

CROSS PARTY GROUP
on
ARCHITECTURE and the BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Draft Notes of Meeting
*Building for Scotland's Communities: New Thinking for
Our Future Places*

Tuesday 9th March 2021, 7.45pm
Online via Zoom

Present:

| | | | |
|--------|-----------|------|-----------------|
| Graham | Simpson | MSP | Convenor |
| Linda | Fabiani | MSP | Depute Convenor |
| Karen | Stevenson | RIAS | Secretariat |
| Craig | McLaren | RTPI | Treasurer |

Speakers:

| | | |
|-----------|---------|------------------------------|
| Euan | Leitch | BEFS |
| Hannah | Smith | ICE Scotland |
| Rachel | Tennant | Landscape Institute Scotland |
| Christina | Gaiger | RIAS |
| John | Edwards | RICS Scotland |
| Barbara | Cummins | RTPI Scotland |

A list of all delegates is attached [here](#).

Apologies:

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|-------------|--------|-------------------------------|
| Dr Keith | Baker | Glasgow Caledonian University |
| Prof. David | Adams | University of Glasgow |
| John | Pelan | Scottish Council on Archives |
| Eugene | Mullan | Smith Scott Mullan |

1.0 Welcome

1.1 Graham Simpson (GS) welcomed delegates to the meeting of the CPG for Architecture and the Built Environment and the second on-line.

1.2 There were no further apologies in addition to those listed above.

1.3 The Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland, Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in Scotland, Built Environment Forum Scotland, Landscape Institute Scotland and Institution of Civil Engineers Scotland issued a [joint statement](#) ahead of the Cross Party Group on Architecture and the Built Environment meeting on 9th March.
The statement is based around three areas – Professionalism, Prioritisation and People.

1.4 GS reminded attendees that the meeting was being recorded.

2.0 Minutes of the Previous Meetings

GS explained that since the meeting is being held as an online webinar with no chat function, proposers and seconders were sought from the CPG membership ahead of the meeting, these were as follows.

2.1 11th September 2019

Proposer: Eugene Mullan; Seconder: Gordon G Smith

2.2 30th September 2020

Proposer: Prof. David Adams; Seconder: Jocelyn Cunliffe

2.3 5th February 2021 (AGM)

Proposer: Euan Leitch; Seconder: Craig McLaren

The minutes of the previous meetings, as noted above, were duly approved.

3.0 Presentations

GS introduced Euan Leitch, Director of BEFS to discuss the collaboration between the six bodies to produce a joint statement, who would then be followed by the other presenters thereafter.

3.1 Introduction - A Future for our Built Environment - Euan Leitch, Director, BEFS

BEFS work across the policy landscape - and collaboration of this kind is what will enable a stronger, regenerative, greener, and just transition for Scotland. Working on a maintenance agenda BEFS want to see policy and the professions working in unison to improve our places to meet climate, community, cultural, and economic need.

3.2 On a shoogly peg? Scotland's infrastructure resiliency - Hannah Smith, Director, ICE Scotland

To achieve the Scottish Government's vision of infrastructure supporting Scotland's resilience and enabling inclusive, net zero and sustainable growth, we must first establish if our infrastructure is fit for purpose. "There must now be a strategic 'resiliency audit' to identify priorities and the most meaningful interventions to ensure our infrastructure is as durable as possible, particularly to withstand the effects of extreme weather.

Hannah emphasised the resiliency issues across Scotland's infrastructure, particularly in light of climate change, and setting out the benefits of conducting a resiliency audit – all drawing from work in a recent ICE report available [here](#).

3.3 Multifunctional Places - Rachel Tennant, Chair, Landscape Institute Scotland

LIS believe that multifunctional places needs to be at the heart of our built environment to ensure we can sustainably deliver on a range of societal benefits for the future. Diverse, well designed and managed places can deliver climate change adaption, increase the resilience of our communities and businesses, improve our health and wellbeing, as well as protect and enhance nature. Collaborative and empowering approaches are essential to the delivery of this.

Our built environment spaces need to be diverse and resilient providing multiple benefits which requires us to plan, design and manage.

Quality useable spaces with blue-green infrastructure which will enhance biodiversity, enable climate change adaption helping absorb flooding and which will enrich communities by including children's play and outdoor education, allowing opportunities for food growing, and upping our health and wellbeing.

These should all include cycling and walking routes to maximise connectivity, reduce our carbon footprint and increase healthy and happy lifestyles. Our public spaces in town centres should be of high quality and include tree planting and green infrastructure, such as green roofs and walls and sustainable urban drainage systems.

