage assets into residential use.

Procurement of the housing was led by a joint venture and a public-private partnership approach committed to over an extended period of time. This long-term leadership approach has helped address long-term issues with economic decline and site dereliction.

We discussed the opportunities realised and issues faced by those responsible for delivery. We also tested the outcome of a masterplanned approach to urban regeneration and placemaking. We discussed how to ensure the new residents are served by the services and facilities required to repopulate a town centre.

Workshop Overview

Organisations Represented	Renfrewshire Council, Park Lane Developments (Joint Venture Co.), Link Housing Association, Scottish Government
Date held	July 2019
Status of site	Phase 1 & 2 completed, Phase 3 under construction and Phase 4 seeking planning permission.

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 Arnott’s Backland

Renfrewshire Council’s Regeneration Manager Stuart McMillan began by describing the housing built to date and future planned phases. He explained the history of the site, in particular the role of the historically significant department store. Following the closure of Arnott’s in 2002 the site stalled for a period of nine years. Park Lane Group, a joint venture company with Renfrewshire Council, stepped in to finance the project, including public grant funding. This has led to a successful residential development that is contributing significantly to the wider regeneration of Paisley Town Centre.

Brian Clark, Managing Director of Park Lane Developments, described the governance and commercial challenges faced. Working with the council and other stakeholders, the masterplan process evolved over the lifespan of the project shifting from retail and mixed use earlier on to the current residential-led development of the whole urban block. With funding from the Scottish Government’s Town Centre Regeneration Fund, 55 units have so far been built during the earlier phases with the final phase due to be completed by 2021.

The result is a development that has had a positive impact on the wider regeneration of Paisley.

Site Overview	
Location	Arnott’s Backland, Paisley
Numbers of units	152 (Phases 1 to 4)
Size of site	2.48 Ha. (Phases 1 to 4)
Housing mix	80-90% to be affordable rented; 5-15% mid-market rent or market rent and 0-10% will be housing for sale including low cost home ownership.
Design Team	Masterplan: Cooper Cromar Phase 1: Do Architecture Phase 2: Clyde Design Partnership Phase 3: Hypostyle Architects
Organisations Involved	Renfrewshire Council, Park Lane Developments (Joint Venture Co.), Link Group Ltd, Historic Environment Scotland and Scottish Government
Year commenced	2013







Session 1: Outcomes for the Community

Following a site visit and tour of the area the group – comprising local representatives, project team members and planning officials - used the structure of the Place Standard to discuss the qualities of the regenerated site, and anticipated impact this had 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 fourteen themes gained high scores reflecting the quality, attractiveness and accessibility to residents of a full range of local services, facilities and public realm improvements. However, there was less confidence over six themes related to the quality of outdoor spaces. These related to the impact of the protracted process of change and great shifts in market conditions that have slowed the pace of development, leaving incomplete areas remaining undeveloped over extended periods. This has impacted upon the quality and amenity of outdoor spaces which, alongside demand for town centre surface parking, has affected residents and families with incomplete common gardens, play areas, and gap sites. Whilst public engagement had been extensive, it was felt that 'Influence and Sense of Control' could not be accurately assessed in the absence of local residents at the workshop.

Overall the assessment reflected the significant strengths and advantages for residents of housing in an attractive and distinctive town centre context. This was enhanced by the council's complimentary actions over a number of years to re-invent and regenerate the centre of Paisley. The group felt positively about the access to public services, the pedestrian friendly design of the streets and access to employment for residents. Concerns included the lack of private natural space, parking measures and meanwhile solutions required in relation to the surrounding brownfield land.



Session 2: Lessons Learned for Housing to 2040

A&DS identified 4 key lessons arising from the session 1 discussion - each lesson with wider relevance for the workshop theme of town centre regeneration. 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.

These lessons were checked by the group and then amplified through further discussion in session 2. Participants worked in pairs and as a whole group to develop the lessons.

Lesson 1

Regeneration Model

The public/private joint venture company demonstrates a model for the long-term regeneration of town centre sites with housing and public investment emerging as key economic drivers. Could this be replicated?

The model required sustained leadership and commitment over 20 years, beyond political cycles. It required land assembly at scale linked to a Masterplan and vision that gave confidence for community and investors. Investors benefited from the certainty the masterplan offered and the phasing made quantifying risk easier. A mix of funding could be drawn on including Capital Grant, Affordable Housing Grant and private funding. But this also had to be flexible to respond to market changes, notably moving away from mixed use/retail towards housing as the dominant use. The council's wider town centre regeneration approach was complimentary, with benefits flowing from the success of the adjacent Cotton Street development.

