

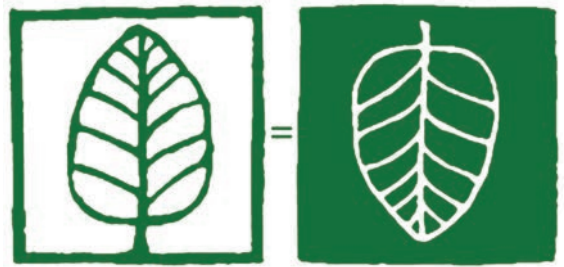


The Scottish Ecological Design Association Magazine

S p r i n g

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# The Sustainable Communities Issue



# SEDA

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The official magazine of the Scottish Ecological Design Association, Rose Cottage, Whitecastle, Biggar, Lanarkshire ML12 6LZ



## View from the Chair

by Paul Barham



### Why We Need Ecological Design.

"Many people react to arguments against growth-based economics with horror; getting the message across that the current system of endless consumption and economic growth will cease is not going to be easy." (Mandy Meikle)

Moving from the fringes of design to the mainstream we find ourselves immersed in the flow of greenwash and lobbying from commercial or governmental vested interests. Meanwhile the rise of new superpowers sees Europe increasingly marginalised, reducing our leverage in the world of ideas as we become

economic migrants or service suppliers in the energy, leisure and construction industries.

To engage in such projects requires compromise, and to do this with any integrity we must maintain an understanding of our role in the processes involved and how much or how little influence we have over them. At best this can lead to the honing of ideas in the face of financial and physical constraints; at worst it is dishing out lip service to the green agenda.

The alternative for the ecological designer might be to stand back from all this, but by standing aloof we risk isolation and limiting our engagement to new eco-elites - intellectually gated communities of interest - and to making prototypes and exemplars which become noted more for their own prestige rather than for any potential wider application.

These concerns apply not only to those whom we normally think of as designers - architects, engineers, product designers, gardeners - but also to politicians, academics, administrators, agronomists, economists and business entrepreneurs involved in decisions affecting how society is organised and how we leave our mark on the physical world.

What, then, should be our priorities as ecological designers?

The "non-modern" world was mentioned in the last SEDA Magazine:

there is much traditional knowledge which has in the past been overlooked or crudely exploited for short term gain. But its appeal is in part a reaction to corrupt science - and we also need to connect with honest science in a truly modern, enlightened and sceptical way. How else will we find out whether a painted timber window is less damaging to the planet than a plastic one? Or how the health hazards from off-gassing plastics compare with the aromatic dioxins and PCBs of a wood fire?

We need to challenge assumptions about risk. Why is business risk-averse when it comes to embracing ecologically based innovation, but quite the opposite when it comes to addressing risks which threaten the planet and everyone living on it?

We need to connect across cultural and political boundaries in a world of increasing inequalities. We need to address the increasing militarisation and mechanisation of society at the expense of the human and the humane: what has happened to the concepts of peace, fairness or equality?

And perhaps most importantly as designers we need to look at energy availability and the limitations to economic growth when we design for our disparate futures.

It seems to me that it's not a matter of seeing the elephant in the room - it's deciding which one to look at!

## Extraordinary General Meeting – 4th June 2011 at New Lanark

Report by Hamish Neilson

This meeting was the first General Meeting to be held since the conversion of SEDA to a Company Limited by Guarantee in February 2011. As the first Annual General Meeting of a company only needs to be held in the first 18 months after establishment, it was agreed to hold it in May or June 2012, and to hold an EGM in 2011.

Richard Atkins spoke about the Design Guides, all of which were funded by the Scottish Government and have covered Design and Detailing for Demountability, Air-tightness and

Toxic Chemical Reduction. He paid tribute to the work done by Howard Liddell, Sandy Halliday, and John Gilbert for their work on the last of these which advocates the adoption of the Precautionary Principle.

Objections from four trade bodies have been received. However, in consultation with the Scottish Government, these have been addressed either by further explanation to the interest groups, amendments to the text by the authors or in the redaction of text. The Guide has been replaced on SEDA's website and Richard recommended that SEDA issue

a press release confirming that this had been done (as requested by one of the trade organisations).

It was now judged that the Guide could be launched and SEDA should issue a Press Release. Chairman Robin Baker thanked Richard and the authors for dealing with this project. An event concentrating on the Precautionary Principle was being planned.

Robin Baker gave his report for the year, which started with the AGM at Drumossie near Inverness, and a visit to the site being prepared for Scotland's Housing Expo. SEDA also took part in the Big Tent Festival of



## SEDA Needs You: why join us

Members support the Association's aims to advance ecological design in Scotland and so benefit from its research and publishing around ecological design.

