

# Local Authority Urban Design Forum

MEETING 9: CHAIRED BY SUSAN FULTON (EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL) & UNA LEE (HIGHLAND COUNCIL)

25th May 2017 | Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation



LAUDF 09 workshop, Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation.

## 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 ninth meeting of the Local Authority Urban Design Forum. The forum was attended by 40 professionals from 23 local authorities or public bodies and attracted a good mix from across planning, architecture, urban design, transport, housing and landscape professions.

Co-chairs Susan Fulton and Una Lee introduced the topic: **Engaging communities in design for all abilities access and movement**. The issue is a live one for many authorities with some considering how to improve access and movement in town centres, others delivering projects with elements of public realm improvements, and others considering developments that involve new streets.

Such projects are being negotiated by authorities in the context of ongoing wider debate around 'shared space'. Susan reported on an April event from Transport Scotland and the Transport Research Institute of Edinburgh Napier University which had explored issues relating to the 2015 petition to the Scottish Parliament calling for a moratorium on shared space. There was felt to be a need to clarify national guidance on street design. Una highlighted that authorities are also being approached by the RNIB to adopt a street charter.

There is a strong desire to create well-designed places, which encourage people to spend time and incentivise a shift to walking and cycling, while taking into account the needs of all users. The forum agenda was designed to enable members to share learning and gain inspiration around issues to do with engaging communities effectively in access and movement projects and to develop understanding around how to balance the sometimes conflicting needs of users.

Speakers from East Dunbartonshire Council, Sustrans and the Scottish Disability Equality Forum set the context for discussions, highlighting key challenges and sharing experiences of engaging communities.

Workshops enabled interactive discussions and exchange of ideas about how engagement challenges might be met with input from the Scottish Disability Equality Forum on co-production, Sustrans on their 1:50 street kit, The Place Standard Alliance on use of the place standard tool, Edinburgh College of Art on the A-Z of co-design, and Living Streets on their experiences of engaging with older people. Forum members shared their own experiences through discussions in small workshop groups.

John Dales of Urban Movement gave inspiring keynote reflections on what can be delivered by working with communities on street design projects.

## Learning points

The following key reflections and learning points were noted from the afternoon's discussions:

- The public sector has an important role in leading the way - just as it did in mainstreaming charrettes and other activities that raise design standards. For good place-making to succeed, it must include effective engagement on access and movement.
- Prepare for complexity and criticism - not everyone will get what they want from engagement.
- Early engagement is key and shouldn't be tokenistic
- Local context is important - just because something works somewhere else doesn't mean it will work locally
- Focus on where to consult - find places people already gather (libraries, cafes, clubs, shopping centres, public open space). Reach out for feedback from street users (e.g. teenagers), rather than engaging solely with 'stakeholders' or expecting people to make special effort to attend exhibitions and workshops.
- Be outcome focused. What will happen if we do this? Its not about the product or output, but the impacts.
- Paul Ruffles, Sustrans explained that when community engagement really works well, we make ourselves redundant and the community takes on ownership of decisions that shape their environment.
- The term 'shared space' is open to interpretation and can be misunderstood or mis-used. Not all street design interventions can or should be described as shared spaces.
- Timescales are important to reflect on. Cowgate had taken four years from initial concept to delivery and was Local Authority led. Whereas for projects proposed by the development industry through planning applications, only a condensed period of engagement is possible within a 3 month application process. Its often too late to make changes by that point, when key decisions are made. How do you get development industry buy-in to effective engagement?
- Co-production draws on the knowledge, ability and resources of service providers and service users to develop solutions to issues that are successful, sustainable and cost-effective. Co-production ensures those affected by decisions or developments are involved from the start, and can contribute to the process through to its conclusion and beyond.
- There are particular challenges around accessibility and the historic environment (streets as well as buildings).
- There are implications for maintenance and stewardship of public space. It is essential to address the legacy question about who cares for and maintains projects.
- Be bold! Engagement can be challenging - people dont always see beyond their own points of view and there are limitations to what can reasonably be adjusted. But, you will capture the intelligence you need to inform decision making.



## The Cowgate Street Design Project, Kirkintilloch

*"Its not about traffic lights!"*

Kevin Argue, East Dunbartonshire Council presented a quick overview of the long process involved in the town centre regeneration project in Kirkintilloch.