However the fragility of the public/private economic model was also noted in respect of the bespoke nature and density of the housing and the listed building preservation (Arnott's). It may be difficult, without subsidy, to replicate the model elsewhere in Scotland due to dominance of .plc housebuilders wishing to build standard products and lack of SME housebuilders who have historically taken on more complex urban sites. Public investment was required alongside a type of private sector investor who may now be hard to come by.

Lesson 2

Design and Placemaking

The site demonstrates how to bring it all together in a holistic way to deliver a coherent and integrated residential neighbourhood in a town centre context.

Masterplanning and placemaking at the scale of a whole urban block were guiding principles for development of the Arnott's site, building on the platform of the surrounding socio-economic regeneration of central Paisley. A clear vision extended to restoring frontage buildings and street activity with new housing surrounding a central common garden space. The vision has breathed new life into the redundant Arnott's building, incorporated the Methodist Hall and retained local businesses, infilling gap sites, vacant land, turning around current areas of dereliction.

Temporary 'meanwhile' uses have become important to maintain amenity for residents during the development's construction over an extended period of years and to solve political issues with car parking.

The approach of building on assets and heritage as anchors has created identity, attracted investment and reinforced and transformed the historic street pattern and the frontage to Paisley Abbey. Density and careful design at street frontage has brought footfall and 24 hour use.

Design skills have also proven to be essential in a number of respects: enabling longterm stewardship, meanwhile uses on temporarily vacant areas, design of 'non-standard' edge conditions at the rail embankment and vacant sites and a role to improve the rail underpass. Design is also key to planning for climate change adaption: open space types, green infrastructure and water management.

A weakness is the challenge of working with historic buildings and tenements within grant cost constraints.



Lesson 3

Mix of Tenures and Affordability

The development demonstrates alignment of private and public sectors to deliver a variety of housing tenures meeting a range of local needs and demands.

There is good progress towards a wider mix of tenures and typologies. A multigenerational approach will ultimately provide diversity once all phases are built out - however that has not been delivered yet. Affordability of housing was key - especially social rental. Providing high quality, affordable, housing was a key priority. Attracting housing investment and filling gaps sites has also helped with wider economic and town centre regeneration.

In terms of managing costs:

- Challenges to viability may repeat elsewhere where adapted properties are included in the mix (such as the Arnotts conversion).

In terms of funding:

- The joint venture model secured buy-in from stakeholders and investments from both private and affordable housing sectors.
- Scottish Government grant was key to unlocking the phase 2 typology.

Support should be given to improving the ability for Registered Social Landlords to develop sites and increase affordability of housing.

Tenure blindness could not be achieved due to the economics required to secure restoration of the listed Arnott's building into private apartments.

Lesson 4

Car Parking

The development highlights consequences for placemaking of meeting national standards for residential parking and managing town centre public parking.

Whereas the new housing has been designed to current standards (based on SCOTS national roads guidance), the impact that current car parking standards have had on residential amenity was questioned. Was this necessary given direct access to public transport and local services? Was this necessary given predicted declines in future car usage linked to carbon reduction policies. Tensions were created accommodating new private parking and public rail commuter parking alongside private amenity space for residents, reducing the space left for the common gardens and play areas first intended. There is a need to mitigate the demand for public and residents parking cars through encouraging improved access to local services in wider areas.

It was suggested that SCOTS guidance should be reformed to avoid parking limiting the amount of green space developers can provide. Guidance needs to be more place specific, more flexible and appropriate to local place needs.

Other Lessons

Land value capture was discussed as a potentially useful tool for the future. Some saw the mechanism as not providing the liquidity at the right part of the development process, others viewed it as redressing an imbalance in the sector.

Council awareness of good practice in Compulsory Purchase Orders could be useful in reducing land assembly issues.

Session 3: Final comments and reflections

Ian Gilzean, Chief Architect, Scottish Government summarised benefits the approach:

"I think the lessons are that town centre living and town centre development can provide a diverse range of options for people. At this development, we've got elderly housing, mid-market rent, and housing for sale. Access to services, amenities and transport make urban housing a viable option, especially when retail is declining.

