

Local Authority Urban Design Forum

MEETING 8: CHAIRED BY TIERNEY LOVELL (GLASGOW CITY COUNCIL), MATTHEW SPURWAY (RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL)

8th December 2016 | Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation



LAUDF 08 workshop session, ECCI

Introduction

The LAUDF is a network for local authority practitioners with an involvement in urban design to share ideas on current issues, learn from each other's experience and build up resources that everyone can benefit from.

This newsletter covers the eighth meeting of the Local Authority Urban Design Forum, which focussed on Place Quality and the Delivery of Housing.

The forum was attended by over 40 professionals from 20 local authorities or public bodies and attracted a good mix from across planning, architecture, urban design, housing and landscape professions.

Speakers from Igloo Regeneration, Homes for Scotland, Glasgow City Council and City of Edinburgh Council highlighted issues encountered in their work and shared learning from their experiences of meeting some of these challenges. Speakers covered a range of private and public sector housing perspectives from regeneration, volume housebuilding, and mixed tenure developments, as well as self-build.

Workshops enabled interactive discussions about the challenges faced by local authorities in shaping the delivery of place quality, as well as an exchange of ideas about how these challenges might be met. A number of forum members shared examples of projects from their own areas to prompt discussion around key issues.

Forum discussions were topical in the context of the recent independent review of the Scottish Planning system

'Empowering Planning to Deliver Great Places', which proposes six outcomes including the delivery of more high quality homes, strong and flexible development plans, an infrastructure first approach to planning and development, collaboration rather than conflict and stronger leadership from the public sector

The Scottish Government's white paper in response to the planning review [Places, People and Planning](#), is now open for consultation.

www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00512753.pdf

More on LAUDF

Forum members are encouraged to register with the online LAUDF [knowledgehub](#) site, where presentations from this meeting are available. It's your site - please use it to contact forum members, start discussions or post information about items of interest to members between meetings.

The next full meeting of LAUDF is proposed for mid May 2017. The steering group would be pleased to hear from anyone interested in contributing to the development of that meeting. The steering group meets on a quarterly basis. Please contact kate.givan@ads.org.uk for more information, or with future topic suggestions.

The LAUDF is intended for all local authority or public agency staff working on issues relating to urban design. Please do encourage colleagues to attend future events.



Igloo regeneration, Green Street, Nottingham



Igloo regeneration, Maryhill Locks, Glasgow

Regeneration Perspective

Gary Watt offered perspectives on behalf of Igloo regeneration. Igloo's purpose driven approach to the commissioning and delivery of places of high place quality, using principles of imagination, impact and identity was outlined. Their investment methodology, [Footprint](#), generates wider value from investment decisions and binds stakeholders' aspirations into each project undertaken.

Gary shared insights into design principles behind a range of recent projects delivered across the UK. Maryhill Locks in Glasgow uses anchor buildings and shared spaces to create a range of desirable homes. Port Dundas-Glasgow, offers all homeowners the chance of a room with a view, reimagines roads as streets, incentivises active travel and offers innovative custom build options. Projects in England such as The Maltings, Newcastle and Green Street, Nottingham, demonstrate residential streets designed as 'places', activated with quality contemporary architecture. The projects show the potential to deliver bespoke high quality places with homes which sell - often off-plan - in areas without a strong previous market for private housing.

Gary shared his belief that homebuyers 'get' design quality and highlighted key lessons learned from Igloo's approach: Unlock the potential of places using strong urban design as a trellis for contemporary architecture to sit upon, take a long term view, work in partnership with enlightened public sector clients, and select the right private sector partners.

Gary concluded with some thoughts and challenges for group discussions – Is the value of good design understood across the range of players in the development industry? Should the planning system do more? Should there be a more formal approach to the assessment as part of the application process?

Housebuilder Perspective

Fraser Walsh, architect for Cala Homes, offered his own thoughts on the challenges of delivering place quality for housebuilders. Housebuilders measure their success on how they survive to the next year in terms of sales. Typically decisions on sites for investment are influenced by a focus on selling prestige, detached, standardised family homes to customers. Certain sites demonstrate the capacity to vary standard housetypes in an urban context. Most typically however, a location-first approach is taken, whereby sites are sought in market areas that can support detached housing with a view to selling tried and tested standardised models to customers.

