

Local Authority Urban Design Forum

Chaired by Caroline Bell (East Dunbartonshire Council) and Laura Robertson (Aberdeen City Council)

Meeting #11 | Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation | 18th June 2018

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 for mutual benefit.

This newsletter covers the 11th LAUDF meeting. The theme **Housing Delivery: From Masterplans to Plot Passports** was chosen by the steering group. An agenda was then developed by the chairs Caroline Bell from East Dunbartonshire Council and Laura Robertson from Aberdeen City Council, with input from the steering group and Architecture and Design Scotland (A&DS).

Presentations and learning exchange sessions were curated to enable sharing of knowledge and insights around issues including masterplans (at different scales), plots passports, design codes, tenure blind development, self-build, offsite construction and Simplified Planning Zones.

The forum was attended by over 40 professionals from 18 local authorities and public bodies.

During the afternoon, Danny McKendry and Johnny Caddell (from A&DS) both took a moment to talk about A&DS Design Advice services:

Danny talked about **Pre-Design Advice for Housing**. A&DS can offer support to local authorities (and housing associations) at the outset of planning housing delivery. The service aims to promote placemaking and build the conditions for better design. Support can include: helping a diverse range of stakeholders to develop a shared brief, help to public sector clients to attract the right partners or skills, and help to develop guidance for a site or organisation. Contact daniel.mckendry@ads.org.uk to find out more.

Johnny then invited forum members to direct relevant significant projects to the **A&DS Design Advice** service. This can help you to identify and agree key design principles (with the developer, designer and agencies) at early stages of design development, when there is the greatest capacity for positive influence. Contact Johnny.Cadell@ads.org.uk to find out more.



PRESENTATIONS



Housing Led Regeneration

Colette McKenna,
City of Edinburgh Council

Colette talked about two developments: Pennywell Living in North Edinburgh and North Sighthill. Edinburgh's population is increasing, requiring 4000 new homes every year over the next decade. The proportion of private rented homes in the city is also increasing - it has doubled over the last 15 years - creating affordability issues.

Pennywell Living

The Pennywell site was formally an area of social deprivation with poor quality housing and public realm. Demolition cleared ten individual sites, which are to be delivered in four stages. The masterplan was developed with a high level of community engagement.

Pennywell is a tenure blind development, with all homes being delivered by one contractor. Across the 850 homes there is a mixture of tenure types; over 400 are for social/mid-rent, around 10% suitable for wheelchair users, and private housing was delivered alongside affordable. Tenure blind development was a key criteria in the procurement process with Urban Union; it was part of the scoring in the competitive procurement.

A key objective was to create jobs within the area and increase its prosperity; £80m will support 1000 jobs and aims to generate £56m of investment. The public realm is factored, with a unified pallet of materials throughout the development. There is one architect delivering a cohesive design aesthetic. Pennyhill town centre is also being redeveloped as part of the wider masterplan.

North Sighthill

North Sighthill is another tenure blind housing development (with social, mid-market rent and private sale) on land previously occupied by poor quality high-rise housing. A competitive tender resulted in one contractor/ developer for the whole site.

Watch a video [here](#) on Pennywell and Muirhouse.



Tornagrain, Inverness

Simon Hindson, Highland Council

This new town stretches between Inverness and Nairn along the A96 corridor. The Inverness Structure Plan was developed in the late 1990s and identified the need for 20,000 new homes; the revised figure is now 40,000 new homes over the next 20 years.

The landowner, the Earl of Moray, was keen to develop a new town focussed on traditional architecture. When the first development plan for Highland Council was initiated, Inverness was the fastest growing city in Europe. It was decided to consolidate the development in Inverness first, then move on to Tornagrain.

The planning applications, contentiously, came in before the development plan was finalised. Permission in principle was granted but with complex legal framework. Permission was given for 4900 homes, 3 primary schools and a secondary school.

The council wanted to ensure there was high quality design and took an infrastructure first approach. Initial work included street design and upgrading of the road and waste water facilities. Workshops were held to coordinate the masterplan development with education and the capital programme. Corporate buy-in was needed to the masterplan approach.

There were challenges with coordinating applications for the site; at one point there were 25 separate applications. There are now 60 houses developed and occupied and initial landscaping has been completed.

