



CULTURAL COMMISSION:

RESPONSE:

ARCHITECTURE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

1. INTRODUCTION & CONTENT

- 1.1 The Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS) is the professional body for Scotland's 3000 chartered architects. They work in 1000 businesses, mainly very small, as well as in areas of industry from housebuilding to local and central government.

The RIAS has charitable status and offers a wide range of services and products for architects, students of architecture, construction industry professionals and all those with an interest in the built environment and the design process.

- 1.2 Architecture and the built environment have been recognised by the Scottish Executive through its Policy on Architecture (October 2001) which incorporates the framework document "Towards a Policy on Architecture for Scotland" (September 1999). This sets out in a broad and comprehensive manner, the importance of architecture and the built environment to all sectors, including the cultural life of the country.

The Policy document was followed (November 2001) by "Designing Places" an urban design policy framework emphasising the importance of the spaces in and around buildings, and the urban realm.

These principles apply as much across rural Scotland as they do to urban areas.

- 1.3 As a public artform, with practical outputs, architects are responsible to a multitude of stakeholders who have varying degrees of stake in the holding. For example in a commercial development, an architect will have a principal client, potential future tenants, possibly a funder with any or all of whom there may be contractual agreements either directly, or through collateral warranties.

Nonetheless, architects have responsibilities to the local citizenry – whose interests are to some extent catered for through the statutory regimes of planning control and building warrant (regulation, approval).

In a school, the stakeholders include the children, teachers, parents, maintenance staff, boards of governors/local authority departments/HMI – along with others in the community, as above. The extent to which the architect is directly or indirectly responsible to such stakeholders, and the rights of such parties often are not clear, and their power in the process of design and procurement is extremely variable. Indeed, the position of architects also varies considerably – according to the client type, forms of procurement etc.

1.4 Architects are, in the broader sense, change managers. Often they are broking agreements between parties with different agendas and from different cultures. In thinking about the position of the social cultural agenda and its interface with regulators on the one hand and the business world on the other, useful reference may be made to a book outlining the generic approaches that can be useful: “Managing Partnerships”, by Ros Tennyson for the Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum (Appendix 1).

1.5 The environmental and sustainable development agenda becomes more prominent with each passing year. In May 1997, the RIAS published its Environmental Statement, which is enclosed as Appendix 2. It is useful to note reference therein to inter-generational responsibility. Architects are taught to think long-term, usually much longer than economic or political cycles. If the built environment as a cultural enterprise is to be given due weight, mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that longer payback periods and investment programmes are considered seriously. The ill-thought-out housing programmes of the 1960s and ‘70s, funded through 60 year loans, have resulted in an expensive bill for the taxpayer with demolitions too often occurring well within even 30 years in some instances. Currently, the 25 – 30 year maintenance and management obligations of PPP contractors do not appear to be producing buildings that exhibit durability or beneficial whole life costing, let alone be significant cultural artefacts.

1.6 The way settlements are designed and developed has a significant impact on the way communities are formed, and these can have significant impacts on the cultural life of such communities. It is important that such cultural issues are given appropriate weighting alongside economic factors when considering the contribution that the built environment plays in long-term quality of life issues.

2. EDUCATION

2.1 If we are to develop a more aware and confident society with appropriate artistic, cultural and social skills, this is more likely to result from an education which is holistic – providing an integrated approach closely embedding cultural activities such as music and movement, artistic and creative work, alongside intellectual and social pursuits. Within these spheres, visual literacy is a vital component, particularly in a world where the visual is becoming so vital, alongside literacy and numeracy skills.

- 2.2 The built environment offers a wonderful resource for such activities, enabling holistic learning in a wide range of means, which can also tackle important subjects such as citizenship.

These arguments were spelled out in 2000 in a Perspectives paper for Learning and Teaching Scotland entitled "Tracing the past, Chasing the Future". This led on to the establishment of the Building Connections website.