Rachel went on to say that these require to be connected biodiverse networks and movement zones from our built centres out to the surrounding areas, well designed and actively managed. At the moment poor landscape and deprivation often occur together meaning those in greatest need are least able to access quality outdoor space. They should also be created collaboratively with communities and other key stakeholders.

To achieve this, she believes we must (a) embed the principles of design, management and effective use of all places and new infrastructure into our policies and public statutory duties so that it contributes to positive outcomes for climate action, health and wellbeing and biodiversity (b) set fairer standards for quality green space – with a focus in areas of socioeconomic deprivation so there is equity to all (c) invest in design, maintenance and management of quality public spaces and green infrastructure and (d) use collaborative approaches with place and landscape led decision making and design solutions that will lead to sustainable, multifunctional and equitable results

3.4 **Creating a Zero Carbon Future - Christina Gaiger, President, RIAS**

Christina's presentation focused on really creating a zero carbon future.

Scotland has set world leading targets to cut greenhouse gas emissions to Net Zero by 2045, with both Edinburgh and Glasgow pledging net zero carbon by 2030. But what does this actually mean and why are Architects and built environment professionals critical to the conversation?

Significant in this equation is that all construction and buildings have a substantial carbon footprint which is created from both embodied and operational carbon emissions.

Traditionally one might think that a message like this would not quite align or resonate with the RIAS and the 'shiny' image associated with architecture or an architect, however the climate emergency is now, and we all have a responsibility to support Scotland's ambitious carbon targets. We believe it is time for the construction industry to change, to reflect on the resources we have available to us and take the opportunity to re-think our approach.

This reshaping must prioritise our existing building stock and build to achieve the lowest embodied and operational carbon footprint. It sounds so simple, but unfortunately it is not happening.

It is estimated that 80% of buildings currently standing will still be here in 2045 when we will supposedly have achieved net zero carbon emissions. Upgrading them to be

fit for purpose and meet energy efficiency targets is a key economic, market and industry opportunity.

Critically the focus, highlighted by the recently updated Climate Change Plan, is on how we heat our buildings, often solely the operational emissions energy as opposed to assessing the heat demand.

It is important to recognise that a buildings fabric, what it is made of and how it's made can lower or eradicate energy demand. This is what we call the fabric first approach, which can improve the efficiency of our buildings. This is building upon the dialogue and expertise brought to the table at a previous Cross Party Group last September.

There is no doubt that an important part of the equation is the conversion to low carbon heating systems, but if we ignore the buildings fabric, we won't maximise the benefits of this change or improve the energy efficiency and running costs. This is fundamental. At the same time, overlooking embodied carbon in the industry footprint as a whole or in the materials we use to build is something we can't afford to do.

A buildings heating system can often only have a lifespan of 10-15 years whereas any investment in fabric is much more long term. Recognising this could make the programme for government investment, work harder and be more effective across Scotland, in cutting fuel poverty and realising carbon targets.

We support the Government's proposals that workforces should have the skills to install the new systems and recommend that these could be combined, working alongside professionals, to marry the necessary fabric improvements. At the moment we don't know how Scottish Governments targets for making homes energy efficient by 2035 will be achieved but Chartered Architects and other built environment professionals have the expertise to help.

We want to ensure that this can be delivered successfully to homeowners. How do we use this opportunity to facilitate a common understanding of how our homes can achieve net-zero and what would it mean for the occupants and their quality of life? We need a cultural shift and for us all to become zero-carbon advocates. We need the demand for high performance buildings and upgrading the fabric of your building to become the next tote bag movement, through education, support and a robust regulatory system to deliver effective and appropriate upgrades to Scotland's properties.

The move away from heating and cooling our buildings with fossil fuels is a big step and one aspect of tackling the climate emergency to lower operational emissions. Nevertheless, this has to be a forever strategy of long term investment.

The RIAS believes in a Scotland where we protect the environment through legislation and regulate for a zero-carbon future. This can be achieved by adopting a quality focused collaborative approach that avoids impacts. Through which we can create a built environment that lowers or eradicates energy demand. This is why Architects and built environment professionals are critical not only to the conversation but the delivery. Open collaboration, sharing resources and learning from each other will be key to this process and the collaboration between the professional bodies today demonstrates the potential and expertise to hand.

The experience of the pandemic over the last year alongside the urgency of the climate emergency acutely illustrate that change is needed ... but also that it can happen!

3.5 **VAT Reimbursement Fund - John Edwards, Immediate Past Chair, RICS in Scotland**

As we look towards a green recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, Scotland's built environment professionals will play a pivotal role in tackling some of the most prominent domestic issues in Scotland, including the lack of adequate housing, renewing our high streets, creating a 21st-century infrastructure network and addressing the challenges of climate change. A coordinated and collaborative approach will provide the leadership and expertise that will help guide decision makers in ensuring a swift recovery and economic prosperity.

