

Local Authority Urban Design Forum

CHAired BY GRAHAME CRAWFORD, FALKIRK COUNCIL (WITH APOLOGIES FROM KEVIN ARGUE, EAST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL)

6th Dec 2017 | The Lighthouse, Glasgow

Introduction

The Local Authority Urban Design Forum (LAUDF) is a network for local authority practitioners involved in urban design to share ideas on current issues, to learn from each other's experience and to build up resources that everyone can benefit from.

This newsletter covers the tenth LAUDF meeting. The theme of **Delivering Landscape and Public Open Space** was chosen by the steering group. An agenda was then developed by Grahame Crawford (Falkirk Council) and Kevin Argue (East Dunbartonshire Council), with input from the steering group and Architecture & Design Scotland.

Presentations and learning sessions were curated to enable sharing of knowledge and insights around issues including major strategic greenspaces, integrated green infrastructure, community engagement, public/private partnership, SuDS coordination and integrating development with public realm.

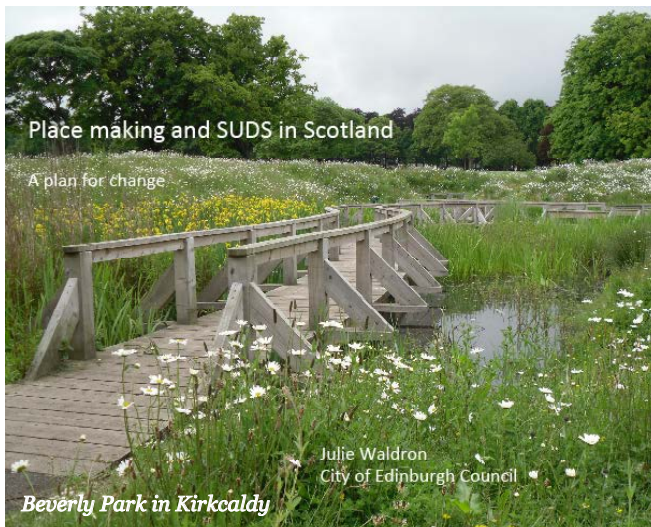
The forum was attended by over 40 professionals from 22 local authorities and public bodies. It attracted a good mix from across planning, architecture, urban

design, transport, housing and landscape professions.

Before the presentations kicked off, Danny McKendry (of Architecture & Design Scotland and a committee member of Landscape Institute Scotland) took a moment to promote the timely release of the [Landscape for Scotland](#) vision document. Prepared by LIS, it explores the value of landscape and priority areas including natural capital and health and wellbeing.



Julie Waldron's presentation



Placemaking and SuDS Julie Waldron, Edinburgh

Julie began her presentation with an image of Beverly Park in Kirkcaldy (above), which shows the potential to create beautiful parkland with SuDs. This was then contrasted with an image of a lacklustre SuDS solution, all too often found in housing developments.

Julie described the range of guidance and legislation which covers urban drainage (Ciria c753, Green Infrastructure 2001, Designing Places 2011, Sewers for Scotland 3rd edition, Water Assessment and Drainage Assessment Guide, SuDS for Road). It was highlighted that councils will now maintain above ground SuDs while Scottish Water will maintain those underground.

Julie suggested that Scottish Water's guidance 'Sewers for Scotland' is not optimally named to inspire a sense of potentially attractive environments. She proposed that while the content of the document doesn't prevent great design, it can allow for poor design. There is a risk of councils and developers missing the potential for adding attractive landscape. Acknowledging Scottish Water's 'duty to drain,' Julie called on forum members to help drive the delivery of more holistic design solutions; designers should be trusted and landscape architects should be involved.

The presentation was rounded off with a set of 'what can you do' ideas including:

- Requesting conveyance swales.
- Change your design guidance to 1:6/8 and refuse planning applications.
- Request that developers submit risk assessments.
- Remember grass cuttings block outlets.
- Get signage designed within planning applications
Signs are too often 'hazard' focussed eyesores.