The town centre has many strengths, but has suffered decline in retail and the public realm had deteriorated. The council identified the need for a masterplan and held workshops, consultation with schools and 20,000 questionnaires were circulated. A champions group (including traders, community council, access panel and schools) was also created to develop a vision for regeneration and an improved town centre.

The Cowgate street design project looked at changing behaviour, getting people out of their cars to wander around the town centre. In 2014 they conducted a junction trial removing barriers, traffic lights and guardrails. The feedback was that people didn't like it! However the data showed reduced speed, no accidents and greater footfall. People said they wouldn't come back, but the figures showed increased number of visitors. The key learning is to consult early and ensure the community informs how the project is taken forward. Other lessons learned are;

- Frontload engagement with inclusivity: Consider implications of proposal in regards to Equality and Equality Impact Assessments
- Keep people involved throughout: Proactive consultation and communications, Access Champions
- Manage expectations: Be clear about what is being proposed
- Strong leadership and communication vital
- Partnership working adds value
- Learn from others and be open to different ideas
- Keep pushing for innovative design solutions
- Future projects will use the Place Standard Tool





## National Perspective on Engagement, Sustrans

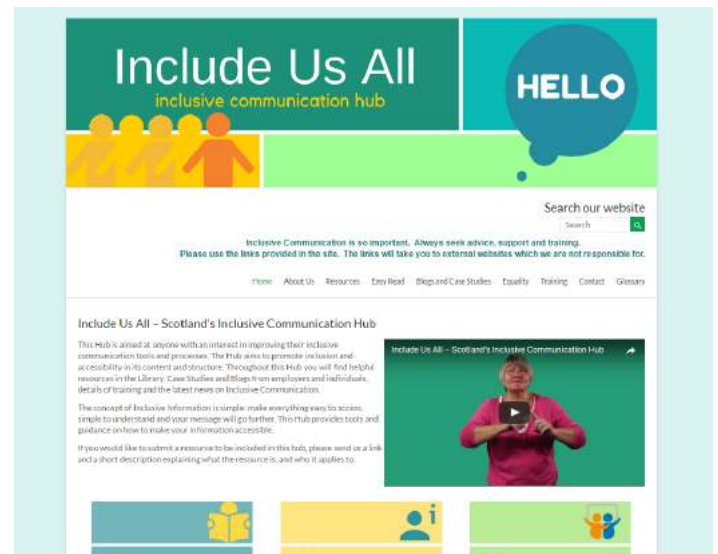
Paul Ruffles of Sustrans gave a national perspective on the lessons that have been learned from their engagement with communities in terms of accessible street design.

The organisation has run nine projects within Scotland over the last few years, mainly focusing on small town centres with railway stations with the aim to improve active forms of travel within the local communities.

Their engagement process has often taken the form of charrettes and Paul provided key points that he feels contribute towards effective community engagement.

1. Listen and observe what is important to the community
2. Talk to everyone – take your discussion to where people are
3. Look at the whole context and analyse the place and people
4. Have clear objectives and record everything in a clear, readable way
5. Target local passion and build on opportunities that arise through the process
6. Use a mixture of methods to engage with different voices
7. Expect problems and make friends on the journey

Paul provided examples of where this process has been undertaken including Dumfries and Lenzie. Paul's enthusiasm for community engagement was obvious and his experience provides an invaluable and honest insight into the highlights and pitfalls of meaningful public consultation.



## Engaging with Disabled People, Scottish Disability Equality Forum

Morven Brooks of the Scottish Disability Equality Forum (SDEF) touched on issues, challenges and engagement approaches. SDEF is a national charity, working towards a better life and full accessibility for people with disabilities. They have over 600 members and are funded by the Scottish Government. SDEF supports a network of Access Panels, working together to improve accessibility and overcome barriers. SDEF also work with organisations to help influence Government policy which effects how disabled people live.

SDEF have developed a number of online resources including the recently launched [Inclusive Design Hub](#) – Scotland's one stop shop for inclusive design information and resources. The site aims to improve awareness and encourage the take-up of inclusive design in Scotland, advocating for disabled people's needs to be considered from an early stage.

[Include Us All](#) is Scotland's Inclusive Communication Hub. The hub aims to promote inclusion and accessibility, providing tools and guidance, and seeks to involve disabled people and their needs in planning from the beginning.