John focussed his presentation on the key areas below:

- The built environment will play a pivotal role in tackling the most prominent domestic issues in Scotland:
 - lack of adequate housing,
 - renewing our high streets, and
 - creating a 21st-century infrastructure network
- Climate Change mitigation be a top election issue
- Post-covid recovery will be green
- Housing contributes 15% of total UK green house gas emissions
 - More prevalent in private housing stock
- VAT Disparity between new build and existing property
 - Tackled by Government assistance to encourage RMI:
 - Introduce a VAT Reimbursement Fund
- Accessed by an individual providing proof of a VAT payment for the RMI
- Available through VAT registered companies only
- Benefits are numerous:
 - will support job creation and maintenance, particularly for SMEs;
 - tackle the skills shortage;
 - obstruct rogue traders and the informal economy.
- Policy echoes CICV Forum; based on FAI research
- Could generate £400m in Scottish GVA
- Support up to 7,500 FTE Scottish jobs
- Every £1m spent on maintenance generates a £1.09m GVA return to the Scottish economy and supports 21 full-time equivalent jobs.

3.6 **Twenty Minute Neighbourhoods - Barbara Cummins, Convenor, RTPI Scotland**

Covid-19 has allowed us to appreciate the importance of the places we live in. A more coordinated approach across government will allow us to create twenty minute neighbourhoods that provide well-designed, attractive, healthy and sustainable communities where people have local access to the services, shops and facilities they need on a daily basis.

Barbara explained how we would operationalise 20-minute neighbourhoods through planning policy and practice and place-based partnerships.

Firstly, we need changes to national policy backed by data. Existing and emerging policy in NPF4, Designing Streets and Creating Places and many parts of the Planning Scotland 2019 Act still to be implemented, all can inform decision making to support 20-minute neighbourhoods. The Scottish Government's Digital Planning Strategy needs to provide robust access to data to support and inform decision making and monitoring to support policy changes.

Secondly, there are some key Policy areas to be addressed including compact settlement patterns helping to reduced the distances between homes and work places, making more efficient use of existing transportation structure. Retrofitting density may

be necessary but are we ready and prepared to take those decisions? Moving active travel from policy through guidance to delivery is key. This might mean we need changes to Transport appraisals and the use of the Infrastructure Levy to achieve different outcomes in future. Should we look at implementing Low Traffic Neighbourhoods? Daily services need to be accessible by all of our population, that includes things like play infrastructure as well as schools, shops and services. She also suggested a presumption against out-of-town retail.

She went on to say that we do not need Open Space Strategies that operate in isolation, we need these to integrate with the greenspace aspirations of 20-minute neighbourhood.

Development Management can support delivery of 20-minute neighbourhoods through assessment criteria for interventions and renewed infrastructure considerations on planning obligations to reflect these policy priorities.

Barbara ended her presentation by emphasising the need for genuinely Place-based partnerships. There are 20minute neighbourhoods which are very successful. The Gorbals and Morningside have key elements in common; mix of housing types and tenures, mix of uses that serve the residents, good public transport links and walkability and access to green space. It just takes the will and collaborative working to make it happen in more of our communities across Scotland.

4.0 Discussion and Questions

4.1 Graham Simpson MSP thanked the speakers for their presentation and took questions from attendees (using the Zoom Q&A function) and led a discussion with the panel.

4.2 The question was put to the panel around what vision they have for rural areas, especially post covid. CG agreed that a lot of the focus is on urban areas but agreed that we must remain acutely aware of Scotland's rural landscape. There is a lot of research and community led work which needs to be done to hone that picture. RT commented that a lot of what she mentioned in her presentation does relate to rural situations as well as urban. The same principles apply. Working closely with communities to help them shape their own environments is essential.

4.3 When asked what steps could be put in place to raise embodied carbon up the agenda and restrict emissions linked to the development intended to answer the climate emergency, EL responded that it is already on the agenda, in that the position statement on NPF4 acknowledges that we need to understand embodied carbon much better. There is no one perfect way of doing it, but the Government is acknowledging that has to be part of how we plan and develop. Working hand in hand with Building Standards and Planning working together. BEFS membership wholly advocates that understanding whole life carbon costs is essential. HS agreed put pointed out some challenges, particularly the risk of becoming disjointed in approaches to measuring and assessing this. Critical the organisation work collectively. As a whole, making sure that you are utilising what you have to the best you can. Maximise the value of those assets. She pointed out that addressing embodied carbon will be different for different settings so should have a more holistic approach.