Benefits also include:

- Connection with the **main network of ecological designers in Scotland**
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- **Monthly e-bulletins**
- **Three printed magazines per year**
- **Searchable Members Directory** on website and option for enhanced listing profiling your business, product or service
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Stewardship at Falkland, Fife, with our own stand and display area in Scottish timber. The Housing Expo event took place in August and was counted a significant success.

During 2011 there was much discussion about future directions for SEDA, assisted by a questionnaire and a Discussion Day at Birnam. Conclusions focused on the scope for three Working Groups to focus on key issues. This was followed by a Passivhaus Seminar in Edinburgh and the annual Show and Tell event at Glasgow School of Art.

In the spring of 2011 there was a

Buildings Visit to the Burns Birthplace Museum at Alloway, and Dumfries House Bothy at Cumnock, Ayrshire. The EGM was forming part of the Sustainable Communities Conference at New Lanark.

Communications and information to members was enhanced by issues of the magazine, and Robin paid tribute to the work put in by Sarah Sutherland, Michael Davidson and Sydney Brogan. When Sydney left for new, southern horizons, she was succeeded as Administrator by Kirsty Ward. The new improved website was launched, and is complemented by the

much-appreciated e-Bulletin produced by Mary Kelly.

The successful establishment of SEDA as a new company resulted in five Directors, with four others being co-opted. Issues of concern such as the organisation's finances and membership numbers will need to be addressed in the year ahead. Robin Baker concluded his final report as Chairman and welcomed Paul Barham as the new Chairman.

*Hamish Neilson is a Landscape Architect and Treasurer of SEDA.*

# Introduction

by Andrew Guest

**T**he theme and contents of this magazine are based on SEDA's 2-day 'Sustainable Communities Conference' held at New Lanark in June 2011. It includes reports on or summaries of the presentations given by seven of the speakers, and a summary of the discussions held on each of the two days. It also contains three further articles specially written for this issue of the magazine on topics that relate closely to themes discussed at the conference.

For those who attended the conference the magazine should provide an opportunity to reflect on the ideas, passions and concerns expressed over those two days, from a fresh angle. For those who did not attend the conference the magazine presents a wide range of experience and ideas on the broader agenda of sustainable design and on some of its political context, and should provide a vista beyond a concept that is often confined to professional and political jargon. For both sets of readers it is hoped that this magazine will help you get to grips with some of the important decisions that politicians, designers, planners, individuals and communities need to take to fully realise the goal of sustainable living.

## Measuring sustainability

One objective of the conference was to ask whether it is possible to define or mea-

sure a 'sustainable community', particularly in a way that would help us create one. There is a sense in which you wish no-one had ever put these two words together: each of them individually is hard to define, let alone both together. The phrase seems to have been coined by government (whether in England through the Sustainable Communities Plan in 2003, or in Scotland with the 'Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative' of 2008) to claim the high ground in almost every aspect of planning, building, architecture and design – and sustainability.

The UK Government's definition of a sustainable community in 2003 was '... places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all.' The definition used by the Scottish Government's Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative is the more succinct but not dissimilar 'places designed and built to last, where a high quality of life can be achieved.'

## Place-making

But how useful is this phrase to the rest of us, particularly in the kind of over-centralised and conservative state that is the UK as described by Nicholas Falk, where skills and development practice fall well short of what he, as well as Howard Liddell, Kevin Murray and David Seel describe as being current in Europe. From the Scottish Government Sandy Robinson was only too ready to acknowledge the lack of aspiration

in Scotland, and the lack of skills and poor standards in how we plan and make places, and also the curse of short-termism (also acknowledged by other speakers and in the discussions).

## "Why do we talk so much but do so little?"

Malcolm Fraser and Howard Liddell demonstrated that there are skills in Scotland, but are frustrated that the infrastructure and the culture are not there to support them. 'We know what to do' says Liddell, speaking from over 40 years' experience of designing for sustainable living, but he rightly asks why everybody is not doing this by now, lamenting the continual, marginal focus on cutting carbon (even from the Scottish Government's Climate Challenge Fund) as opposed to the broader agenda of health, biodiversity and minimising pollution. Liddell's reference to 'Sustainability Value Maps' were the closest the conference came to being able to measure sustainable communities.