- 2.3 Capacity building for teachers is vital, and as well as opportunities through different mediums, activity needs to take place in this area in Teacher Training colleges and, potentially through a network of Architecture Centres working with the Lighthouse in Glasgow.
- 2.4 The Big Draw, which is engaging the Lighthouse in its UK campaign, is stressing the importance of drawing and visualisation, and all the benefits that that can bring.
- 2.5 The work of the Aberdeen Environmental Education Centre, the last remaining urban studies centre after the unitarisation of Local Government in 1995 has been developing useful initiatives in the north east of Scotland for many years. Curiously, Aberdeen despite its wealth is one of the few places in Scotland which has not seen any obvious impact of Lottery or Millennium projects.
- 2.6 Over the last 3 years the RIAS has run sketch design competitions with school pupils in Inverness (2002), Falkirk (2003) and Aberdeen (2004). These have indicated that such activities can provide enormous stimulation to youngsters and teachers alike, involving other designers in creative workshops. Children have often taken up the challenge, working in groups, contributing considerable extra effort in their own time.

From these exercises, it is clear that youngsters with appropriate assistance and support can produce challenging work, and they have many clear ideas of their own, which most processes of change tend to ignore.

- 2.7 A series of eco city projects run by Cathy McCulloch of the TASC Agency/Children's Parliament bears this out. Supported by multi-disciplinary teams, planners, architects, landscapers and others from construction have demonstrated the ability to tackle complex and serious challenges, at quite large scales (new settlements and most recently the area of Edinburgh south of the Parliament project in Edinburgh).
- 2.8 The Schoolworks project in London, albeit supported by substantial funding from central government, has also indicated that the physical transformation of a large secondary school can be a creative and engaging process.

Not only has the physical environment been altered, but all those involved will have a completely different view about their built environment and the opportunities it offers for positive change – capacities that will last them through a lifetime.

- 2.9 Children in Scotland is also pursuing such agendas, looking not only at the Scottish and UK experience, but involved in a network of new thinking and building around Europe. An Award proposed looking at facilities for children up to the age of 10, will be seeking supportive evidence of the engagement of that age group, when planning and developing the brief.
- 2.10 Developing capacity at this level is certainly demanding, but also exciting. It is a further development of the process of community engagement in a serious way, which has been a part of some sectors' work in Scotland in many years (notably the Housing Association movement) which has led to the creation of more informed and demanding clients and a greater level of innovation and quality-seeking as a result.
- 2.11 Currently experiments are taking place in Germany, providing local communities with their own planning powers, which is generating more inventive solutions, as communities engage directly with those in the business sector.
- 2.12 In contrast, the current model for schools provision are based upon the production line model, led by those in charge of the production, rather than those consuming the product. A recent EIS survey, supported by the RIAS, indicated very little consultation with teachers (none with pupils) and very little discussion about pedagogy or future models of education itself. Even thinking long-term proved difficult, as wholelife costing was played down in importance, compared to initial capital cost.
- 2.13 Rather than undertaking pilot programmes a test how best the mechanisms could be adjusted to deliver excellence and innovation, there has been a rush for development, and consequent severe criticism of the results from the design community. This does not bode well for those being educated in such facilities, and contrasts bleakly with the work being undertaken by CABI & RIBA in examining "21st century schools" in their "Building Futures" series (2004).
- 2.14 The RIAS has since 1998 run an informal Education Design Quality Forum involving teachers and school designers, to encourage debate on this important topic, and help the setting of more ambitious objectives for the school estate. The Architecture Policy Unit has taken up this mission with November conferences in 2002 and 2003, shortly to be followed by one on 3rd December this year. This has been an admirable effort, supported by Ministers. Sadly, however, as yet the Policy has not had any perceptible substantive results in practice, as PPP programmes continue to proliferate without adequate emphasis on pedagogical issues as an integrated and holistic approach to design.