Design Codes were developed, with the first application setting the standard. The code became the 'bible' outlining materials, hierarchy, ecology and landscape. Planners, developers and householders are all required to follow it.

Challenges and opportunities arose during the development. A pipeline ran through the site and couldn't be built on. This has now been developed as an active travel corridor.

The final advice Simon shared: town planners have a huge responsibility when it comes to new towns, for generations to come – we need to make sure that we get it right – get the masterplan principles right and stick to them.



Kippen Dairy, Alexandria

Graham Connor,
Cooper Cromar Architects

Alexandria is one of three town centres which was designated by West Dunbartonshire Council as in need of regeneration. It is part of a wider regeneration programme for the Vale of Leven, one of Scotland's most deprived areas.

The Kippen Dairy site is located on the main route through Alexandria, a small town of 13 000. This affordable housing project for Caledonia Housing Association consists of 11 flats and 44 houses - all rental.

A zonal masterplan carried out 2004-2009 identified that Alexandria needed a more defined and activated town centre to sustain and grow. Cooper Cromar's work followed a design guidance document prepared by Gillespies.

A key part of the design was the creation of a civic square, on the edge of the site leading to the high street. From the square, a pedestrianised route through is created on a former road. Further design moves include: gables activated with windows; sandstone and brick buildings, in keeping with Alexandria's dominant material palette; a feature corner building; provision of 125% car parking; and 2.7m floor-to-ceiling height reflecting the high street shop sites.

The aspiration is that this project can contribute to the transformation of Alexandria's centre while providing much needed affordable housing. As a consequence of the development there is now interest in developing other town centre sites.

West Dunbartonshire Council were awarded the 'Place – Residential Development' award for Kippen Dairy at the 2017 Scottish Quality Awards in Planning (SQAP).

Reflections

Edinburgh's presentation on developments on council owned land in **Pennywell and North Sighthill** demonstrates how..

- Development on council owned land offers the potential to steer a design-led approach to investment for new large scale public/private residential developments.
- Local authority leadership can enable a strong placemaking vision and brief, linking in wider improvements to local service provision and driving longer term benefits for communities.
- Working in collaboration with private developers and local communities, local authorities can drive quality through the delivery of large scale tenure blind residential development

Highland Council's **Tornagrain** presentation shows how:

- Through the use of masterplans and design codes local authorities can take a leadership role for land in private ownership, working in collaboration with landowners and the development industry on steering quality of development and delivery in major residential projects.
- Corporate buy-in by the local authority to the masterplan/design code approach is important as well as pursuit of a coordinated approach to applications and consents, a requirement for strict adherence from outset and confidence to refuse quickly where conditions are not met.
- Masterplans and codes can influence good street design, landscaping and public realm. Homes are delivered (and sold) with good relationships to the streets, no vehicular access to front of properties or remote car parking and with flexible intergenerational landscapes spaces throughout.
- A problem-solving approach to working in partnership means constraints can be treated as opportunities (e.g. pipeline through major site reimagined as active travel landscape corridor).
- Maintain by hook or by crook - Community/landowner conservation body will uphold standards of code on ongoing basis to retain character over longer term.

The **Kippen Dairy** presentation highlighted:

- a design led approach to smaller-scale affordable housing in town centres can catalyse wider change and generate confidence for future investment.
- The value of working in collaboration such as in Alexandria where joint working between the local authority, the Housing Association, and the design/development team has transformed a town centre brownfield site with the result of improved town centre living opportunities for all ages, as well as a new gateway to the town and improvements to street design and public realm for local communities.
- The impact of such an approach to investment has been to change perceptions and catalyse interest in significant redevelopment elsewhere around the town centre.

LEARNING EXCHANGE SESSIONS



Self-builds with plot passports

Iain Briggs, Glasgow City Council

The Maryhill self-build pilot project sets out to address the barriers preventing people from building their own homes (uncertainty with land, funding and planning puts many people off). The pilot looked at a simplified planning process using a site of council owned land with space for six plots. The project took inspiration from the Gravenhill project north of Oxford.

The Council delivered the serviced plots with roads, drainage, water and electricity connected. Each plot has its own passport with requirements of heights, outlook etc. Clarity within the plot passports is key; all guidance is concise, written in plain English and worded so not to be open to interpretation. There is a need for cooperation between the council's design team and the development planning team.