## The influence of Geddes

The ghost of Patrick Geddes floats through the contents of this magazine (hence the short refresher article on Geddes by Jim Johnson). Howard Liddell refreshes Geddes' dictum 'Folk, Work, Place' as 'Society, Economy, Ecology.' David Seel proposes that the Baugruppe process of 'building communities' can deliver a similarly tri-partite aim of 'Economic, Ecological and Environmental' sustainability. After a consultation process led by Kevin Murray, Kilmarnock concluded that it wanted to deliver a unified vision of 'People, Place and Economy'; again the same tri-partite mantra of Geddes.

One has every right to ask, in the same way as Howard Liddell does, why we talk about Geddes so much and act so little. Sometimes the talk is a substitute for action, but there remains a lot of sympathy for Geddes' ideas in Scottish culture; however acting on his message and following his example today is made difficult by the very corporate, bureaucratic, financially driven way we go about government and development, which actively militates against doing things the way Geddes did them and how we need to do them today to achieve what he advocates. Unless we change these structures and cultures we will be still talking longingly about Geddes in 100 years' time.



*Discussing the diverse needs of existing and future residents*  
Photo: Claire Hewitt



# Conference Programme

## Transition Towns

The importance of the Transition Town movement, however limited it may seem in the face of the behemoth of corporate development and centralised government, is that it is demonstrating a different way of organising communities and developing places – and a way that is not rocket science but often a re-creation of things that were once well-practised in small communities. Of the Transition Towns operating in Scotland, Sustaining Dunbar is one of the most ‘sorted’ and impressive in its achievements, which is why they were asked to make a contribution to the New Lanark conference and why this issue contains a second article that supplements that in the 20th Anniversary edition of the SEDA magazine. The Transition Towns also demonstrate a culture of ‘engagement’ that is completely different to the more programmed form of ‘engagement’ described by Kevin Murray, and which brings with it a much stronger commitment to change, and a willingness and ability to be part of that change.

But Dunbar’s acknowledgement that the main barrier to making those changes was the lack of support infrastructure, confirms that communities and local authorities and capital and bureaucracies and governments need to work together to produce communities that are going to become more sustainable. Government needs to connect its support for initiatives like Sustaining Dunbar from the Climate Challenge Fund (praised in his address by SEDA’s Patron Robin Harper and a fine contribution to government by the Green Party in Scotland) with the work being done by other departments such as its Planning and Architecture Divisions (whose 2011 publication ‘Designing Better Places’ is also saying that we need to come up with new, more creative processes of development).

## Engaging communities

From New Lanark to Freiburg and Dunbar to Hammarby, the message of the conference seems to be that the only reasonable way to talk about ‘sustainable communities’ is in particular places, with the people that live there. The conversation needs to be more diverse, not more simplified, and this magazine should be a contribution to that.

**This magazine has been edited by Jim Johnson and Andrew Guest, and put together by Sam Foster.**



## SEDA Sustainable Communities Conference 3-4 June 2011

### Programme of talks and workshops

#### Friday 3 June

Talk 1. Historical overview – Utopia and New Lanark’s place within it. Lorna Davidson, Director of New Lanark Trust and Secretary of Utopian Studies Society (Europe)

Talk 2. Making urban areas more sustainable: alternatives to planned approaches. Dr Nicholas Falk, Founder Director URBED.

Talk 3. Planned initiatives – the Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative. Sandy Robinson, Principal Architect, Architecture and Place Division, the Scottish Government.

Talk 4. Planned initiatives – the proposals for Whitecross. Malcolm Fraser, Malcolm Fraser Architects.

Talk 5. Bottom-up/community initiatives overview. Robin Harper, Patron of SEDA, formerly Green Party MSP for Lothians

Workshop A. Getting started/making things happen: the effects of different/changing policy frameworks, Karen Anderson, Chair Architecture + Design Scotland.

Workshop B. The role of design/buildings and CO2 emissions in defining sustainability, Malcolm Fraser.

Workshop feedback and plenary session.

#### Saturday 4 June

Talk 1. Development and sustainable management of New Lanark: making it work. Lorna Davidson, Director of New Lanark Trust and Secretary of Utopian Studies Society (Europe)

Talk 2. Collaborative working – examples in the UK and Europe. Howard Liddell, Director Gaia Architects, founding partner Gaia Planning.

Talk 3. Collaborative working – existing communities guiding and creating change creatively. Professor Kevin Murray, Chair of the Academy of Urbanism, Principal Kevin Murray Associates.

Talk 4. Communities doing it for themselves: Sustaining Dunbar. Sue Guy  
Workshops A and B – topics as Friday but chaired by Howard Liddell and Sue Guy  
Workshop feedback, plenary session and conclusion.



