

West Dunbartonshire Council
Report by the Strategic Lead – Regulatory
Planning Committee: 28th August 2019

Subject: Place and Design Panel

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To update the Committee of the work of the Place and Design Panel and to advise of the future work of the Panel.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1** It is recommended that the Committee:

- notes the progress and achievements of the place and design panel as described in this report;
- agrees that the Place and Design Panel should continue after the current funding period from 2020/21 onwards and notes that officers will submit this as a growth item for Members consideration in setting the 2020/21 budget;
- agrees the amendments to the Place and Design Panel Terms of Reference and Governance document contained in Appendix 1.

3. Background

- 3.1** Council agreed on 24th February 2017 that £75,000 per year for the next 3 years would be invested in a West Dunbartonshire Design Forum to help ensure future quality new build. The Place and Design Officer was appointed in September 2017 with the responsibility to set up and manage a Design Review Panel. The Terms of Reference and Governance arrangements of the Place and Design Panel was approved by Planning Committee on 20th December 2017 and the Panel convened in March 2018. It has been in operation for 17 months and is supported by more than 70 volunteers from Built Environment professions such as Architecture, Planning, Urban Design and Landscape Architecture and additional specialisms such as Heritage and Conservation, Inclusivity, Ecology and Police liaison. The Panel has a budget which is used to support the operations of the Panel and to assist with projects and policy documents.
- 3.2** The work of the Panel is also subject to annual external review by the Evaluation Board made up of senior members of the Scottish Government Planning and Architecture Division, Architecture and Design Scotland, the Improvement Service and Strategic Director from West Dunbartonshire Council – Director for Regeneration and Place and observed by Strategic Lead – Regulatory. The Evaluation Board met on 15th April 2019. An Elected Members Briefing was held on 23rd May 2019 where the work of the Panel and the Place and Design officer was presented.

4. Main Issues:

Panel Operations

- 4.1** In the time it has been operational the Panel has reviewed 19 projects in 16 sittings, varying in nature, stage of development and complexity. These have included affordable housing developments, projects on key regeneration sites, vacant sites requiring redevelopment and smaller sites which will contribute to the overall quality of the area as well as Council policy documents such as Development Briefs, Conservation Area Appraisal and the Council's Housing Standards. The Panel meets monthly and there are normally 4 Panellists, selected according to the relevance of their skillset to the project, who volunteer their professional services for around a half day where they can be reviewing up to 2 projects. The Panel takes the form of a workshop and the Place and Design officer works in conjunction with the presenters to ensure that the information brought before the panel generates conversation, debate and recommendations so that the full skills and experience of the Panellists are maximised.
- 4.2** The early engagement of developers and project sponsors with the Panel, before too many decisions have been taken, helps to maximise the opportunity for the whole range of the skills of the Panellists to shape a site or a policy document. The Panel is now playing an integral role in the planning process and is assisting other Council Services in achieving better quality development and places. The Place and Design Officer works closely with Planning and Council officers to identify projects/documents that would benefit from coming to the Panel, as detailed in the Terms of Reference and Governance document. It is not unusual for a project to come twice to the Panel, first at first inception and then at detailed development stage in order to achieve the standard of design and placemaking value expected of the particular development.
- 4.3** The ability to align skills and respond to the specifics of each proposal has proven to be a key strength of the Panel. The integration of the Panel process within the wider pre-application process has assisted in reducing pressure on the Planning Officers' time whereby the impartial and independent views of the Panellists supports and reinforces the Planning Officers views on where a development is falling short on a point of design and place-making principle. In this current climate, the Panel represents a cost-effective method of extending the Council's capacity regarding design and helping to assist in raising quality of development required to create better places. It allows access to a variety of skills and experience which is unavailable in-house which the Council would otherwise have to source externally at a significant cost.

Added Value

- 4.4** The majority of development proposals that have been presented to the Panel were affordable housing projects as the Council works towards meeting the Scottish Government's national target of providing 50,000 houses by March

2021. Projects on the strategically important sites of Queens Quay and Clydebank East, and those at the former school sites of Aitkenbar, Haldane and Highdykes, have been presented to the Panel. A number of housing association led affordable housing projects have also been presented to the Panel: Muir Road and Boquhanran Road and an Amenity housing project Creveul Court.