Morven explained the term co-production, which describes a relationship between service provider and service user that draws on the knowledge, ability and resources of both to develop solutions to issues that are successful, sustainable and cost-effective - changing the balance of power from the professional towards the user. The approach is used in work with both individuals and communities. Like all processes it needs agreed rules, boundaries and etiquette to succeed. It ensures those affected by the decisions or developments are involved from the start, and can contribute to the process through to its conclusion and beyond.



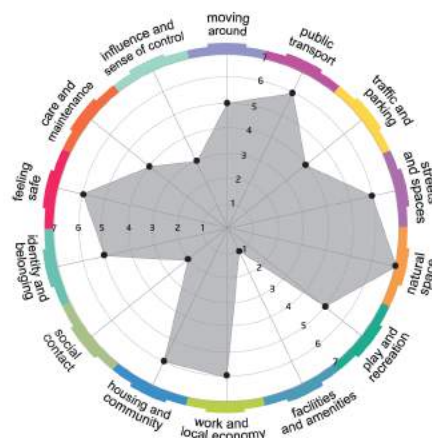
### Engaging communities in street design (1:50 map tool), Sustrans

Paul Ruffles introduced a 1:50 map tool Sustrans use to engage communities in street design issues. Paul emphasised the importance of spending time on the street looking and listening. Sustrans are now more interested in managing contested views and focus less on remote cycle ways, although he stated that in some quarters the term 'shared space' is considered toxic.

Much of Sustrans' recent work in places such as Lenzie and Balloch has been about being visible, grouping public comments together, then feeding them back in graphical form. Paul was keen to make a distinction between the terms street, road, and space but also said it was important to send potential champions to exemplars such as Poynton to challenge perceptions.

Sustrans welcome online comments to glean as wide a range of views as possible. Working with specialised focus groups such as visually impaired people is really important too. In Kirkcaldy intergenerational work with P6/7 pupils took place. Example cards on build outs, paint/thermoplastics, and desire lines are used to provide better understanding of finishes and issues. Comments are marked up in a 1:50 plan called "You Said" for further public scrutiny.

Understanding the potentially



different priorities of internal (housing/transport dept etc) and external audiences is essential. Use of 'Qualitative' experiential data was promoted as well as the Place Standard tool. Solutions are, however, always about trade-offs and compromise. Where the divisive topic of parking raises its head really good data is important.

Sustrans has a funding for consultations but Councils need to apply competitively and be able to provide match funding.

### Engaging communities with the Place Standard

Etive Currie presented the [Place Standard](#) tool on behalf of the Place Standard Alliance. The Place Standard is a very simple tool which can be used to facilitate conversation with communities. It has been developed in partnership by the Scottish Government, NHS Health Scotland and A&DS. Discussion points included:

- The tool can be used by everyone and provides a holistic view of place - touching on spatial, social and economic issues. It can be used as a tool for engagement at different stages in the planning and development process.
- 14 key themes/questions form the basis of the tool, which are supported by a more detailed set of questions.
- First step is to look at the 14 themes and then go for

a walkabout around your community with these issues in mind to score priorities for action. Then work in groups and overlay graphs to show the wider perspective.

- There can be a big disparity in scoring because of different perspectives. Feedback should be graded in terms of positive, negative, constructive.
- The tool has focused on deprived areas – the aim is that it should help to improve the quality of place and reduce inequalities.
- It is aimed to build ownership of a place – it does matter/leads to action. It should be shared across all services.
- 11,000 people have used the tool so far – 62 incidents of being used for consultations. In Shetland, the online format had 900 responses with 4500 comments – this has helped to get buy in from senior managers.
- Developments are being undertaken to make it more interesting to youth groups.

### A-Z of Co-Design, University of Edinburgh

'The A-Z of Co-Design' is a quick reference tool with 26 hints and tips for co-design, participation design. Dr. Katherine Brookfield introduced the guide, which was developed following a three-year research project at Edinburgh University, Mood,





Mobility and Place – which brought together architecture and landscape architecture students and older adults to investigate how to design environments that are enjoyable to be in, and easy to move around as we age.

The guide aims to support and inspire people in their work and everyday practices, with practical methods and techniques for use at different stages in a participatory design project. It is intended to have a wide variety of applications – from assisting design brief development and assessment, to community participation and engagement. It includes links and pointers for further reading and training.

Forum members were interested in how the guide might be taken forward and enshrined in practice, and how it might feed into the planning process and government policy. Edinburgh University will be working with the Centre for Accessible Environment to explore potential next steps.