SEDA members learn more about New Lanark  
Photo: Wendy Hebard





# New Lanark: A Sustainable Community

Presentation by Lorna Davidson (review by Jim Johnson)

**N**ew Lanark sits deep in the valley of the River Clyde, just outside Lanark. It was founded in 1786 by David Dale and Richard Arkwright who built cotton mills and housing for the mill workers, taking advantage of the water power provided by the river.

By 1798, when Robert Owen was appointed manager, the village was already a thriving concern, forming the largest collection of cotton mills in Scotland. Between 1800 and 1824 Owen expanded the work of the mills and introduced a series of radical social reforms which greatly improved living and working conditions and also the efficiency of the workforce. New Lanark was a showpiece of the industrial revolution, and came to epitomise Owen's Utopian socialism

In Owen's time some 2,500 people lived at New Lanark, many having come from the poorhouses of Glasgow and Edinburgh. Owen paid particular attention to the needs of the 500 or so children living in the village and working at the mills, and opened the first infants' school in Britain in 1816.

New Lanark became celebrated throughout Europe, with many leading statesmen and reformers visiting the mills. They were astonished to find a clean, healthy industrial environment with a content, vibrant workforce and a prosperous business venture. Owen's philosophy was contrary to contemporary thinking, but he was able to demonstrate that it was not necessary for an industrial enterprise to treat its workers badly to be profitable. He was able to show

visitors the village's excellent housing and amenities, and the accounts showing the profitability of the mills.

Owen was a tireless proselytiser for his beliefs. Addressing the inhabitants of New Lanark on New Year's Day, 1816 Owen said: "I know that society may be formed so as to exist without crime, without poverty, with health greatly improved, with little, if any misery, and with intelligence and happiness increased a hundredfold; and no obstacle whatsoever intervenes at this moment except ignorance to prevent such a state of society from becoming universal."

Owen's proposals for 'socialist communities' were widely publicised and discussed. In 1825, such an experimental community was attempted under the direction of one of Owen's disciples, and in the next year Owen himself began another at New Harmony, Indiana, U.S. However after a trial of about two years both had failed completely.

## Recent History

The New Lanark mills depended upon water power. A dam was constructed and water travelled through a tunnel, on through the open mill lade to power a number of water wheels in each mill building. It was not until 1929 that the last waterwheel was replaced by a water turbine. Water power is still used in New Lanark; the water turbine in Mill Number Three now provides electricity for the tourist areas of the village, with any surplus sold back to the grid. (see article in SEDA magazine no. 3, May 2008, p8)

In 1825, control of New Lanark passed to the Walker family. The Walkers managed the village until 1881, when it was sold to Birkmyre and Sommerville. They and their

successor companies remained in control until the mills finally closed in 1968. The closing of the mills was a huge blow to the local economy and people started to move away from the village, and the buildings began to deteriorate. In 1963 the New Lanark Association (NLA) had been formed as a housing association and commenced the restoration of the housing in Caithness Row and Nursery Buildings. In 1970 the mills, other industrial buildings and the houses used by Dale and Owen were sold to Metal Extractions Limited, a scrap metal company.

In 1974 the New Lanark Conservation Trust (NLCT) was founded to prevent further damage or the demolition of the village. A key role was played by the Provost of Lanark, Harry Smith, who convinced the Council to save all the buildings in the village from demolition. Jim Arnold was appointed Director of the Trust, and remained in post for 35 years until he retired in 2010. Historic Scotland declared New Lanark an outstanding Conservation Area in 1976 with all the buildings 'A' listed.

A compulsory purchase order was used in 1983 to recover the mills and other badly neglected buildings from Metal Extractions. They are now controlled by the NLCT. By 2005 most of the buildings had been restored and the village has become a major tourist attraction. It was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2001, one of five in Scotland, and is an Anchor Point of ERIH - The European Route of Industrial Heritage.

## New Lanark in the new Millennium

Of the residential buildings, only Mantilla Row and Double Row have not been restored. Some of the restoration work was undertaken by the NLA and the NLCT. Braxfield Row and most of Long Row were restored by private individuals who bought the houses as derelict shells and restored them. The mills, the hotel and most of the non-residential buildings in the village are owned and operated by the NLCT which is registered as a social enterprise. NLCT was set up to restore the buildings and to create a sustainable community. Its strategic aims are:

1. Keep the residential community – the current population is some 125, made up of the 20 private owners and 45 families renting from the Trust.
2. Develop the income from tourism and hospitality (e.g. the visitor centre and the hotel)
3. Renting some commercial property (e.g.

