



WORKSHOP REPORT

ARCHITECTURE POLICY REVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

The workshop took place on Friday 14th July 2006 and was attended by 21 individuals and representatives of organisations with an interest in the review of Scotland's Architecture Policy. The purpose of the workshop was to provide an opportunity for discussion on the key themes identified in the current consultation document on the policy. The workshop focused on the themes that were of particular interest for BEFS:

- Raising Design Standards and Building Quality
- Place-making/Urban Design/Landscape
- Procurement
- Managing and Understanding Change in the Built Environment

The themes of Sustainability, and Public Engagement and Community Involvement were considered as underlying themes.

Participants received a presentation from the Scottish Executive's Architecture Policy Unit on the context for the current consultation. Points raised in workshop discussion are given below. Participants were also asked to write down the key achievements of the Architecture Policy over the last five years, and key priorities for the future. These points are given in the appendix.

DISCUSSION OF CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Co-ordination and Cross Cutting Issues

Vision and purpose:

- The policy requires a vision if it is to support public identity and to raise general issues of architecture, rather than the exemplars.
- The policy needs to indicate more clearly its purpose and intended benefits. Challenging performance indicators are required to ensure effective delivery.

Policy Integration:

- The policy needs to be able to raise the profile of debate in order to establish links with other Executive departments.
- There is a need to more closely integrate planning policy and architecture policy.
- Architecture as a discipline falls under the Government's creative industries portfolio. There is insufficient linkage with broader planning issues which impact on the quality of communities and where people live.
- Joined up thinking is required between a range of disciplines at policy level ie architecture, roads, planning, environment etc.

Planning System:

- Planning is still seen as a barrier, rather than an enabling process.
- Applications which have had approval from the A+DS Design Review Panel in pre-application discussion could be fast tracked in planning system.
- It was suggested that Planning Advice Notes be policy rather than advice as currently the advice cannot be taken as a material consideration.
- A review of Designing Places was suggested.
- The length of time for determining applications should not be the same for minor developments as for large schemes (currently the timescale is the same irrespective of the scale of the development).

Scope of the Policy:

- Architecture is part of the policy and consideration should be given to a more conscious framing of the strategy. The policy should have broader scope beyond a pure focus on architecture.
- Consideration should be given to providing a definition of architecture, to clarify what is under discussion.
- The policy must reflect Scotland's identity and not been driven by other agenda such as tourism.

Policy Implementation:

- The policy framework must have relevance for stakeholder organisations.
- Some of the principles should refer responsibilities back to the architectural professional itself. There should be a clear duty on the architectural profession to buy into the terms of the policy, including the formal acknowledgement by the profession of the wider social framework (of planning, community, environment, and third party interests) within which new architecture sits.

Practical Support:

- The policy must be able to help address practical issues such as managing planning appeals and the resource implications of this (training for local decision-makers etc).
- Resources are a key underlying issue, and could help address many of the issues raised in the policy.

Raising Design Standards and Building Quality

Measuring success of design:

- The subjective nature of design makes it more challenging to aspire to a particular standard or level of quality.
- On the other hand, the subjective element of design is about style and fashion. There is actually much about design and place-making that is objective and could be measured, particularly relating to how the building functions.
- Relating design to style is problematic when it comes to architecture. To ask questions around a set of principles is a good way of getting out of a stylistic debate – aesthetic considerations could be one of a number of questions in terms of measuring the success of a building. The aesthetic element is part of design, but by no means the most important. It is possible to codify some subjective elements and measure these.
- Broader outcomes (beyond a focus on value for money) should be considered – for example outcomes relating to health and education.
- Buildings give something extra – reference was made the elements 'commodity, firmness and delight'.

Public awareness of architectural design:

- Public awareness of cultural values associated with quality and architecture is low. There is a need for greater explanation of values at community level.
- Erosion of quality in private space (small scale developments) does little to increase public demand for higher quality.
- The public needs greater information to increase awareness and create demand for improved design, eg Historic Scotland has a good range of leaflets on materials.
- The agenda of The Lighthouse is quite restricted.