Enabling Infrastructure Integrated Public Realm - Avenues Programme Ciaran Buchanan, Glasgow CC

Ciaran described the Avenues Project in Glasgow city centre. This aims to improve connectivity, improve the public-realm with pedestrian friendly street design, address flood risk and stimulate retail regeneration - all with a placemaking focus. Funding is via the City Deal.

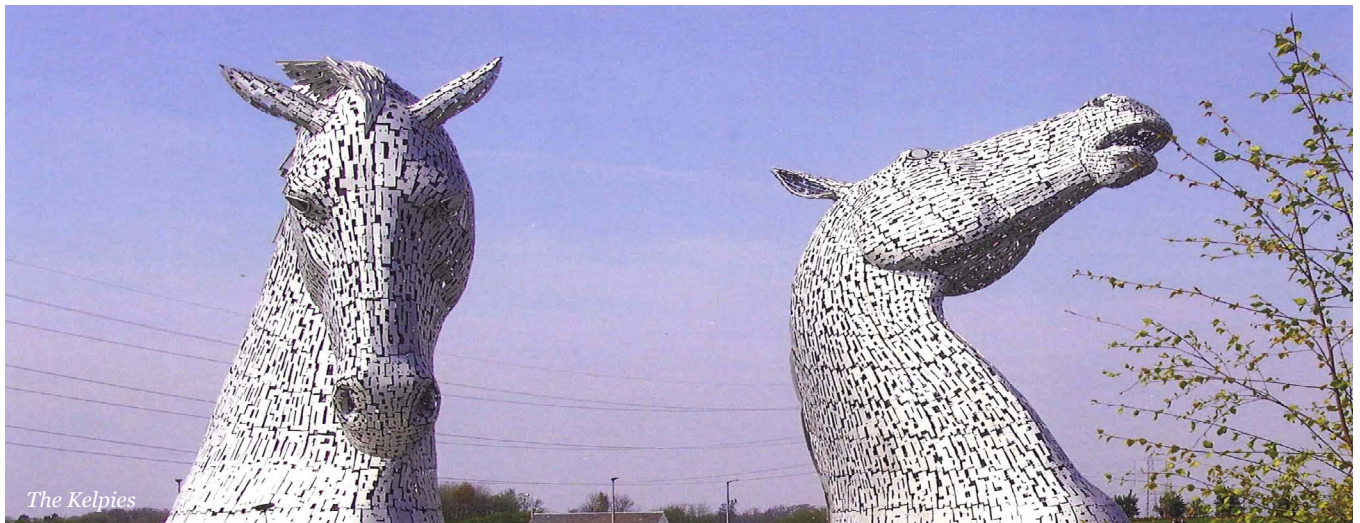
There are 16 streets involved in the project, the first to be delivered being Sauchiehall Street and in Garnethill area. The £115m improvements cover nine city centre districts. Preparatory work with the community was key.

The project is being managed by four council officers. Civic Engineers are the key consultants of the first designs. Specialist team skills are required on the client side to support delivery including ecology, civil engineering and traffic engineering.

Components:

- Sauchiehall Street - wider footways; less road with a 6.5m two-lane carriageway; continuous cycle route; rain garden of mature trees with benches and bus stops; continuous pavements with pedestrian crossovers at side streets based on the Scandinavian model.
- A green bridge to Sighthill as a key link into the city centre
- Mapping and negotiating utilities was an issue to achieve tree planting in pits. A GPR (ground penetrating radar) survey was used which gives a 70-80% accuracy.

In feedback the question was raised of a budget for future maintenance, given the issues with Buchanan Street and risk of cyclical process of replacement every 15 years.



Strategic Landscape Delivery

Julian Farrar, Ironside Farrar

Julian focused on the 5 actions points from the recently launched Landscape for Scotland. As landscape professionals we need to be:

- Holistic
- Engaged
- Evidenced
- Building awareness
- Showing leadership

Julian joked that his mother accused him of a career of 'just colouring in.' However the Landscape Architect is a 'joiner-up of dots'. Landscape design can really deliver impactful change. We should also recognise the collective importance of quality landscape design across the country. We need to be clearer about the motivations of projects, then move on to the 'show me the money' by sourcing resources and demonstrating added value.