Watercolour of New Lanark, J. Winning, 1818

(Reproduced with kind permission of New Lanark Trust)



office spaces in some buildings, the retail woollen mill)

4. The hydro scheme produces electricity for the Trust's buildings, any surplus being exported to the grid. Buildings are also heated by a heat pump in the mill lade.

The NLCT is a charity, with three trading companies – New Lanark Trading, New Lanark Hotels and New Lanark Homes – as wholly owned commercial subsidiaries. Much of the restoration work has now been completed at a capital cost estimated at some £25m, substantially funded by Historic Scotland and other public agencies. The Trust has an annual grant of £150,000 for maintenance with an additional revenue grant of £20,000 for its education work. All other running costs are the responsibility of the Trust.

It was emphasised that New Lanark is not a museum – it is a living and working community. Though of huge historical value, it must balance its accounts like any other social enterprise. The Trust's website explains that the uncertainties and limited time-scale of any revenue grants force the Trust to take an "uncompromisingly commercial approach" to all its operations. 250 people work on the site, 165 of them for the Trust.

The economic development of the village has gone hand-in-hand with the restoration work. The progression is as follows:  
 1990 - Visitor centre opened.  
 1994 - 60 bed youth hostel  
 1998 - 38 bed hotel and self-catering cottages  
 2001 - Conference suite added to hotel  
 2004 - Leisure suite formed in hotel  
 One of the mills still spins organic wool, which is sold online.

*Lorna Davidson is Director at New Lanark.*



Hotel & Waterhouse, New Lanark

**A personal view, by Jim Johnson**

To give some (recent) historical perspective on New Lanark it may help to recount my own memories and reactions to the place. I must have first visited it in the late 1960s after I came to live in Scotland. New Lanark must then have been at its lowest point; I remember it as very run down, the buildings dilapidated and several mill buildings and their surroundings used as a gigantic scrap yard. It was hard to believe anyone lived there, but I soon became aware that a small but determined band of locals had a vision of a better future, one which valued the village's historical importance and that its beautiful setting alongside the Clyde deserved.

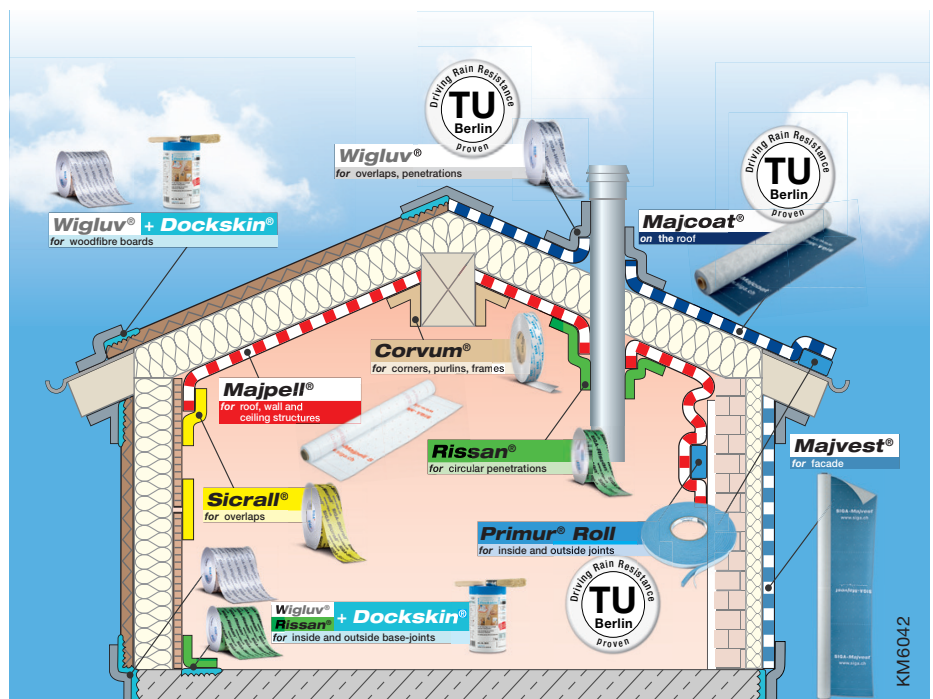
I must have kept in touch with developments and invited Jim Arnold and others to speak at various seminars and courses I organised at Strathclyde University. One of my colleagues at the university at that time was John Hume, the pioneer of Scottish industrial archaeology and later to become Chief Inspector at Historic Scotland. John left me in no doubt about the huge histori-

cal importance of New Lanark.