The project demonstrates many of the themes on the Housing to 2040 vision in that it is local, connected, vibrant and healthy. Also in terms of local services and affordability. It demonstrates the benefits of housing in town centre sites for economic regeneration, re-balancing of uses, re-population of town centres and re-purposing historic buildings."

Brian Clark, Managing Director Park Lane Developments summarised the challenges of the approach:

"Market conditions and viability will continue to be challenging for similar initiatives without systemic change. The site was not a commercial success - including difficulty in delivering within grant cost constraints due to the extra costs of historic building retentions. Since the global financial crisis SME developers have struggled due to growing number of barriers that have emerged. The size of land parcels is one factor but another is the way that the major lenders have operated since then. Gaining the equity needed for large scale development land has been difficult. This is not just about land acquisition but also about getting through planning and building controls processes."

Next Steps

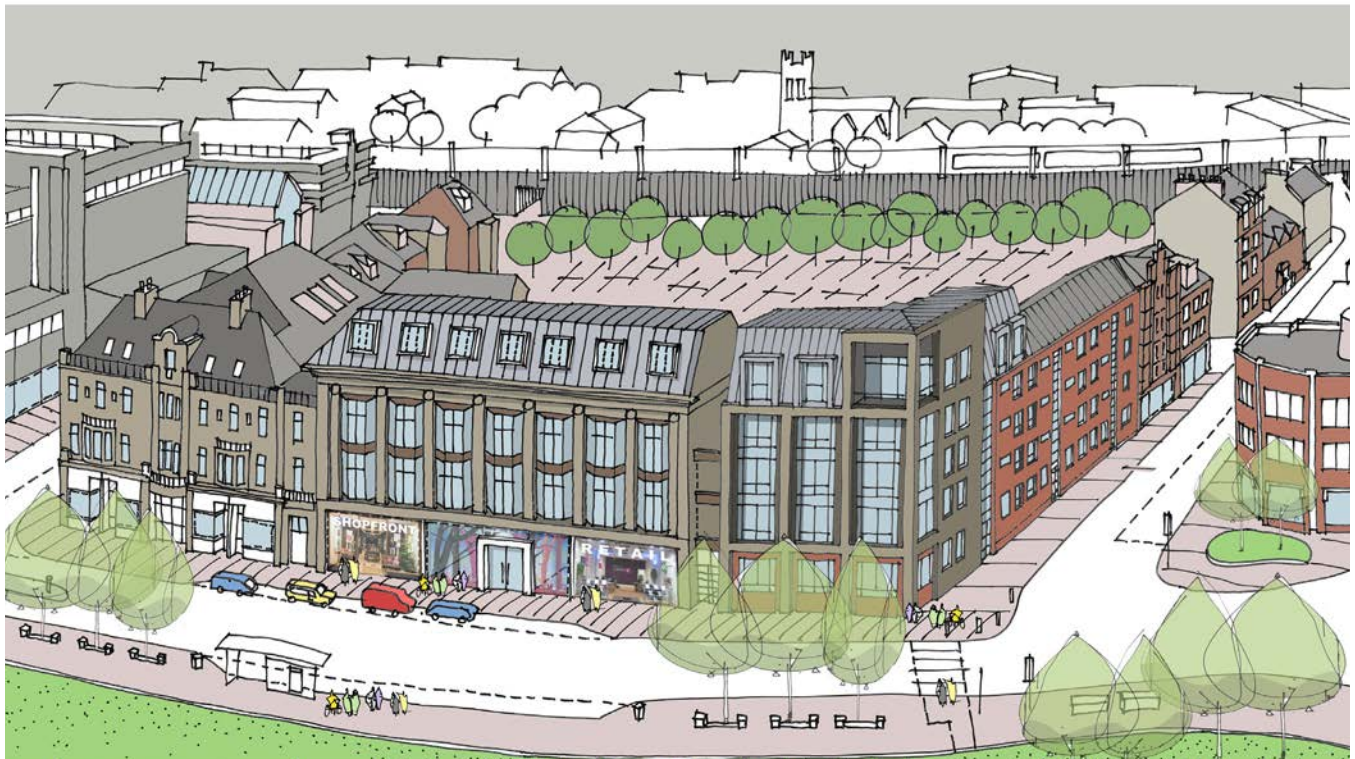
The findings of the workshop series form part of the feedback to Scottish Government to help inform their Housing to 2040 vision and a route map, which is expected to be published in summer 2020.