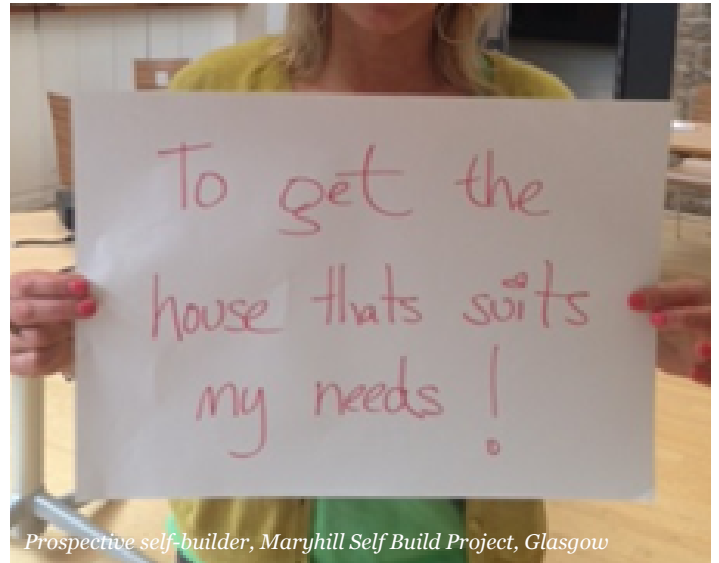
Fraser outlined key challenges for delivering place quality, including: measuring the delivery of successful streets, negotiating the process towards designing streets outcomes, conflicts with SCOTs guidance and navigating business models against local needs and contexts or wider societal and environmental factors.

Typical lead times from concept to delivery can be 5 years, which indicates the timeframes for changes to approach to become evident. Fraser proposed that more upfront, open and productive dialogue between the public sector and housebuilders could help to overcome the stereotyping of different actors in the process. With improved communication and consistent messages from LA policy documents and across teams, showing how good design is measured, principles of place quality could filter through.

Fraser offered some thoughts to prompt group discussion: Informal process of communication is key: are clear messages communicated through regulation and local guidance? Improve perception: show what place quality looks like with new examples of good street design. Improve communication so there is an understanding about how to measure the success of places, apart from the balance sheet.



City of Edinburgh Council, Mixed Tenure Housing, Gracemount



Prospective self-builder, Maryhill Self Build Project, Glasgow

LA Led Housing Investment

Elaine Scott of City of Edinburgh Council introduced work undertaken on their 21st Century homes building programme. Since 2009 the local authority has lead the delivery of hundreds of new homes in key sites across the city in moves to address the City's undersupply of social and affordable housing.

Housing investment has been used as a catalyst to bring wider benefits for places and communities. Investment was undertaken in consultation with tenants. The focus has been on providing high quality affordable housing led regeneration. A range of mixed tenure homes for council and midmarket rent have been delivered alongside homes for private sale delivered in partnership.

Illustrating how local authorities can take the lead on shaping and delivering place quality and wider community benefits, Elaine introduced a range of examples: Gracemount, where a shared surface, tenure-blind development has been delivered with close involvement from residents associations. Leith Fort, where high density colony style housing is being delivered in partnership with Port of Leith Housing Association and CCG. North Sighthill where smaller family homes are being commissioned to address changing needs and Craigmillar where council leadership has enabled issues of fuel poverty to be addressed by incorporating district heating in new homes there.

Elaine explained that with such high need and demand in the City, the Council has big ambitions and plans to extend its building programme with a further 3000 to 8000 homes over the next 10 years. Key learning includes the need to take the lead where the private sector isn't keeping up, to embrace developments in technology, to use design and placemaking to deliver the best solutions, and to join up decision making with other council and community services.

LA Led Self-Build

Angela Doran of Glasgow City Council (GCC) gave an overview of progress and learning from the city's Maryhill Self Build Project, which will see the delivery of six serviced self-build, detached and terraced homes.

Following a manifesto commitment to support self-build home schemes, political leadership catalysed GCC to take the lead on bringing forward self-build development on a site near Maryhill Locks. With Glasgow's population growing, the intention is to pursue solutions to help retain people within the city by providing affordable options for growing households. Recognising that self-builders invest in a place, the hope is to create a model for a long-term mixed, sustainable community which is people-led.

Angela outlined how the project had been progressed. To unlock the barrier of access to land, GCC made available the site at Maryhill. An initial register of interest attracted 120 interested parties. A shortlist of 20 was drawn up of people who could begin on site within 12 months. The six plots were then awarded and design workshops facilitated with eco-specialists.

Addressing barriers of funding, GCC worked with specialist self-build mortgage providers Buildstore to give help and advice to potential self builders.

Addressing planning barriers, GCC has developed a simpler planning process for self builders – producing a Self Builders Guidance Pack with 'Plot Passports'. The plot passport establishes design guidelines, which remove the need to go through formal planning process. Borrowed from a similar approach in the Netherlands, it is the first time this has been tried in Scotland. Rules include design parameters such as size of house, a maximum height and a designated frontline to provide a streetscape.

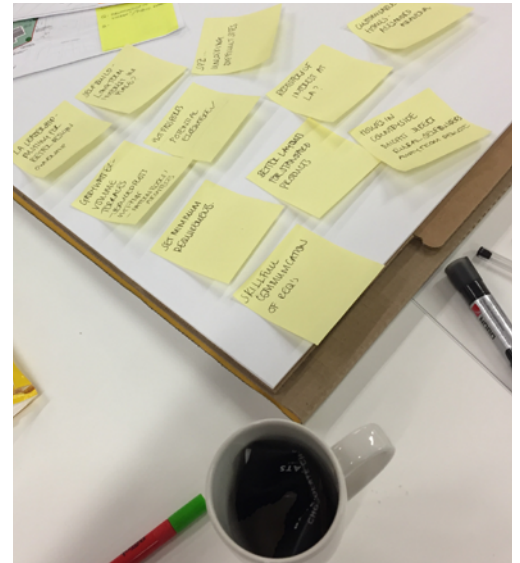
Next steps will see the servicing of the plots, new road treatments and conclusion of legal offers before self builders take ownership in spring 2017.