The Council applied for planning for each plot; each development then needs to apply for a Discharge of Conditions certificate to demonstrate that they comply with the regulations. To date, one plan has been submitted (Planning application code: 17/01713/DC). The six plot holders are in constant dialogue with planning. Plots range from 350-870m² and cost £40-50k.

From the Council's point of view, the process has been resource intensive. If it were to be scaled up it would be advisable to proceed with a planning permission in principle approach, as opposed to needing full planning that then requires the discharge of lots of conditions. In hindsight, it may have been beneficial if there had been a planner embedded in the design team. The importance of sticking to your design code 'guns' was also highlighted.

The prime motivation was to pilot self-build and test local appetite. GCC plans to release further serviced plots, which include the opportunity for collective self-build. With the Maryhill pilot project being on a small site, the plot holders are talking to each other, coordinating their works. For self build, some form of a vetting process of the owners/builders is needed to ensure that the projects are completed.



Durieshill masterplan

Emma Fyvie, Stirling Council

Stirling Council have been involved in a masterplan exercise for Durieshill, a 3000-home village on a 240-hectare site between Pleau and Bannockburn. As part of the pre-application process the Council set up a steering group of stakeholder departments and agencies to ensure an alignment of vision and outcomes in what they describe as a 'major growth area' which is included in their Local Development Plan and Strategic Housing Investment Plan.

The development, now submitted to Planning, will comprise a range of homes including 25% affordable homes, retirement housing and care facilities. The village is expected to grow organically over a 30 year period. Fifty homes will be built during 2019-20, (subject to approval of plans) then 75 the following year and about 100 homes a year thereafter.

Following a request from Stirling's inhouse urban design officer, A&DS assisted the planning team through collaborative workshops with the developers and other council services to agree the development of a landscape framework, and the relocation of a community space and education campus from the periphery to the heart of the site.

Existing woodland will be retained and augmented with new woodland and landscape. A network of paths and cycle routes is also integral to the masterplan. In discussions, forum members suggested the importance of robust ongoing maintenance regimes to ensure the high quality public realm shown in the plans and visuals is sustained.

Forum members with experiences of similar scale projects reflected on varying approaches and success or challenges in dealing with placemaking and design issues on such major urban expansion sites including: frontloading discussions, infrastructure delivery, coordinating applications, overcoming car dependency and integrating active travel routes.

All supporting documents and the proposed site plans can be found on Stirling Council's website, as can the planning application.

LEARNING EXCHANGE SESSIONS



Offsite construction

Andrew Livingstone, Napier University

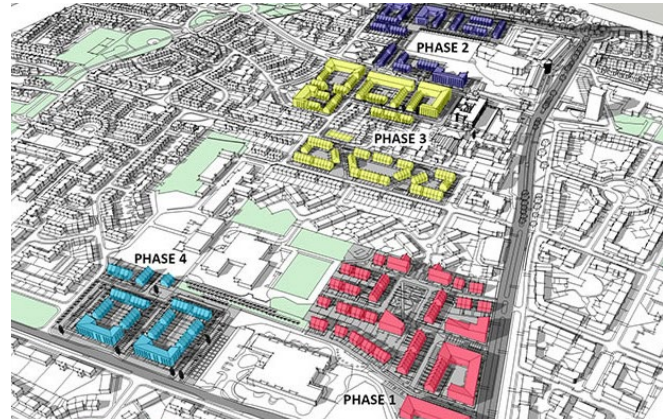
Andrew talked about the benefits and opportunities offered by 'offsite' and pre-fab construction methods. He outlined developments in the sector while addressing misconceptions based on earlier pre-fab or pre-built development. The sector is innovating and growing fast with companies such as Machar, Carbon Dynamic, Portakabin and CCG offering a range of solutions from 3D volumetric pods, through timber frames to customised ready-made panels with built-in brick facings and insulation.

Benefits include: quality assurance advantages over onsite joinery approach; better air tightness; potential for upskilling workforce; better safety; delivery speed and on-site assembly and reduced traffic disruption in construction phases; the potential for mass-customisation; and for contribution to low or zero carbon development.