4.4 The next question related to Scottish regulations and whether there should be only zero carbon heating options from 2024 and whether domestic renewables like heat pumps and solar should be a requirement of all new builds to reduce demand on the grid and meet the Scottish 2045 Net Zero targets. CG referred to the recent new build heat standard consultation. The RIAS is of the view that new build heating should be

zero direct emissions only. She would like to see local authorities driving that as early as 2022. There are examples of this happening now and it is about making the most of those examples, showing good practice and about knowledge sharing. JE agreed it was great to have the ambitions, but recognition in term of the supply chains that can deliver it. There is appetite for it but we should be incentivising the supply chain to accelerate the growth to produce the heat pumps, to produce the solar panels, to have them locally available so that they are not having to ship them halfway across the World. CG agreed that if look to fill that gap with import we completely overlook to topic discussed earlier of embodied carbon. HS said it was key to think about this in a systems approach. There must be a balance across the energy systems which will allow those technologies to come forward.

4.5 The next question was on whether it was felt that VAT should be removed from all domestic renewables and energy efficiency measures to help with the green recovery in Scotland. JE replied that in an ideal world, yes, but needs to be on proven technology and not on experimental technology as there are tried and tested ways. It should be through a registration or certification scheme.

4.6 One delegate said that it is relatively easy to write policy, but as Barbara pointed out, we have been talking about some things for years, but still see new schemes that fly in the face of those established principles (e.g., out of town retail; low-density car centric suburbs). They asked how are we going to narrow the implementation gap? Is it built environment professionals we need to convince or politicians?

BC responded that the joint statement issued ahead of this meeting is a very good start. We need everyone to have bought into the same idea. The narrative around the climate emergency as well as the focus on people and place is becoming more similar amongst different groups. It's down to the people who make the decisions on where the money is spent, it's down to the built environment professions and it's also down to the politicians. It takes a bit of bravery to make the decisions and communication is very important. We need to genuinely engage people at the early stages of planning.

4.7 When asked how can we ensure that policy is translated into practice and delivered on the ground, BC responded by saying that we do value a lot of what developers bring even though it can be profit driven, but they are looking for that level playing field where everybody is expected to deliver the same high quality to the same standards. If we set standards and establish policies which we expect people to stick to then there will be no harm in them making profits because they are delivering the places and the developments we want. We have to set that standard and stick to it. EL said that as long as we have a discretionary planning system then we will always be having this debate. The Scottish Land Commission work looks at collaboration between public and private sector to deliver better places. JE believes it comes back to incentivisation and education.

4.8 An attendee asked why there has been no mention of the urgent need to adapt our built places for an age friendly future, given the urgency of demographic change. HS said the challenges are multi-faceted, in that we need to adapt infrastructure with the forward looking view of what the use cases will be, but we also need to address all challenges at once, demographic change, embodied carbon, resiliency etc. The key is a collaborative holistic approach, maximising the benefits for the most amount of people. No one key challenge trumps another at the moment. CG says it comes back to community aspect. Some great work being done across Scotland for multi-generational living which is tried and tested.

6.0 Concluding Comments

- 6.1 GD invited Linda Fabiani MSP to comment. As it will be her last meeting, LF thanked the CPG for its continued support over the years and she hoped to stay involved after she stands down as an elected member of Parliament. Before she was elected 22 years ago she had a background in community based housing associations and the comments being made this evening were all said back then too. She expressed her concern that we get good ideas and get things going and then we just stop. Always looking for new innovative ideas instead of sticking to what worked before. The whole community housing ethos for neighbourhoods was there, then we lost it and it became very different. Force politicians and professionals to stop people looking for something to make their name with and recognise when something works. She also agreed with the plea to stop the out of town shopping centres. Society has moved on in terms of shopping and the Pandemic has exacerbated that in terms of online shopping. Rethinking our town centres in a really sensible way, not just about shops, but bringing things back into the town centre is essential. Again, this was something which was discussed 30 years ago and is a constant frustration for her.
- 6.2 On behalf of the CPG, GS thanked Linda Fabiani for her time and work with this Cross Party Group and others over the years and her passion for the topic and said he would be very keen for her to continue to join the discussions and debates.
- 6.3 GS thanked all of the participants and attendees and reminded the Group that this will be the last meeting of the CPG before Parliament closes, The Secretariat and Treasurer will be leading discussions with other built environment organisations with a view to re-registering the CPG for the new Parliament. Anyone wishing to contribute to these discussions should contact the RIAS (secretary@rias.org.uk).

Meeting closed at 9.00pm

A copy of the recording of the meeting was issued to all who registered to attend and is available on request from: Carol-Ann.Hildersley@rias.org.uk.