Workshop 1: Challenges

In an initial brainstorming session, forum members shared learning on their own key issues with delivering place quality. In subsequent workshop discussions, forum members considered provocations from Gary Watt and Fraser Walsh and drew on their own experiences of the issues and challenges of delivering place quality in housing. The following points were shared in feedback sessions:

- The brief is key. Needs to show spatially. Clear site briefs show spatially and are not expressed just with words.
- Policies need to have teeth. Design tools in SPP aren't applied as standard by applicants.
- Proactive planning - lack of resources needed for more proactive planning?
- Are there enough placemakers in planning? Design skills a challenge within and outwith local authorities, also a lack knowledge about the market.
- Adapting a volume house builder layout back to a designing streets approach is challenging. Standardisation focuses on numbers and returns - presents challenge for negotiating on place quality. Difficulties with encouraging housebuilders to move away from standard product comfort zone.
- Roads standards conflicts. Negotiating for place quality after roads dominated decisions have been made can be difficult.
- Shared surfaces continue to be a challenge to deliver. Shared surfaces and accessibility tensions.
- Political agendas, good design is not high up the agenda. Pressure is to get houses built rather than get good places. How to balance between getting housing built and responding to context. Relationships between planning team and elected members.
- Constraints on developers - paying for the site up front. Bespoke takes longer.
- Lack of response to context - Red-line boundary mentality creating lack of relationship to surrounding context. Need more contextual design - Struggle to get developers to produce contextual designs that relate to the sites.
- Challenge getting mixed use or community uses into housebuilder led developments. Has it been done/ how?
- Affordable housing quality - getting integration of affordable housing right with good quality design throughout
- Is there enough of a team approach within authorities? How to upstream and get all those with a role involved at pre-app stage? More conversations early in process.
- How to encourage wider collaborative approaches too - from development plans through to pre app discussions in development management with public sector, KAG, developers and site briefs with communities.
- Negotiating good landscape design around conflicting policy requirements eg secured by design.
- Need approaches and opportunities for urban self build - bringing the planning system on board.
- Need for long term thinking: How to get future proofing / durability - challenges of getting long-term consideration factored in of how developments might fare in 20-40 years where developers have short term interest.
- Challenges even where development frameworks are in place. The switch to multiple smaller development parcels due to market conditions means steering delivery of wider place benefits is a challenge.



Workshop 2: Opportunities

Following presentations from Elaine Scott and Angela Doran, a second workshop invited reflection in small groups about how things might be approached differently. Discussions indicated a strong case for greater Local Authority leadership to reshape housing markets – from driving large scale mixed tenure projects through partnerships with social and affordable housing investment, through to smaller innovative approaches unlocking opportunities for new markets such as self-build or cohousing. The following points were noted from workshop feedback and notes...

- LA's take the lead with design frameworks. Larger scale of development can allow for masterplan approach. Councils can work together with developers.
- Need strong robust frameworks, with the backing to carry through, and the ability to ask for consideration of context outside the red line. Framework isn't enough in itself - experiences shared of attempts to erode key design principles as applications come through from private sector.
- Plot passports – lots of interest in how this might work in different LA contexts. E.g. in smaller town setting where key small development sites can have a big impact on townscape.
- Practical action could be to establish LA register of interest for self-build – potential easy win to gauge demand, but no current requirement for authorities to do this.
- Opportunities of private rental sector development. Dominated by private sector, but opportunity for LA's too?
- LA as facilitator - enabling opportunities for different kinds of communities to grow. Could developers be encouraged to offer serviced plots for self-builders on sites they're developing? Offer options of partially constructed adaptable models e.g. Alejandro Aravena <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0IOPoe3qlg>
- Improved community engagement in development frameworks. How to get community involvement in project prior to planning notification – when commitment is already established to particular proposition.
- Taking a proactive approach, councils can look at opportunities differently, taking a 'business' view as long term investors in the place - leadership to show differences can be made
- Improved collaborative working within Local Authorities. Resolve issues where LA's lack teeth due to political contexts, or where there are institutional silos, or to improve relationship between Planning Policy and Development Management outcomes.
- Public and private sectors working more collaboratively – improved dialogue, brokering better outcomes by front loading process.
- Looking at carrot and stick approaches – e.g. design quality = speedy decision versus more protracted assessment where quality or information is lacking
- Potential for LA leadership to set parameters through simplified planning zones.
- Handbook on consumer demand – challenging perceptions of what people want, pushing the boundaries of market demands.
- Place partnerships that secure long term investments in place with partners who are prepared to push the boundaries to create good places.