Design for End Use:

- Need to explore values associated with a building once it is in use. The introduction of an award for buildings five years post completion was suggested.
- Procurement process must give sufficient time for iterative dialogue between client and architect.

- Often buildings are not built for the end user; the link between user and designer does not exist, rather a short term approach is adopted which can undermine the design.

Design Standards:

- There is no mechanism within the planning system that encourages dialogue with applicants, aimed at improving poorly designed buildings, if on balance it is likely that consent can be granted anyway.
- Reference was made to the fact that the majority of applications for planning consent are submitted by non architects.
- The lack of regulation in process of architectural design is surprising (many involved in the process are not fully trained or registered).
- The government in all its forms has a responsibility, where they have a direct responsibility for commissioning / brief building etc to adopt the highest design standards.
- The level of contact between architects and housebuilders is increasing – particularly on brownfield developments which are more challenging.
- The policy should enable minimum standards at least to be met.
- Small scale developments (house extensions etc) have significant cumulative impact relative to flagship projects.
- The National Parks would be a good test bed for promoting good practice – effort might be concentrated in these areas.

A+DS activities:

- The design review process that A+DS is developing seeks to get involved in design at an early stage, when there is more scope to gain influence before the design becomes established.
- A+DS is also getting increasingly involved in advising on masterplanning.
- Much effort is going into building links into Local Authorities.
- A+DS is looking at pre-application procedures (caution was expressed that following pre-application procedures does not necessarily result in good design).
- The work of A+DS should continue to be supported and the existing program of early design reviews and research etc enhanced.

Public Engagement and Community Involvement

Community involvement:

- Reference made to the SENSCOT (Social Enterprise Network Scotland) and also the Architectural Heritage Society in Scotland's network of voluntary cases panels. Both provide good models of community involvement.
- Community involvement usually takes place in response to change/challenge/threat to a place or building. It was noted that those that are most vocal can skew the public interest.
- Resources are required to look strategically at successful models of networking between built environment NGOs and the community.

Promote best practice:

- The web offers a good method for promoting best practice: although this does require appropriate promotion of sites as key sources of comprehensive information. It was noted that A+DS is currently developing its website and is considering how this should relate to the scottisharchitecture.com website and the Lighthouse.
- Support was given to Architectural Awards. It was felt however that the other players in the project should also be recognised in the award-giving process as well as the architect ie. designer/client/community/craftsmen.

Planning system:

- Development Plans need to be made more accessible by adopting a more varied range of communication methods (including three dimensional models).

- Planning Inquiries take up huge resources – this can act as a disincentive to instigate this process.
- There is a need to implement a framework which requires development of a design brief. This would:
Encourage developers/housebuilders to work with architects to achieve the best in design and take on board the wider community issues;
Ensure that land cannot be sold/released until there is a detailed design brief in place;
Ensure local community input into the planning process through public consultation.

Place-making/Urban Design/Landscape

Area based focus on 'place':

- Desire to move away from the concept of 'good architecture' to the idea of 'good places'.
- Context and layout are important; urge for a shift in focus away from individual buildings to a focus on the wider environment and sense of place.
- Do not just look to promote just the *best* in architecture but put resources in to *raise* standards overall. 'The best is sometimes the enemy of the good'.
- Encourage contextual design and not just look to design iconic buildings.
- The use of space should also be a consideration in addition to design ie aspiration/place/context.
- A suggested alternative to the term 'architecture' was given as 'place-making'. This would incorporate landscape design.

Procurement

The impact of the physical environment on health:

- Need to focus much more attention on this area. There is much existing information on the health outcomes of better design; research needs to be promoted. Maggie Centres have helped raise awareness hugely.
- A+DS is working with the health sector and the Executive's Health Department to advise on achieving good design (for example design champions to operate within health boards).

Brief building:

- Advantage of competitions is that they can encourage architects to be more innovative and question the brief.
- Still would like to see community engagement in development of brief.