Andrew noted the importance of raising the general awareness of the offsite methods among local authorities - highlighting the value of detailed conversations between offsite developers and planning at the pre-design stage. Adoption is much lower in Scotland than elsewhere in UK. Andrew encouraged dialogue between authorities to share learning. Awareness of approaches taken by different companies is also important to influence the best outcomes. Some favour early stage discussions with planning authorities to enable upfront development of detailed designs, while others will engage in dialogue and design changes later in the process.

Perceived barriers from a planning perspective were discussed. Potential challenges around adaptability of standardised products were raised – in terms of responsiveness to site context and masterplans / design codes. One authority had experienced challenges with proposals for a modular hotel model in a sensitive townscape setting. Other forum participants who had experience testified offsite construction to the build phase being less problematic once groundwork was done.

Further Reading: A&DS' materials library, available online through [Material Considerations](#) and the books [Building Offsite – An Introduction](#) and [Mass Timber: an introduction to solid laminated timber systems](#)



Pennywell masterplan

Stuart Bishop, Barton Willmore Homes

Collette McKenna had previously set out the social issues and challenges affecting Pennywell from a local authority point of view. Stuart used this session to describe how the architecture and landscape design addressed these issues in the delivery.

Following a Planning Permission in Principle in 2010, a Design Code was used to set the framework for delivery of phases of housing dispersed among existing residential areas. The site was delivered to a common set of materials and with the same to design team to ensure visual coherence across the site. Bidders for the first phase had been assessed against the qualities set out in the design guide which was simple and effective and has driven the delivery of high quality development.

There was high levels of investment in the area including a new secondary school, an NHS Partnership Centre and a council-led regeneration of the local shopping centre. Of four housing phases, two have been implemented to date. The first three have a 50/50 affordable/private tenure mix (173 – 315 units per phase); the fourth will be entirely private.

Key characteristics included:

- High energy performance standards
- Process of learning and review for renewable technologies – issue of HMVR heat recovery system dependant on airtight sealed homes – people switched if off.
- Consistent public realm for a legible streetscape.
- Tenure blind – no visible distinction between private for sale and social rental housing.
- Simple/robust palette of materials.
- Common factoring arrangement for all housing.

Given high levels of earlier consultation, the community had to be carefully re-consulted for each phase. Responding to issues coming out of consultation was a key focus, including community safety and antisocial behaviour (design to secure by design standards and housing designed for passive surveillance).

LEARNING EXCHANGE & MORE INFO



Simplified Planning Zone in D&G Matt Bridgestock, John Gilbert Architects

Matt presented work on a Simplified Planning Zone (SPZ) pilot in Dumfries and Galloway. Dumfries & Galloway Council received a government grant for the pilot (£120 000 was available across four local authorities) to help address a design quality issue emerging from the self build plots across the region and to increase housing supply in specific areas. A&DS provided advice in the development of this project.

Techniques learnt on a study trip to Almere in the Netherlands were used to help inform ways to keep the process simple for self-builders. Almere has a one-stop 'plot shop' where you can pick up brochures detailing the conditions of each site. A financial advisor is also on hand; you can go in with a wage slip and come out with a plot, design and suitable mortgage.

The pilot is located on a site controlled by the council; the issues around SPZ on sites outwith the Council's control were also considered but not implemented. The pilot site had been on the market (by D&G Council) for a number of years with little interest. The site has capacity for 12 detached self build plots, laid out to complement the surrounding urban fabric.

The SPZ aspires to remove blockages within the planning process. A masterplan, design code and plot passport are developed and form a codified planning approval. Conditions are specified in advance of plot sales. For the D&G site, the SPZ is valid for 10 years. Specified conditions for the homes include: a 'blue line' for each plot which at least 70% of frontage should be built to, a demarked build zone, a maximum Gross Internal Area, a maximum building height, a secondary build zone for ancillary accommodation and front elevation guidelines. Compliance with the SPZ documents is in the form of measurable, quantifiable parameters and is expected to comprise a checklist and set of drawings, simplifying the process for the applicant. It is likely that the decision time will be the order of 2-4 weeks.

The D&G SPZ aims to help address poor quality design, product and management and to identify a suitable delivery model to enable scaling to other rural contexts.

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 winter 2018. Topic suggestions are invited via our [feedback form](#).
- 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 for any LAUDF enquiries.