- 2.15 RIAS Consultancy, meanwhile, in a secondary schools project coordinated with the Lighthouse, has assisted Clackmannanshire where the Chief Executive, (with an educational background), has sought to explore serious alternatives. The fact that this is a notable exception merely reinforces the concern that in this crucial part of our future cultural cauldron – the school estate – we are opting for “ready meals” rather than selecting excellent ingredients, an enticing recipe, and a good chef. That, of course, requires discerning diners!
- 2.16 On the broader public educational front, that is an agenda strongly identified by the Architecture Policy, and primarily being delivered through the Lighthouse. The general debate about buildings and interiors continues apace in the popular media, notably television and the property pages of the daily papers. These should be seen as opportunities to explore a wider debate.
- 2.17 Perhaps the most likely source of full engagement by individuals and communities (of all kinds and types) will occur when change is seen as a more continuous issue. Generally, people are too busy with their own lives and relationships, work and leisure, to commit large tracts of time to the future of their built environment - unless it is threatened in some way, or unless there is a clear need for action on a collective basis. The Review of the Planning System, which is itself reactive rather than proactive, offers opportunities to explore ways in which positive agenda-setting activities can occur at a community level. There is no shortage of methodologies for that, including the Urban Design Group’s Placecheck approach – outlined in the Scottish Executive’s November 2001 “Designing Places”, - or Village Design Statements, and their equivalents for urban areas. It is clear that masterplanning, and taking on board all the stakeholders’ interests, enables a more successful framework to be established, within which quality built environments can be developed.
- 2.18 The issue of land value as a community asset needs to be better understood, so that increased asset value through development can generate returns for community benefit. Often this requires an early community input, via a local authority or some other vehicle. This has to do, of course, with developing confidence, and establishing the margins of risk. Ultimately education, awareness and capacity building should seek to create confidence in Scotland’s communities not only to be able to participate in shaping the future of our shared built environment, but to have sufficient skills to maximise the opportunities as and when they occur.

3. INSTITUTIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- 3.1 The current pattern within the architecture and built environment framework, of the cultural side at least, includes the Architecture Policy Unit itself within government, its outreach “agency” the Lighthouse Centre for Architecture Design and the City, and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments, and what will soon become Architecture and Design Scotland.

The remits of these bodies are overlapping to some extent, and how Architecture and Design Scotland takes forward its advocacy agenda, particularly with regard to the public sector client, will be significant.

- 3.2 Also included in that list should be the RIAS, as a body with a Royal Charter and therefore a public mission to promote a knowledge and understanding of Scotland's architecture.
- 3.3 However, all these bodies with cultural intentions are also embedded within a wider structure, which the Built Environment Forum Scotland has recently "mapped". There are many voices within this sector, all with valid points of view! All would agree, however, that architecture and the built environment represent cultural artefacts. What and how we build is determined in part by cultural factors. Cultural significance is the first unit of the CPD units being put together in support of conservation accreditation in the building sector, and this is a concept which is becoming better understood amongst construction professionals at present.
- 3.4 Apart from embedding cultural values, buildings, spaces and places are the backdrop against which the vast majority of life is lived; and of course many cultural activities take place and are influenced by the physical surroundings.
- 3.5 The extent, to which design and construction, as cultural activities, relate to the role of government and its agencies, is set out in the Policy on Architecture, and the Lighthouse is carving itself a strong and coherent presence, within that infrastructure. This debate is, of course, about the complete picture, and the government only has a part to play – the private and voluntary sectors have major roles in taking forward the cultural sector, with regard to buildings and places. The value systems that inform the different sectors are often incommensurate. In many cases, the cultural contribution of the built environment is difficult to measure. The arrival of Design Quality Indicators (those produced as a tool for school buildings: QIDS, are enclosed as Appendix 3) illustrate how successful buildings elegantly integrate these different value systems. Current procurement practice would suggest that, as a nation, our cultural aspirations - at least with regard to school buildings - are negligible. The government, in setting out the ground rules for school buildings has a crucial role here, and there is a major mismatch between the Policy on Architecture, and the current forms of school and health building procurement.

Who is setting the public sector cost comparator?