- 4.5** The Panel have encouraged the designers to give earlier and greater consideration to the context in which a development sits as a first principle, to integrate the surrounding landscape through the development and to seek innovative solutions when it comes to site layout, house design and approaches to Sustainable Urban Drainage Solutions (SUDS). Designers have been steered to devoting more time at the early part of the design process in connecting the road, street and pathway networks relating to a site, reflecting the Scottish Government's policy on Designing Streets. This advice has been endorsed by recent housing development which have received full planning consent, whereby the housing layout has adopted an approach that focuses on connecting the green infrastructure from out-with the red line boundary and throughout the site. High quality design and the specification of a high quality palette of materials, that reflect the local area, are also being achieved such as the recently approved affordable housing on Queens Quay, Haldane and Aitkenbar.
- 4.6** Other development that has benefitted from the added value of the Panel includes the marine fabrications building at Carless with recommendations on how the external finishes could be adapted to appear to reduce the overall impact of the scale of the building on the backdrop of the Kilpatrick Hills and the Grade A listed Erskine Bridge. The Panel have also reviewed Development Briefs for key sites before they are sold to private developers. Setting out the development expectations for prospective developers at an early stage can give certainty and increase the attraction of sites for developers by providing a much smoother planning process. The Panel played an important role in the proposed Conservation Area for Dumbarton Town Centre, strongly endorsed the principle of designating a conservation area and recommended several changes to the proposed boundary which have been included in the final version of the report by the Heritage Consultants.
- 4.7** The added value of the Panel process can now begin to be evidenced in that there has been a change in quality of the proposals that have come forward after the Panel process. Officers now feel empowered to ask and push for the best quality of development achievable on a site, which will lead to better places and greater economic wellbeing for the area. Early engagement with the Panel and Planning Officers has led to fewer changes required to designs on submission of a planning application which has led to a much quicker and smoother application process.

Wider Impact of the Place and Design Officer Role and the Panel

- 4.8** The roles of the Place and Design Panel and the Place and Design Officer have had a much wider impact than first anticipated. Close working relationships have emerged between the Panel and Planning officers, strengthening the integral role the Panel plays in the Planning process by supporting and assisting projects and highlighting the benefits that early engagement can bring to a development.
- 4.9** One of the driving factors behind the formation of the Place and Design Panel was to have some stewardship over the delivery of outstanding development for the Queens Quay site. The remit of the Place and Design Officer has developed to include coordinating partners involved in the development strategy for Queens Quay and working with other Council Services involved in built environment projects. The Place and Design Officer has led workshops to address the landscape and urban realm strategy for the wider Queens Quay site to ensure that each development takes cognisance of the other and quality of materials is consistent.
- 4.10** Closer working relationships have been fostered between Council services of Housing, Asset Management, Consultancy Services, Capital Projects, Education, Regeneration and Roads teams. A Planning/Health and Social Care Partnership working group is now taking place with a Health Improvement Lead contributing to the Place and Design Panel. The Panel process has facilitated health and well-being improvements being considered through development proposals which may not have happened if the Panel was not in existence. The Place and Design Officer and the Team Leader in Forward Planning presented to the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Public Health Inequalities Group, chaired by the Director of Public Health on our approach to Place. This has generated further discussions on the Council's approach of how place and health and well-being can function better together.
- 4.11** This greater collaboration has led to a heightened awareness within council teams and external project delivery partners of the benefits that early engagement with Planning can bring to a development and of what it takes to create places with longevity and resilience, where people can thrive and lessons can be learned from the past. This ethos aligns comfortably with the 'Place Principle' adopted by the Scottish Government and COSLA to take a more joined up - collaborative, place based approach to support a clear way for all services, assets and investments, maximising the impact of combined resources.

Projects Undertaken

- 4.12** The strategic investment in the Place and Design Panel has afforded the opportunity to undertake projects that can further assist with ensuring delivery of high quality development on sites such as Queens Quay and town centres.