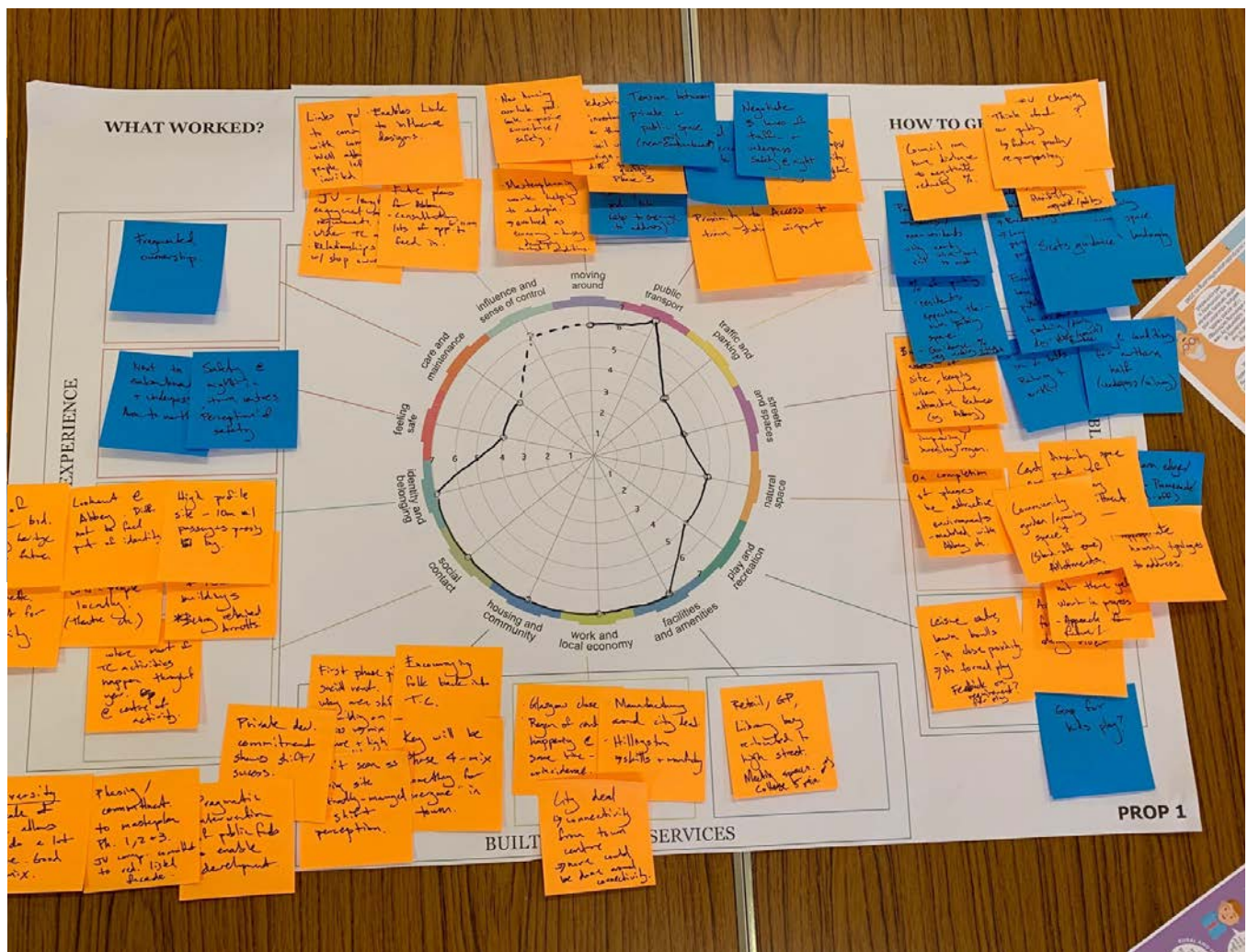
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I think the lessons are that town centre living and town centre development can provide a diverse range of options for people. At this development, we've got elderly housing, mid-market rent, and housing for sale. Access to services, amenities and transport make urban housing a viable option, especially when retail is declining.