- 3.6 The relationship between government and its agencies with a cultural role in the more traditional sense benefit from being arm's length, enabling independent judgements to be formed by appropriate Boards. While it is right that the government should set out the principles within which such Boards operate, within that, freedom of movement is essential.

- 3.7 In this sense, the complementary roles of the Lighthouse (general education), the Royal Commission (recording and archive) and the new Architecture and Design Scotland (design review and advocacy) offer the opportunity to develop a coherent picture.
- 3.8 As far as access is concerned for the public, including young people, sufficient centres for debate and exchange are needed, if architecture and the built environment are to become an integrated element of cultural discussions at a local level. The initial policy consultation and framework related to architecture raised the possibility of a series of centres for architecture. Opportunities for extending this idea need to be explored, and each of the agencies could have a role here, as could the RIAS as a hub within an Architecture Centre. The Dutch model of Architecture Lokaal is useful here.
- 3.9 As the Doors Open Days programme during September illustrates, there is substantial interest in the built environment, and people's inquisitiveness will encourage them to explore other people's buildings with enthusiasm!
- 3.10 The assumption upholding the planning system is that development is to be encouraged. At a cultural level, it would be valid for the planning system to ask: in what way will this development enhance the area, the street, the landscape ... the cultural experience of an area or place?

Indeed in his St Andrew's day 2003 speech, Jack McConnell said: "And all new developments could, indeed should, have an artistic or cultural component to them. Artistic displays inside new buildings and public art in open spaces – large and small – should not be seen as optional luxuries, they should be integral to the ambitions developers and planners have for the experience of those who will live or work there in the future".

"The planning system can be a powerful tool to encourage creativity in both open spaces and the built environment. The right to an aesthetically pleasing environment is as much a right for the poor in run down areas as it is for the rich living in today's conservation areas.

While gardens and designed landscapes are important both culturally and historically, the planning system can encourage the use of art in the design of new open spaces. The inclusion of elements of art can encourage a sense of ownership and community pride in the open space.

Design issues have, in recent years, properly assumed increased prominence within the planning system. More and more people are recognising the contribution of design in achieving or retaining a high quality environment, and creating a sense of place that people can identify with.

Our devolved government has issued the first ever Policy Statement for Scotland on "Designing Places". This was followed by the Planning Advice on Open spaces and on Housing Quality and Design published earlier this year.

We recognise, absolutely, that the 'conservation areas of tomorrow' will not happen by chance, but by design. So, we will continue to drive forward with the design agenda, and will be producing further design based Planning Advice Notes."

4. DELIVERY OF SERVICES

- 4.1 If, in built environment terms, the cultural agenda is embedded in buildings and places, then creating and maintaining places and spaces of quality for all human activities is a shared cultural activity. Culture is a rich and diverse notion, and so the stakeholders, and contributors to the development of the built environment need to be as rich and diverse.
- 4.2 Many people in Scotland look to the scenario in the Netherlands as an exemplar, where a proactive national policy planning framework includes design as a key component, not just in buildings, but in urban design, major infrastructure landscaping and civil engineering works. The Dutch public are well informed, assisted by intelligent debate in the mainstream press, and through the activities of local Architecture Centres. These include debates on civil engineering – naturally a key issue for the Dutch – dealing with all aspects of planning and urban design and development, including works in the historic environment. 11.
- 4.3 In this sense, delivery of the built environment requires all the agencies and factors referred to in the Policy on Architecture framework document to recognise the cultural activity which they influence and deliver. This reaches down through the curriculum, through statutory arrangements, particularly the planning system, and the attitudes of clients and developers, as well as the professions directly engaged in design.
- 4.4 It is important, however, to recognise that if this delivery is to reach a good proportion of the Scottish population, then good design is required in all parts of Scotland, in all scale of projects. This requires leadership at central and local government level. There is no refuting the concept that well-designed places spaces and buildings arise from the combination of "good" clients and "good" designers and "good" constructors. Any Cultural Policy can only hope to influence the cultural framework within which all these parties operate, and other initiatives are required to influence other aspects of the whole picture. However, a more demanding and mature populis is the best guarantee of long-term positive change in this regard. 1.