Service delivery:

- There is a need for research to compare the success of buildings procured by different methods.
- Queried whether the procurement process makes a positive contribution to built environment or is simply a method of service provision.
- Cultural change is needed to move away from a service delivery approach, and the restrictions of annual budgetary processes, in order to bring about longer term capital investment in places. The professions need to facilitate this process.

Managing and Understanding Change in the Built Environment

Integrating new development into existing context:

- It was felt that the historic environment should not be seen as a separate category of design. Instead the distinction could be existing build/new build, with the challenge being for these two to be tied together more effectively.

- It is important that the historic environment is seen to react to new buildings and is not viewed as unresponsive in its form and design. It should always be about the quality of place whether old or new.
- Incentives are required to encourage the conservation of the historic environment within regeneration areas. Local Authorities are working with developers, however conservation principles are not being incorporated into schemes.

Understanding:

- Greater understanding of what is of value requires a process of appraisal (which requires greater resourcing of local authorities). Under new proposals, the 'main issues report stage' should not just focus on landuse, but adopt an 'urbanist' approach.
- Development of existing settlements must recognise the historical context of the place – the nature of the urban fabric.
- Landscape Character Assessments and Historic Landscape Assessments are among the tools which perhaps could be used in enhancing the effectiveness of the management process.

Education and Research

Training:

- Basic training of local authority planning committee members is urgently required (so far few authorities have taken the initiative to undertake this themselves).
- Provision of greater resources are needed to widen the skill set and capacity of local authority planning departments.
- The policy cannot sit apart from the issue of training within the profession. Training and education for architects should be reformed to help the profession see beyond the focus on new-build, including possibly the development of a common foundation year looking at 'places' holistically, for all professions.
- Perhaps a broader education in first year of professional architecture training could encompass consideration of other disciplines such as landscape, as transport, environment etc.
- CPD in Scotland could also provide cross disciplinary knowledge.

SUMMARY

- The purpose of the policy needs to be more strongly articulated, along with steps for implementation.
- The policy must be integrated into other policy areas within the Scottish Executive.
- Measurement of design quality may better enable standards to be set, and awareness of what constitutes good design raised. Greater emphasis must be placed on the design brief.
- Concern was expressed over the relatively low level of public awareness and aspiration for quality in the built environment - there is much scope to inform and engage the public.
- Participants urged for a shift away from a focus on individual buildings to 'area based' contextual design; to think in terms of good places with emphasis on context and layout.
- A cultural change is needed to move away from a service delivery approach in order to bring about longer term capital investment in places.
- A better understanding of the existing settlements and the nature of the urban fabric is required in order to help relate together new development and the existing context.
- A more holistic approach for training of professionals working with the built environment was called for. Training of local authority planning committee members was considered a priority.
- The establishment of A+DS was welcomed – its work must be supported and enhanced.

APPENDIX: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND KEY CHALLENGES

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS OVER THE PAST 5 YEARS

- Architecture policy evolved and was supported by general trend for better architecture.
- Policy has raised profile of design generally.
- Policy raised public awareness and desire/aspiration for good architecture.
- Establishment of A+DS, ScottishArchitecture.com, and the Lighthouse Architecture Centre.
- The Lighthouse -
 - Education Programme
 - International Profile
 - Sustainability (more recently)
 - Travelling Exhibitions
 - SUST
- Link with Education eg. Building Connections.
- Historic Scotland – TCRE supported research eg. ‘The Performance of replacement sandstone’.
- TCRE general leaflets help to educate/inform home owners.
- Awakening possibilities.
- Greater awareness in built environment.
- Driving aspirations.
- Greater political recognition of issues and chance to influence.
- Design led PAN’s (Planning Advice Notes).
- Competitions and awards.