Ian Gilzean, Chief Architect, Scottish Government





Appendix: Place Standard Evaluation

The whole group discussed the Place Standard 14 themes in session 1. 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: High Score

Assets:

- The project is underpinned by attention to urban design and placemaking - benefitting from both town centre and site masterplanning, and including a range of public realm improvements and investments that have helped catalyse site regeneration.
- Investments in design and high-quality public realm improvements on Gauze Street, at Paisley Abbey and on Smithhills Street, including new bus stops, have set a new bar for the area. This was a catalyst for attracting investment in further housing (phase three).
- Permeability has been a key principle including the establishment of a new east-west pedestrian route through the block - linking neighbouring residents at Silk Street to the Piazza shopping centre.
- New housing is designed with attention to detail, for

example through the design of a set-back threshold and entrances to apartments providing activity along the street and with rooms overlooking pavements, making for a much safer experience along Smithhills Street.

- Good access to footpaths was noted along the river.
- A Sustrans funded cycle path will link to employment areas at Yoker - in place for phase four.

Issues:

- Dead frontages (around the shopping centre opposite and site itself) had made attracting footfall difficult initially. The Methodist Church on the site and pubs were the only occupants on the street for a long period of time.
- Improved street lighting remains a key objective, e.g. at the underpass towards the station, considered unsafe at night.

Public Transport: High Score

Assets:

- Town centre location provides direct access for residents to public transport including the a nearby rail station, the newly built bus stops on Smithhills Street which are now well used and including affordable bus links to the airport and Glasgow city centre.

Issues:

- To reach public transport pedestrians have to negotiate three lanes of traffic and the rail underpass, which can feel dangerous at night.

Traffic and Parking: Medium Score**Assets:**

- Parking has been carefully integrated for residents, and there are plans to consider Electric Vehicle charging points and car clubs in the future.
- Residents' proximity to public transport, local services and active travel routes could reduce car dependency.

Issues:

- The project has had to challenge perceived need to provide town centre parking and residents' parking (to national standards/SCOTS guidance) with the needs of new residents for amenity areas and access to green space. Parking sacrifices green spaces and creates hard landscaping.
- Particular challenges are around balancing amenity for residents against expectations of local people to park (on the site) near the railway station and local employers. Many industrial sites, major employers and the station attract cars into the area, creating demand for parking on the site. The impact of this for site residents presents challenges for future planned phases of housing to be built on areas of current surface parking.
- Think about future proofing/ repurposing parking spaces: Parking plots need to be able to flexibly transition out of parking usage if we are to be climate neutral – current parking standards may create redundant space. Council should consider reducing the percentage of parking spaces required.
- Future housing in town centres needs to challenge the balance of parking in town centres and address conflicts between placemaking and parking, where parking if often considered a right is in conflict with issues such as emissions affecting air quality for residents.

Streets and Spaces: Medium Score**Assets:**

- The development builds on attractive features: retaining the listed Arnott's building; using the quality of the Abbey setting, and historic frontages as anchors to re-build visual character and streetscape.
- Each phase is building quality and capacity for further improvement, investment and regeneration.

Issues:

- The north of the site is currently less attractive and more challenging to re-build due to derelict land, surface parking and the adjoining rail embankment. There was a need to build up the improvement elsewhere before tackling this more challenging end of the site
- There are tensions to manage through design between demand for public access for parking and shortage of amenity space for residents.

Natural Space: High Score**Assets:**

- The site will benefit from the Abbey area gardens and community garden spaces within the new block.
- A central garden space for residents is a key feature within the block - as yet unbuilt. This is to include community garden/growing space.
- A stand-off zone is provided for residents' private gardens and a further green space is intended alongside the rail embankment which could include structure planting or allotments.
- The transport links ensure that despite its central location, cycling to more natural spaces is possible via a nearby canal path.

Issues:

- Masterplan ambitions for green space have not been fully realised. Priority of parking spaces over green space has shrunk the area now allocated for common gardens.
- During the gradual construction process, the area also lacks immediate and attractive garden space.
- The adjoining Network Rail owned land could benefit from enhanced stewardship to maintain the peripheries of the site.

Play and Recreation: High Score

Assets:

- The site benefits from excellent facilities for the adult population including a nearby leisure centre and the cultural facilities at Paisley Town Hall.
- New care facilities for the elderly are planned and will benefit from the facilities available in the town centre.

Issues:

- There are no formal or informal children's areas in Paisley town centre, which is a gap for families.
- Planned play facilities on site have not been realised to date.