- 4.13** Design Codes are being brought forward for the remaining development parcels on the Queens Quay site which will largely be for private housing. The codes will assist with balancing the ambitions to create an attractive, sustainable neighbourhood with the need to produce a commercially viable and deliverable development. They will provide clarity and certainty about the expectations around urban layout, architectural treatment, materials, details, identity, character and sustainability. A 3D model of Queens Quay has also been commissioned in order to assist with the visioning of projects as they come forward. In addition to the model being used for the Place and Design Panel, it will be available to assist planning and other council officers, developers, elected members and the community as a physical representation of the site as it develops.
- 4.14** The Planning Service has also agreed with the Professor in Urban Studies at Glasgow University to collaborate on a Collaborative PhD research project from September 2018 for 4 years. The PhD student Rob Richardson has been shadowing the Place and Design Officer for the past year, and has been gaining an understanding of the work of the Panel, the Place and Design Officer and how it integrates into the planning process. The primary aim of the research is to assess the planning system's effectiveness in delivering the Scottish Government's key priorities for place making. This is an unique opportunity for the Council; an independent and objective research document will be produced which will be used out-with West Dunbartonshire and beyond the initial life of the Panel, while encouraging future relationships between West Dunbartonshire and Glasgow University. The budget associated with the Panel has been used to part fund the Design Codes, the Collaborative PhD research project, charrette work and will be used to fund future work of the Place and Design Officer and Panel which is detailed in Section 4.21 below.
- 4.15** The work of the Panel has aroused the interest of other Councils with East Dunbartonshire and Perth and Kinross Councils observing the Panel and Edinburgh City Council shortly to attend. In April this year Mr Kevin Stewart; Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning visited West Dunbartonshire to hear about the inspiring work of the Panel and to visit the Queens Quay site. The Scottish Government 'Designing Places' Student Competition held its 10th Anniversary on the Queens Quay site which was the first 'Designing Places' competition to take place on a development site. The Place and Design Officer has also been invited to assist or speak at a number of national placemaking events so that others can hear about the innovative work of the Panel. Building on the interest from other Councils in how we have implemented the Panel into the Planning process an event is planned in partnership between the Council and the Improvement Service entitled; Interventions to Create Successful Places. We expect around 80 delegates to attend from the public and private sectors. The Place and Design Officer also wrote an article about the Panel for the Scottish Planner magazine where the focus was Planning for Good Design. The Planning and Building Standards Manager will speak at the annual Royal Town Planning Institute conference about the inspiring work being undertaken in West Dunbartonshire together with officers from Plymouth City Council and Ireland.

Evaluation Board Review

- 4.16** As indicated in Section 3.2 the work of the Panel is subject to annual external review by an Evaluation Board which was first held in April 2019. The formal review process is set up to evaluate the impact of the work undertaken by the Panel and the Place and Design Officer and offer advice and support for the development of the Panel. The Evaluation Board was presented with updated Governance arrangements, examples of development projects where value had been added, details of the wider work undertaken and the future work to be progressed in the coming year. The early reflections of the collaborative PhD research was also presented, with the Board noting that the work of the Panel and the findings of the research will be transferable and of value across the country.
- 4.17** The Evaluation Board was impressed by the maturity of the Panel and the speed at which it had become established, noting the large number of sittings that had been undertaken in a relatively short space of time. They commended the uniqueness of the format of the workshop Panel sessions, notably the work involved in retaining such a high number of panellists and the way in which each panel has a bespoke skills arrangement, recognising the direct link this had to the impact on design and place-making value on a project seen by the Panel.
- 4.18** The Board noted the parallels between the work of the Panel, the work of the Scottish Government (The Place Principle, Place Based Approach, Town Centre First) and the aims of the Public Health Reform Agenda. They offered advice on how to strengthen ties with Health and Well being colleagues and each member of the Board outlined their openness to offer complimentary support from their respective organisations.

Terms of Reference and Governance

- 4.19** The views of Panellists and presenters are sought after a Panel in order to reflect on the strengths of the review process and where it can be improved. Changes have been made to the governance procedures for the Panel in order to more accurately reflect the manner in which the Place and Design Panel is now run following the lessons learned in the first year. The key changes to the Panel Governance have included:
- the reduction in the number of Panellists required for a Panel sitting to convene;
 - changes to the information available at Pre-Panel stage with presenters steered to focus on scene setting; site analysis and context;
 - the removal of stringent timing during the review, the allowance of controlled dialogue between Panel and presenter and the details around the expectation for a concise presentation that supplements the Pre-Panel information; and

- clarification on the role of the Place and Design Officer. Removing the formality of having a 'Chair'. As Facilitator and Co-ordinator, the Place and Design Officer summarises the key themes raised at the Panel, noting the key areas of focus and ensuring the ambitions of the Council in achieving quality development are upheld, with involvement that spans all the Panel activities.