Julian shared his experience of some recent projects:

- **Helix project, Falkirk.** He described the Kelpies as £9m 'bright shiny objects' which eventually leveraged an additional £25m in a £44m scheme. Interestingly they were not part of the original pitch which focused on the 3 'p's: people, participation, partnership. Iconic items are the cherry but not the whole cake. The key was to stitch together people with places, health, heritage, communities, and opportunity, whilst building on the inherent quality of the place.
- **£5.5m Saughton Park project** revitalises an old walled garden involving horticulture, a hydro scheme and glasshouses. There is a challenge here of revenue funding rather than capital.

- **East Lothian's Open Space Audit £30k**
Stitching parks together often delivers a higher impact than developing new ones (yet tends to be a thankless task).
- **Beaully- Denny Overhead line £6.5m**
Enhanced green network around Stirling, connecting seven communities. 80% of the budget is going on footpaths and cycleways.
- **West Princes Street Gardens** is a £25m project working with the Ross Development Trust and City of Edinburgh Council. One of the world's great urban greenspaces but we must remember in all the excitement of project delivery that local people are most important element.

In conclusion Julian emphasised the need to move from a fixation with transformational projects to transformative ones; away from one-off change and towards projects which are ongoing catalysts of positive change.

Learning Exchange Sessions



Contrast strip along bollards



Woodlands Garden, Glasgow

Designing for Inclusion

Susan Fulton, East Ayrshire Council

Susan talked about the key design features to take into consideration when designing inclusive places. She recommended a [video](#) produced by the Design Council on accessible design and shared the story of the Ford designers using a "Third Age Suit" when they designed and tested the Ford Focus, which allowed the young designer to simulate the experience of being elderly. The outcome was a very accessible vehicle suitable for both people with disabilities and those with impeded mobility – for example families with buggies.

She highlighted a number of street features that can cause problems for people with a variety of disabilities. Bollards which are often designed to blend into the landscape can create issues for people with visual impairments. She mentioned the importance of colour and contrast: not everything should be grey. Stainless steel can also be distracting with glare. Susan also outlined the need for seating at regular intervals (e.g. 45m) to allow people social rest areas. A number of designs were shared that would allow wheelchair users, those with buggies etc. to share the space.

An image of a historic property was shown where a smooth path had been added across a cobbled yard, fully supported by Historic Environment Scotland who are aiming to make their properties accessible.

She noted the importance of an access consultant's (early) involvement in any project. The discussion was summarised by saying that designing for inclusion offers flexibility and choice for everyone irrespective of ability, age or circumstance. Feedback was that a few simple sentences could be added to Design Guidance produced by councils such as:

- the importance of contrast and colour in public realm
- inclusion of backrests and armrests for seating
- identifiable top and bottom steps
- distinct steps at transitions from ramps
- raised beds good; need recesses below for seating
- curved seats help deaf partner audibility

Stalled Spaces

Sue Evans, A&DS and Iain Cunningham, Engage Renfrewshire

Stalled Spaces was a national programme commissioned by the Scottish Government and managed by Architecture & Design Scotland (A&DS) to encourage and support communities to bring derelict or vacant land back into temporary use. The programme covered seven local authorities. A toolkit booklet was produced to create a legacy and to enable communities to carry out similar projects in the future. The Stalled Spaces approach offers a potential model for those considering community engagement in open space projects.

Sue offered a national delivery perspective from A&DS, while Ian gave the local delivery perspective from Engage Renfrewshire, Renfrewshire's third sector interface (TSI). TSIs support a network model of integrated service delivery. Each local authority in Scotland has one to provide a single point of access for support and advice for the third sector, aiming to support better alignment with Community Planning Partnerships.

Renfrewshire ran nine projects, with £20 000 funding. A number of the projects were on private land. Key to the success of Renfrewshire's Stalled Space programme was speed and ease of access for community groups. Time was put in at the front end to help peel back a lot of the bureaucracy. For example the funding application process for the programme was morphed into the standard council application form.