Revisiting the village for the SEDA conference after a long gap (maybe 20 years) I was of course struck by the transformed appearance – restored buildings put back into new uses with the minimum of fuss and alteration. The river cleaned and providing power (as it always had done). Lots of people around though the majority probably visitors – and what better place to visit at this time when we need to be reminded of Owen's ideals, which are as alien to the ethics of our prevailing globalised corporate economy as they were to his own contemporaries.

I was delighted to hear Lorna Davidson's account of the organisation that lies behind this success story, which could serve as an exemplar for other aspirant sustainable communities. I know enough about its history to know that all could have gone wrong at various points, and that hard (and probably unpopular at the time) decisions had to be made to keep it on track. If longevity is a major criterion for sustainability then after 225 years New Lanark must qualify.

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For more information contact SIGA: Jason Byrne, [jbyrne@sigach](mailto:jbyrne@sigach)



# Making Urban Areas More Sustainable

Presentation by Dr. Nicholas Falk (Review by Jim Johnson)

**N**icholas Falk has been a pioneer in the regeneration of decaying urban areas.

With URBED he has been responsible for a range of recent research, consultancies and publications. In his presentation he set out clearly the opportunities and problems in developing sustainable communities in the UK, contrasting this with European experience, and drawing upon his own experience and publications, including:

- 'Beyond Eco-towns; applying the lessons from Europe' a report by PRP, URBED and Design for Homes, published by PRP Architects, 2008
- 'Regeneration in European Cities' a report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- 'Sustainable Urban Neighbourhood; Building the 21st Century Home' by David Rudlin and Nicholas Falk, Architectural Press/Elsevier, 1999
- 'Masterplanning and infrastructure in new communities in Europe' in 'Urban design and the Real Estate Development Process' Wiley 2010
- Recent research and consultancy projects in Cambridgeshire, Brighton, Yeovil and elsewhere in the UK.

## Challenges

Falk listed the challenges we face at the present -

- Economic change and future shock – things will never go back to 'normal'.
- Global interdependence (e.g. the rising level of carbon dioxide emissions from the

developing Asian countries)

- Ethnic conflict leading to uncertainty about fuel and other raw material supplies.
- Social polarisation
- Falling rate of new building due to the recession – housing completions at their lowest for many years

We also face new challenges in the future:

- The costs of mitigating the effects of climate change by lowering our consumption of energy, managing water better and reducing waste.
- Global population growth and its strain on food and other natural resources
- Institutional collapse as corporate globalisation overpowers national governments
- We are all living longer, leading to pressures on the UK's health service and ageing housing stock

Speaking further from his personal experience, Falk noted that innovation is especially hard in the UK, partly due to over-centralised government and also because of the innate conservatism of both government and the building industry. But he commented that building communities was even harder.

## S.U.N.

He went on to discuss the work which URBED has done under the rubric of SUN (Sustainable Urban Neighbourhood). A SUN attempts to recapture the positive attributes of traditional city structure – high densities, mixed uses, permeability, traditional urban blocks, good public trans-

port, walkability, environmental sustainability and a sense of community. URBED have put these principles to use in planning proposals for the New England quarter of Brighton, in Manchester (where URBED has a sister organisation) and in several other English towns.

The SUN approach has been extended in a project for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) called SUNN (Sustainable Urban Neighbourhood Network). This is intended as a showcase for innovative new communities of a modest size, and will enable JRF to contribute to new community building and influence national policy. By 'looking and learning' together SUNN hopes to build the capacity to build better and faster, and to break down some of the barriers that beset house-building in the UK, in particular its financial shortcomings.

In another study, 'Beyond Eco-towns', URBED have tried to apply lessons from Europe (where, as both Nicholas Falk and Howard Liddell demonstrated, practice is far ahead of the UK). Europe offers good examples of sustainable developments, not least in their regional planning such as Vinex in Holland where a series of eco growth neighbourhoods have been coordinated over the large area bounded by Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Den Haag and Utrecht. The retained central rural area is labelled the 'Green Heart'.

The 8 selected study areas in 'Beyond Eco-towns' included districts of Dublin, Amersfoort in Holland, Hammarby in Stockholm, and 3 in German towns (including Freiburg). The study's rather depressing overall conclusion was that authorities in Europe build better and larger homes at a much faster rate than in the UK. Most developments were of higher densities than typically found in the UK: usually four- to five-storey apartment blocks with balconies, often brightly coloured, and set in high quality well maintained landscapes – a far cry from the average developer's housing estate in the UK.