### Co-production with disabled people, SDEF

Morven highlighted the importance of thinking about engagement very early on in a project.

When planning to engage, think about how you'll initially get in touch with people. Will you go to where people are? Police often engage with already established groups.

Inclusivity is really important. How

accessible are your communications across a range of disabilities? Standard good practice is to keep language as simple as possible and avoid jargon.

Think about what you want to achieve, who you want to attract and explain the benefit to those you're inviting of getting involved.

Seek accessible venues and remove barriers to engagement (ramps, hearing loops, changing places, larger toilets, dietary requirements, BSL interpreters?). Communicate those things are in place.

Access panels can be a really helpful way to get input, but you need to cast the net wider too. A tick box approach doesn't work in itself - access panels can reflect particular disabilities or demographics. SDEF can put you in touch with local panels.

The social model of disability explains it is society that disables people, not their condition. The decisions local authorities and public bodies take in their policies, investments and decision making has the potential to make big impacts.

Be bold, work in partnership. Engagement can be challenging. People don't always see the bigger picture outside of their own points of view and there are limitations to what can reasonably be adjusted. But, you will capture the intelligence you need to inform decision making.

### Engaging with Older People, Penny Morriss - Living Streets

Living Streets is a UK charity encouraging everyday walking.

Penny Morriss discussed their work with older people who face barriers to walking. She explained that the official definition is someone over 60 years of age – this is a huge group with many different abilities.

Living Streets focuses on those that are least heard, including residents in care homes, sheltered housing or visitors to day centres.

They may have sensory or mobility impairments that stop them from walking. Even a few steps would be beneficial to their health, independence and social engagement. Many are frightened to leave their homes, and falls are the significant cause of injury for over 70s.

Living Streets has campaigned for improvements such as longer crossing times, and carried out community street audits with residents of care homes to find safe routes to a local café or the pub.

Small-scale improvements can have major positive impacts. Penny noted that any change or consultation should be led by the older person – it is their experience.



Clapham Old Town, London

## John Dales, Urban Movement

John Dales of Urban Movement gave the keynote address, sharing lessons learned from engaging communities over many years. John began by advocating designing streets that are living streets. As a self-confessed 'Traffic' Engineer he suggested that we need a Minister for Walking to get our priorities in order.

Engage with complexity and don't dumb down the issues. Think local...in John's own case "what do I want from Northfield Avenue?" John illustrated that what any individual wants from a street varies according to the day of the week, the time of day, the company you're in, the weather or many other factors.

By listening to others, you won't always get what you want but you might actually get what you need! John emphasised the importance not just ticking the box in terms of consultation. Ubiquitous meetings in anonymous gym halls using post-its and plans isn't good enough.

There are different interpretations of what the term 'shared space' means. Find other ways to describe what is proposed to avoid misunderstanding.

Don't start with the answer! Don't just cut and paste solutions - what's good for Poynton isn't necessarily good for Kings Cross. Rather ask the questions: where are we?; what are the problems?; what are the opportunities?; what is the best design?

Engage early and often and be outcome focused. What will happen if we do this? It's not about the product or output, but the impacts. Who needs to be involved? 'Co-production' means seeing people as users not just stakeholders. Local information from different users is essential.

Young people are notoriously difficult to engage with, but remember that they are the future users. Go to libraries, NHS buildings, Brownies.

Engage with criticism and critics, those who cross their arms, and say down with this sort of thing! John quoted JFK "Too often, we enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought". We need to listen and respond, collecting 'myth-busting' data through engagement. John emphasised this using statistics on the typical spends of cyclists, walkers and drivers over short and long term surveys. Over a year pedestrians come out as the top supporters of the local high street.

Promote opportunities...don't just focus on problems. Celebrate success! Get out more and step into someone else's shoes, learn...then go again! Do give a damn!

## More on LAUDF...

Forum members can register with the online LAUDF [knowledgehub](#) site to view presentations from the meeting. It's your site - use it to contact forum members, start discussions or post information inbetween meetings.

LAUDF is intended for all local authority or public agency staff working on issues relating to urban design. Do encourage colleagues to attend future events. The next full meeting of LAUDF is proposed for mid November 2017. The steering group meet on a quarterly basis and are keen to hear from anyone interested in contributing to developing future meetings. Contact [kate.givan@ads.org.uk](mailto:kate.givan@ads.org.uk) for more information, or with future topic suggestions.