Engage worked 'outside' on community issues, while the council worked 'inside' on bureaucratic and legislative issues e.g. land ownership. Iain emphasised the need for councils to back the vision if community groups are to avoid delays and red-tape. A legacy pathway has now been established in Renfrewshire whereby projects are now easier and faster to get off for community members.

Non-incorporated organisations were encouraged to tie into community organisations, to benefit from their established structures.



Inshes Park playground



Regency Place, Countesswells, Aberdeen

Inshes Park and Inverness East

Craig Baxter and Una Lee, Highland Council

This session looked at the delivery of a district park as part of a major urban expansion at Inverness East; this seeks to replicate a process that delivered a district park at Inshes, to the south of Inverness.

There had been a long-standing proposal to develop a country park to the south of Inverness to connect the city back to the countryside. From the 1990s, developments at Inshes contributed planning obligations towards the country park. A development brief was produced in 2004, which detailed a protocol outlining associated contributions. Consultation with the community indicated that a formal park was preferable to a country park; this would leave a funding gap. A community association, including elected members, was formed to fundraise. The association secured funding from numerous sources and are beginning the delivery of the next phase. The developer gifted the parkland to the Council as part of their planning obligations.

Learning from this experience, the Council is taking a more proactive approach at Inverness East.

Use of the place standard tool to consult nearby communities revealed the need for a park and sports facilities. The council are currently looking for a community group to help secure additional funding. All potential contributions are set out in the brief, with the possibility of gifting the land as part of the planning obligation being explicit. This provides certainty as currently no options have been taken up on the land within the expansion area.

This is a Highland solution to a Highland problem of accommodating change in a very fast growing city; by prioritising the resourcing of the park in collaboration with the community and providing certainty to the development industry.

Delivering Streetscapes

Stuart Henderson and Gary Milne, Stewart Milne

Stewart Milne Homes (SMH) were invited to present by Falkirk Council, as they are a developer that is working in partnership with local authorities, developing an interesting approach to placemaking using standard housing types.

SMH described how their approach to design had evolved over the years in order to build a trusted brand that competed on design quality and could attract buyers that would not normally consider new-build homes due to a lack of character and spirit of place. They described how Local Authorities could encourage better landscape settings through providing a co-ordinated dialogue with the officers responsible for place design (Development Manager, Roads, Utilities etc) and greater speed and certainty in obtaining consents based on developed landscape solutions with evidenced processes for ensuring the successful delivery of those landscapes.

LAUDF members were encouraged by the focus on place-based landscape responses, and the tailoring of materials on the homes to produce a place of identity while using standard plans. They described how they were developing their policies to require such an assurance of landscape deliverability, and that having this in an application would allow faster and more certain processing. They encouraged SMH to consider developing their guidance further in terms of SuDS/swales, and looked forward to seeing the promise in the developers guidance made evident in proposals.



Ciaran Buchanan's presentation



Stewart Milne learning session

Learning Points

The following key reflections were noted from discussions:

- The vital leadership role for local authority practitioners was demonstrated by a number of contributors. Practitioners demonstrated that their influence can help improve outcomes by promoting a holistic approach to design and delivery, and through a willingness to work in partnership with the development industry and local communities to drive successful solutions.
- Various contributions highlighted the latent potential that exists within communities - to engage in design and development, to influence quality of outcomes and to take a role in the ownership and stewardship of landscape and open space. Reducing bureaucratic hurdles is vital to encourage high levels of engagement.
- Upfront planning and design for the maintenance and stewardship of landscape projects is critical to their long term success.
- A place-led approach to investment in infrastructure within the landscape has the potential to bring about real impacts and benefits for places and communities.
- Even modest investments can deliver big differences to people's lives where community needs and aspirations are captured and a focus is kept through delivery on the project outcome.

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 in between meetings.

LAUDF is intended for all local authority or public agency staff working on issues relating to urban design. Please encourage colleagues to attend future events. The next full meeting of LAUDF is proposed for spring 2018. The steering group meet on a quarterly basis and are keen to hear from anyone interested in contributing to developing future meetings. Contact maeve.dolan@ads.org.uk with future topic suggestions or for more information.