4.20 Experience has enabled the remit of the Panel to be more clearly specified within the Governance document. Activities that it was initially hoped the Panel might undertake are now within the remit of the Place & Design Officer, for example, coordinating partners involved in the development strategy for Queens Quay and working with other Council Services involved in built environment projects such as Housing, Asset Management, Education and Consultancy Services. The revised Terms of Reference and Governance document is contained in Appendix 1 with the summary of the changes in Appendix 2.

Future Work of the Place and Design Panel

- 4.21** The Panel will continue to meet on a monthly basis reviewing up to 2 projects in one session. The work programme includes reviewing canal side housing projects such as Stanford Street and Rosebery Place, former school sites and the proposals for housing on the site of the former Council offices at Garshake Road.
- 4.22** The Design Codes will be presented to the Panel, as will Policy documents such as Development Briefs for strategic sites and Supplementary Guidance associated with the Local Development Plan. The planning/design stewardship of Queens' Quay will continue by the Place and Design Officer as the site is progressed and new development is brought forward. It is proposed that the Design Codes will be presented to Planning Committee and taken forward for adoption as Planning Guidance in the coming year. Thereafter used by development partners and future developers on the site to ensure the ambitions for the site as a well-designed, sustainable, walkable neighbourhood are realised.
- 4.23** The Panel will continue to strengthen the collaborative working relationships between wider council services that have already developed. Working closely with the teams of Regeneration, Education and Asset Management and the Housing and Consultancy Services teams. There are opportunities to create efficiencies in workstreams by assisting the Housing team with developing briefs for potential future affordable housing sites at a much earlier stage.
- 4.24** Given the strong Public Health Reform agenda, there will be closer work relationships with the Health and Social Care Partnership. It is intended that criteria will be developed to be used at the Panel to ensure the impact on

health and well being is considered at the earliest opportunity on a development project.

- 4.25** The Panel also aims to review ways of engaging the community into the Panel discussions. The Place and Design Officer is intending to work with local schools, the Scottish Youth Parliament and the West Dunbartonshire Champions Board with a view to setting up a focus group or a mini Panel. Early discussions have taken place with leaders associated with the Champion Board.

5. People Implications

- 5.1** The Panel funding currently employs one Design Officer and if the funding is allocated to the Planning and Building Standards budget that post would become permanent.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1** The approach to having a Place and Design Panel together with the Place and Design Officer has budget funding until March 2020 at £75,000 per year. The Panel since its inception has had a significant impact on development proposals and has wider benefits as demonstrated in Section 4 above. It is proposed that the Place and Design Panel should continue after the current funding period from 2020/21 onwards and that officers will submit this as a growth item for Members consideration in setting the 2020/21 budget.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** The Panel offers a variety of skills and experience which is not often available in the Council and without the Panel the full development quality of proposals may not be realised. The Panel adds value to the planning process and to the work of other Council services.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 8.1** An equalities impact assessment was undertaken when the panel was set up and this has now been updated. The Panel by its nature has potentially positive effects to eliminate discrimination, promote equal opportunities and promote health and well being in all that it does. An Inclusive Design Officer is one of the volunteers to sit on the Panel.
- 8.2** The updated EIA has identified that actions should ensure it is as open and representative as possible in all of its undertakings and in its composition.

9. Consultation

- 9.1** The Strategic Lead Resources, Performance, Strategy and Equalities Officer and HSCP Health Improvement Lead were consulted on the content of this report.

10. Strategic Assessment

- 10.1** The Place and Design Panel is considered to strongly align with all the strategic priorities; in particular improving the strength of and growing the local economy and investing in regeneration which takes account of the environment, sustainability and health and well being.

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Appendices: Appendix 1 – Terms of Reference and Governance
Place and Design Panel
Appendix 2 – Place and Design Panel Summary of the
changes to the Terms of Reference Report to the
Evaluation Board

Background Papers: Equality Impact Assessment

Wards Affected: All