Facilities and Amenities: High Score

Assets:

- Residents needs are well served by the surrounding town centre, adjoining shopping centre, GP practice and local services.
- Plans for the town centre include relocating a library nearby to act as a hub.

Issues:

- None identified

Work and Economy: High Score

Assets:

- There is excellent access to employment opportunities. Glasgow is close by with good rail connections providing access. Hillington Park, a large industrial site, is well connected to Paisley and provides skilled manufacturing jobs.
- Regeneration of Paisley town centre has happened at the same time as the long-term regeneration of the site, part of a bigger picture bringing new employment into the centre and more manufacturing roles anticipated arising from city deal.
- Government funding was crucial to building confidence in the site. Pragmatic investment e.g. in public realm improvement, has stimulated economic regeneration and

provided a catalyst for investment in the site.

Issues:

- Much of Paisley's economy is served by peripheral industrial employment, which often requires a car to reach it.
- More could be done with the city deal funding, e.g. to improve connectivity to Hillington Park.

Housing and Community: High Score

Assets:

- Diversity: Scale of site allows Housing Association and developers to do a lot more and create a good mix of tenure.
- Private development and investments around the area show shift in perceptions of the town centre and success of site from a regenerative perspective. Joint Venture Company committed to redevelop listed facade
- This wasn't originally seen as a housing site initially – developers managed to shift perceptions away from retail towards housing to reflect wider changes in economic conditions in town centres. Many view mid-market housing as a positive step for the area, which will hopefully lead to more affordable tenure options.
- First phase of private housing created an attractor. The way the area shifted built on success and led to mix of tenure and high quality.
- The site is encouraging residents back into the centre of Paisley, building viability for other nearby housing projects, such as a private residential development of flats. Elderly residential and social housing is also currently under construction.
- Long-term commitment to masterplanning at an urban block scale needed both continuity of leadership and flexibility. The masterplan gave developers confidence that the area would rise in market value

Issues:

- A key test for the site will be Phase 4 – intended as a mix of tenures ('something for everyone').
- Due to market volatility, less risky tenure options were prioritised.

- The site is not tenure blind, although this is due to preserving a listed façade.

Social Contact: High Score

Assets:

- The Methodist Central Halls provide community meeting space on site and further meeting spaces are five minutes away at the local college.
- Residents benefit from the proximity of Paisley Town Hall and the Abbey area, which hold a number of seasonal and community events for residents.
- Many of the points elsewhere are relevant here.

Issues:

- None identified.

Identity and Sense of Belonging: High Score

Assets:

- Arnott's department store site being brought back into use is a source of local pride. Site history resonates with local people (e.g. theatre on site at one point).
- Integration with the Abbey quarter, the retention of Arnotts and the Methodist Hall, maintain a strong sense of cultural identity.
- Year of culture bid contributed to a lot of social events.
- It's a high profile site for the town, visible from the Abbey quarter and from the train, with an estimate 10 million passengers passing by per year.
- The site is at the epicentre of Paisley.

Issues:

- Noted difficulty assessing due to lack of residents present.

Feeling Safe: Medium Score

Assets:

- Completed parts of the housing are well lit at night time.
- The new east-west link route should help build activity to the back of the site during the day.

Issues:

- Pre-existing perceptions were of an area unsafe at night.

- Despite improvements the phasing has left undeveloped land remaining and in need of meanwhile uses. Large areas of derelict land create poor perceptions of safety and a visible sign of decay.
- The rail embankment and underpass contribute to poor perceptions of safety.

Care and Maintenance: Medium Score

Assets:

- As for earlier themes completed areas and public realm have created significant improvements.
- On completion the whole area will benefit from residential factoring.

Issues:

- As for earlier themes the longterm process and temporary incomplete areas create issues.
- Fragmented ownership of land was also seen as an issue that is causing negative perceptions.

Influence and Sense of Control: High Score

Assets:

- The joint venture company held extensive engagements early on with local residents and the wider town centre community. Relationships were built, for example with local shop owners. For the future plans for the Abbey, there will also be consultation and lots of opportunity to feed in.
- As implementing developer Link Housing Association approach is to consult widely with community and empower local people to influence design.
- Events have been well attended, with people individually lettered and invited in.
- There were a good number of community events - with the consultation of residents taken very seriously.

Issues:

- Whilst the organisation represented explained some of the work with the local and wider community, as above, they felt unable to score this theme without community members present.

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