5. MARKETING AND PROMOTION

- 5.1 In some ways, it could be argued, that the current level of general media attention to interior design, private housebuilding and “property improvement” means that further promotional activity might be inappropriate.
- 5.2 It could also be said that, because architecture is a part of the property market, and embedded within the (albeit fractured) construction sector, the issues surrounding the cultural contribution of both past and current buildings is well enough understood. The Policy on Architecture itself identifies a weakness in the public debate about architecture and its contribution to civil life, and this is an area which still requires to be addressed. Architecture and urban design can best be appreciated by being in, and moving through, three dimensional spaces. Good journalism and writing can help to widen an appreciation of the issues. The Scotsman had had an idea to undertake reviews of new buildings, in the same way as reviews of other Arts initiatives such as exhibition or theatre performances. Such initiatives should be being encouraged. However, because of commercial or privacy issues, not all buildings’ clients/users wish such prominence or, indeed, visits from hordes of interested people!
- 5.3 Nonetheless, ways need to be found to share the issues with a broader audience; ultimately, the ambition should be to engage them in the process, not merely lift awareness.
- 5.4 One current example of taking a creative and involving approach to new development is in evidence in Thurrock, as part of the Thames Gateway projects, see www.visionarythurrock.org.guk
- 5.5 The “Architect in the House” scheme, run each June during Architecture Week, enables many thousands of homeowners to invite an architect to visit them, and talk about ideas for development, with a modest contribution to Shelter. This has remained a popular scheme, and in 2004 in Scotland produced more than £6,000 towards the Charity’s work.
- 5.6 On the planning side, Planning Aid is a funded scheme, enabling planners to give advice and consultancy advice to individuals and community groups exploring planning issues. To some extent there is an overlap here between marketing and promotion, and rights issues.
- 5.7 An additional dimension, which appears to be growing in importance, is access to information, linking the built environment to other cultural interests – particularly genealogy and local history. The work of the Royal Commission and the National Archives of Scotland, and other bodies, along with the RIAS in producing material both on-line and in print, enables a more appropriate evaluation of local environments and can, in some cases, provide the spur to regeneration, economic growth through tourism and other employment opportunities.

6. CREATIVITY

- 6.1 Creativity is really to do with the ability to play: with ideas, structures, processes. It comes in all shapes and sizes. Education, from the outset, should have as a fundamental aim, the development of human beings with a retained ability to play – an ability which is given insufficient attention in contemporary education, which tends to focus on intellectual achievement.
- 6.2 Particularly in the early years, the integrated use of music, movement, the visual arts, languages, humour and drama helps to develop rounded individuals. Within that context, architecture and the built environment can be seen as a resource for exploration and stimulation, rather than a specific focus of study. Such a range of activities not only develop the traditional senses, but the social sense as well: valuing the different kinds of contribution needed to keep a community, however small or large, in a healthy and balanced condition. Such approaches can create socially adept youngsters who are adaptable, but have their own clear identity.
- 6.3 RIAS activity in this area has been modest, but demonstrates the ways in which pupils and teachers can respond to the built environment, through sketch competitions, often assisted by architects and other professionals working with pupils; and in a joint project with the Scottish Poetry Library. [enc colour photocopy from Aberdeen and brochure from poetry Library and winning pieces of writing]

7. CULTURAL RIGHTS

- 7.1 All citizens should enjoy the right to an environment which satisfies certain standards. They should also have a right of access to understand how that environment came to be; and how it might be changed in future.
- 7.2 The extent to which individuals, communities, businesses and the government, in all its guises, should be able to engage and influence in the future of the built environment, is a matter for continuing public debate and decision.
- 7.3 Scots should enjoy the rights to live, work, play, contemplate, in supportive environments that assist, not hinder a full life. At the best, such environments should be uplifting and of quality; and when environments are not of this order, access to information on where to obtain support for tackling such matters should be available.
- 7.4 Entitlements should follow such principles.