KEY CHALLENGES/TOP PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Co-ordination and Cross-Cutting Issues

- Identification of outputs (ie.links to achievements).
- Further linkages required at policy/political level.
- Integrating highways design [and roads] with architecture/planning/landscape architecture.
- Ensure all appropriate departments within local government and the Executive are ‘in’ on message.
- Consider using COSLA to strengthen message at local government level.
- Government agencies need to become more pro-active in relation to the third sector.
- Leadership required especially by Government and Agencies.

Raising Design Standards and Building Quality

- Raising standards within the built environment in terms of aspirations of quality and sustainability.
- Raising the quality of ‘standard’ design and recognising that this is valuable – not just encouraging ‘one-off’ landmark buildings.
- ‘Best is sometimes the enemy of the good’.
- Encouraging an increased level of quality across all levels ie. design of places and building materials.
- Need more emphasis on design briefs, conservation statements and plans.
- Holistic approach to design required not forgetting the landscape eg.
 - PLACE:
 - People
 - Landscape
 - Architecture
 - Communities
 - Environment
- Address raising design standards within the mass housing market.

- Improve the evidence base to make the case for the value of good design and the cost of bad design across all fields.
- Impose more expectations on the architect.
- Enlightened clients/patrons.
- Require investment of time and money in early stages of design to get it right first time.
- Investment in the skills levels available in the local planning departments in terms of conservation officers and urban and landscape designers.
- Put more emphasis on allowing professional bodies to make contributions including pre-applications, consultations
- Better understanding of built environment issues by elected councillors.
- Further funding/raise awareness and capacity of planning service.
- There should not be such a great emphasis on 'speed' within the planning service process.
- Planning staff must be able to deal with quality issues at source.

Public Engagement and Community Involvement

- Need more emphasis on design briefs, conservation statements and plans.
- Early dialogue with end users.
- Value – tie in 'ownership' of the finished product with its 'value' - financial and aspirational.
- Public awareness of A+DS to help in pre-application stage for large/sensitive applications.
- Emphasise output of good design both in architectural terms and in positive social impact terms eg. better health, less vandalism etc.
- Dissemination of achievements.
- Part of the policy should be to educate and inform the public of the benefits of good design.
- To raise aspirations to ensure 'delight' in architecture.
- To engage more with communities and local groups.
- Establish a central resource for the Built Environment.

Place-Making/Urban Design/Landscape

- Not architecture but 'place-making'.
- Aspiration for better 'place-making' as key which feeds into everything else ie. client aspirations, community involvement, design brief and statement which all lead to better product.
- Policy requires policies/aims that can be used in control/implementation of development.
- Raising the quality of 'standard' design and not just encouraging 'one-off' landmark buildings.
- Need more emphasis on design briefs, conservation statements and plans.

Procurement

- Delivery on the ground requires wise procurement and mature skills.
- Promoting best value as a counterweight to lowest price.
- Design competition to be encouraged in procurement process.
- Centralised planning policy – PAN's as Policy not Guidance.

Sustainability

- Require more relevant research papers eg. in traditional materials.
- Promote re-use of old buildings through greater funding.
- Promote need for repair and maintenance of existing building stock eg as in an MOT for a car.
- Place greater emphasis on sustainable design.
- Promote use of local materials from sustainable sources (avoid UPVC etc).
- 'Pear Oil'/Gas and the implications for development patterns and food supply transport chains.

- Energy audits for materials at downstream stage.

International Promotion and Networks

- Raising Scotland's profile in the design world outside the UK.
- Raising the profile of the Lighthouse.

Managing and Understanding Change in the Built Environment

- Increasing resources to encourage re-use of the historical environment.

Education and Change

- Education – more inter-disciplinary involvement right back from tertiary education level to professional CPD obligations.
- Integrated training and education across the board.
- Respect for and from all players within the built environment.

PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

Angus Council

Architecture and Design Scotland

Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland

Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland

East Renfrewshire Council

Edinburgh World Heritage

Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland

Institute of Historic Building Conservation

National Trust for Scotland

Perth & Kinross Council

Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland

Royal Town Planning Institute in Scotland

Scottish Natural Heritage

Scottish Stone Liaison Group

Scottish Civic Trust

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