Funding arrangements in Europe are different too. The construction of the Stockholm Metro is an example of funding infrastructure improvements through 'smart growth' – the increase in the value of land serviced by the metro. He also stressed the importance of engaging affected communities in the design and planning process. This is particularly important when trying to improve the conditions for disadvantaged communities such as Ekostad in



Vauban, Freiburg, Germany  
Photo: www.gogakuru.com



Malmo or areas of Rotterdam. A slide from the latter showed a pile of boxes, a kind of 'ladder of opportunity' rising from indifference to one's surroundings, through restoring relationships with neighbours, to jointly organising small units such as a street to the goal of self-control. In the Riesenfeld area of Freiburg the community is involved in managing the public realm, resulting in well designed and maintained green spaces between the apartment block, with trimmed hedges, children's play grounds (and not a car in sight).

European eco-cities also demonstrate serious efforts to reduce energy consumption. Apart from the higher standards of insulation normal in Europe, areas in Freiburg have CHP, district heating, and pv or solar panels on the roofs of the housing blocks. The quality of building is higher too, and faster. Falk compared Hammarby in Stockholm where 6700 dwellings were completed in the period 1999-2008, with Greenwich Millennium Village in London, where only 1100 were completed in the same period. It was interesting to note that

the Stockholm apartment blocks were a humane 4 storeys whereas the Millennium Village went up to 8 storeys plus the inevitable developers' 'penthouses' on top. In Freiburg parents must be able to communicate from their apartments with their children at ground level – hence the 4 storeys maximum.

#### Climate-proofing

'Climate proofing' also needs extra investment in the UK for measures like maximising insulation, CHP, developing waste re-utilisation and SUDS.

In conclusion, Falk listed some opportunities which he felt could be usefully adopted in Scotland.

- Concordats or development agreements for strategic plans – public authorities entering into partnerships with developers but controlling the progress and end product (the normal European practice).
- Development partnerships for new communities (already the case for some of the SSCI projects?)
- Community banks and green infrastruc-

ture bonds – in an effort to improve on the short-termism of private housing developers in the UK who borrow short so have to ensure quick sales.

- Quality charters for sustainable growth; for example Freiburg which is the 'city of short distances'
- Learning from examples such as the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy. This was produced by 6 local authorities together with other public bodies such as Natural England, who were faced with a regional population growth of 130,000 in the next 20 years.

(Further sources of information:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/mar/23/freiburg.germany.green-est.city>

[http://www.cambridgeshirehorizons.co.uk/documents/publications/horizons/green\\_infrastructure\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.cambridgeshirehorizons.co.uk/documents/publications/horizons/green_infrastructure_strategy.pdf)

**Dr. Nicholas Falk is the founder director of URBED (Urban and Economic Development).**



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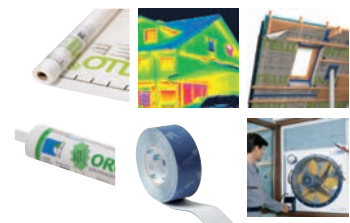
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pro clima The intelligent choice

# Scottish Sustainable Communities: the view from the Government

Presentations by Sandy Robinson and Malcolm Fraser (Review by Andrew Guest)

**A**ttempting to be more hands on than through the issuing of Planning Advice Notes, and more directly involved than through its support for the work of Architecture and Design Scotland, the Architecture and Place Division of the Scottish Government launched in 2008 the Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative (SSCI).

This was to be part of a more 'show and tell' approach to influencing the shape of development in Scotland. Two presentations gave the conference slightly different angles on this programme. First, Sandy Robinson, Principal Architect in the Architecture and Place Division of the Scottish Government, gave a general introduction and update to the SSCI and then Malcolm Fraser talked about Malcolm Fraser Architects' winning design for Whitecross, one of the 11 SSCI projects selected by the Government. Many have asked whether the SSCI is just another way of saying 'how are we going to build more new towns?' Judge for yourself.

## The SSCI

Taking the competitive bid as its model (viz. Garden Festival, Capital of Culture), in June 2008 the Government invited proposals from local authorities, landowners and

the development industry 'which demonstrated ambition in addressing a number of principles, leading to the design and delivery of sustainable communities, bringing about real change.' The initiative was described as being about 'creating places which go beyond single tenure housing estates, which are ambitious and inspiring. It is also about raising standards and developing skills in design, architecture and sustainable construction. It is about taking a long-term view and ultimately it is concerned with outcomes and delivering new development.'

