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## BRIEFING



## DELIVERING GREAT PLACES IN DIFFICULT TIMES: ADDING VALUE AND DEMONSTRATING VISION

### INTRODUCTION

This Briefing is one of a series of three published by RTPI Scotland looking at how planners and the planning system can help to deliver great places in difficult times. The paper has been written after discussion at a *Convenor's Colloquium* discussion dinner which brought together key influencers and experts to come up with solutions, ideas, innovation and good practice. These were organised by RTPI Scotland and sponsored by Halcrow, a CH2M Hill Company. This dinner was also supported by Architecture + Design Scotland (A+DS).

The paper summarises the points raised by those participating in the discussion. These are set out to help stimulate discussion and debate on future approaches to delivering great places and so do not necessarily represent the views of RTPI Scotland, Halcrow, A+DS or all of the participants.

### VALUE AND VISION

This paper focuses on "Value and Vision" and is focussed on the following key questions:

- How can you get buy-in for a long term vision of a place from politicians, funders and implementers?
- How can you demonstrate the value of the vision economically, environmentally and socially?
- What are challenges and opportunities in delivering the vision on the ground?

## BUY IN

The first question asked was how can you get buy-in for a long term vision of a place from politicians, funders and implementers? Key points raised included:

- **Scale:** There is a need to make places that work for people. Creating great places only works well when it is done from the scale of the individual. It goes without saying that community buy-in to development is crucial.
- **Political Leadership:** There is a need to take simple messages to politicians about creating places. Too often the planning profession can overcomplicate the story and use the wrong language. Planners need to be better equipped to inspire and show the vision of what a place could be like in the future. In doing this planners need to recognise role of local politicians and work to use political leadership to support the development and implementation of this vision.
- **Cross Professional Working:** Creating great places requires input from a number of professions and disciplines. Planners are well placed to coordinate these to come up with a holistic vision. However, different professions will bring different perspectives which can contradict one another.
- **Demonstrating Value:** Planners need to improve ways of setting out and articulating the benefits of their vision for different stakeholders. There is a need to demonstrate this in terms of the economy as well as for communities and the environment.
- **Local Authority Role:** Place making must be seen as key role and responsibility of planning authorities so they vision a future for communities. Should there be a focus on doing this at the old 'Burgh' level?
- **Focusing on Vision:** We should focus political involvement on setting the vision. Should this lead to getting the detail on planning out of the political process to allow politicians to concentrate on an approach which encompasses value-led planning? As part of this, is there a need to focus statutory consultation on planning away from the detail of planning applications and move it upstream so it can concentrate more on development planning?
- **Place promoter:** The *Delivering Better Places* good practice guide published by Scottish Government concluded that a key to good place making is having a "Place Promoter" who is able to coordinate delivery, stakeholders, implementers and keep standards high with an eye on the delivering the vision. Is this a role planners could play? If so what skills would they need?
- **Stratify approaches to places:** Is there a need to focus our investment in different ways for different places? As part of this do we need to be

honest about which places are of better quality than others and focus efforts either on the worst to help move them up, or on the best to ensure that we continue to have real quality areas.

- **Risk:** There is a need for the public sector to all to can to de-risk development through providing certainty and predictability for developers and investors. The planning system has a role through providing confidence and upfront infrastructure for sites.

## DEMONSTRATING VALUE

The next question asked was how can you demonstrate the value of the vision economically, environmentally and socially? Key points raised included:

- **Value based planned:** Planning should be based on core values such as democracy, long term vision and maximising community benefit. In doing this planning and the planning system should be promoted and recognised as 'early intervention' which, when done well, minimises the need to deal with issues further down the line.
- **Economy:** Planners should think of their work as dealing with economic projects, not just place projects.
- **Language:** The concept of place making is not well understood outside of built environment professions. There is a need to show what it actually means. The Charrettes have done a good job of this in bringing people together to engage in developing a future vision for communities.
- **Civic Role:** Planning should be seen and promoted as having a 'Civic' role which shapes civic space and the provision of civic facilities such as health.
- **Vision:** We need to promote the idea of planning being about providing a vision which delivers on the ground. Development plans have a key role here. We need to guard against a system which is purely focussed on development management and essentially 'planning by application'.
- **Community:** Planners and developers need to ensure that they take the community with them in developing vision. This can be difficult, but it is essential.
- **Standards:** Planning should 'set the bar high' and aim for high standards in developments and places. It shouldn't be striving for the mediocre.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR DELIVERY

The final question asked what are challenges and opportunities in delivering the vision on the ground? Key points raised included:

- **Confidence and Culture:** There is a need for planning to move to value based judgement and risk models. However, there is also a need for certainty and predictability to be at the centre of planning. This needs

local planning authorities to work to develop a culture which supports planning officers to be more confident in expressing their professional opinions.

- **Public Sector Roles:** The public sector should have key roles in providing certainty and de-risking development through providing infrastructure, assembling land and using assets creatively. This will involve local authorities taking risks.
- **Leadership:** Planning is not at the 'top table' in most local authorities, with Heads of Planning now generally operating at third tier. How can we best maximise planning's influence corporately?
- **New Financing Models:** There is a role for new funding mechanisms such as Tax Incremental Financing and Prudential Borrowing. However, if these are to be used, and to be used to improve the quality of a place, planners need to influence Directors of Finance in local authorities. How can we do this?
- **Assessments:** Many of the impact assessments required when submitting a planning application can be expensive and resource intensive for developers and planning authorities. Is there a better way of handling these?
- **Learning Lessons:** There has been a lot of good practice in place making in Scotland. We need to learn from this rather than re-invent the wheel. Many different organisations are attempting to do this but is there need to coordinate it more effectively?
- **Different Perspectives:** Housebuilders are often coming from a different perspective than place makers. The marketing department of a housebuilder is very influential given that they see property as a commodity and they tend to think in the short term. How do we balance these perspectives?
- **Measuring Success:** It takes twenty to thirty years to make a place and they are constantly changing. Given this, how can we measure success?
- **Focus:** Should we focus development activity more on areas of demand, rather than areas of need? How would this impact on communities? Who would be the winners and losers? Is it fair?

## **PARTICIPANTS**

Those participating in the discussion were:

- Karen Anderson, Chair, Architecture + Design Scotland
- Kevin Braidwood, Head of Physical Built Environment, Raploch Urban Regeneration Company
- Andrew Burrell, Director, The Burrell Company

- Martin Crookston, Board Member, Architecture + Design Scotland
- Colin Graham, Miller Developments
- Duncan Loudon, Director, Halcrow
- Allan Lundmark, Director of Planning, Homes for Scotland
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- Craig McLaren, National Director, RTPI Scotland
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- Stefano Smith, UK Planning Director, Halcrow
- David Suttie, Convenor, RTPI Scotland
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- develop and promote new thinking, ideas and approaches which can improve planning
- support our membership to work with others who have a role in developing places in Scotland
- improve the understanding of planning and the planning system to policy makers, politicians, practitioners and the general public.

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