68 submissions were received, of which 54 represented development on greenfield land, the majority involving expansion of existing settlements, with only five stand-alone new settlements. A proportion represented the creation of new small communities in the countryside, albeit often related to reuse of existing buildings. In assessing submissions, 5 key questions were asked –

1. How does this proposal contribute to meeting identified regional or local housing requirements, taking account of the economic opportunity of the area?
2. What makes this a sustainable location?
3. How does the form and layout of the development and building design contribute to the highest standards of quality and sustainability?
4. How does the proposal address long-term sustainability?
5. How will this proposal be delivered?

Out of the 68 submissions 11 projects were selected as 'demonstration projects'

and given the recognition of 'working towards 'Creating a Scottish Sustainable Community''. Each was promised a package of targeted support from Government, 'intended to help move the demonstration projects towards delivery' (with delivery periods ranging between 10 and 30 years) and also intended to spread the SSCI practice more widely throughout Scotland. In the case of 3 SSCI projects at an early stage of development (Ladyfield, Lochgelly and Grandhome) in 2010 the Government promoted and helped fund design charrettes that took place in each of those places. (See reference to Grandhome in the report on Kevin Murray's presentation to the conference elsewhere in this magazine.)

Charrettes are intensive workshops that take place over a period of 5-8 days and aim to involve a wide range of appropriate stakeholders in delving into the issues and character of a place and working openly through to a well-visualised solution or set of proposals. They were delivered by Andres Duany and the New Urbanist practice of DPZ, who use charrettes widely as part of their aim to re-create the 'universal and time-tested principles of traditional planning and design that created the best-loved and most enduring places in the world.' DPZ have close relationships to the Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment. The importation of good practice from America to guide the development of Scottish towns drew much comment at the time, even to the extent of questions being asked in Parliament about the extent to which the



Overall Masterplan, Whitecross SSCI, (competition site marked blue)  
Ironsides Farrar, Environmental Consultants



Competition Masterplan, Whitecross SSCI,  
Malcolm Fraser Architects



Government paid for these charrettes, and whether appropriate procurement policies were correctly followed. The Government are currently recruiting UK practices to run a new series of charrettes in other towns in Scotland.

**Whitecross Design Ideas Competition**

The Whitecross SSCI project was a proposal by Morston Assets to redevelop the former Manuel brick works, revitalise an existing village and provide up to 1,500 homes, business and industry, shops, a primary school and other community facilities, open space, and canal-related leisure and tourism facilities. The site is some 2.5km outside Linlithgow. Cadell2 drew up a masterplan with clear intentions in relation to energy efficiency and generation, with an integrated, ecological approach to design and masterplanning, and a commitment to sustainable and active travel options. The SSCI team’s assessment concluded that ‘The project at Whitecross has strong potential as an exemplar of a self-sustaining new community. The scale of the proposal enables the critical mass required to regenerate the entire Manuel Works site, enhance the surrounding environment and provide necessary facilities to support an integrated mixed-use settlement.’

Subsequent to this, the developer employed the RIAS to run a design competition for part of the site. The brief was to produce layout proposals for the competition area, provide detailed design proposals for a minimum of 1 house type, with detailed information on cost and financial viability. A minimum requirement for submissions was achievement of Sullivan Report proposals for the 2013 Building Standards (an improvement in CO2 emissions of 60% on 2007 standards). The aspirations were expressed as:

- Placemaking - developing a place-led masterplan;
- Architecture - exploring a ‘new vernacular’ for Scotland;
- Sustainable low-carbon house type design - linked to Building Standards sustainability labelling standards;
- Financial viability - realisable designs that were costed and tested by industry.

41 submissions were received, and 5 shortlisted, with the proposal by Malcolm Fraser Architects being pronounced the winner in October 2010.

Starting his presentation (as he often does) with a photograph of Crail, Malcolm Fraser is happy to note that people want to live in this kind of place, but goes on quickly to say that this does not mean that the right thing to do is to try and build something today that looks like Crail (as the New Urbanists tend to try and do). Places like Crail were a practical response to life then, but a practical response to life today means providing things like a space for a barbeque, a sunny garden and a short distance to the bus-stop. Fraser has devoted much of his working life not only to building in what he calls the true eco-towns, i.e. existing settlements, but also to trying to create communities around those modern day needs. It is to Fraser’s credit that he has been able to pursue many of his ideals working with private sector house-builders, normally the bogeymen of community-making or good design (as acknowledged in the aims of the SSCI) – in developments such as Maryfield, Bo’ness (with Stewart Milne Homes) and Princess Gate, Fairmilehead, Edinburgh (for Bryant Homes).

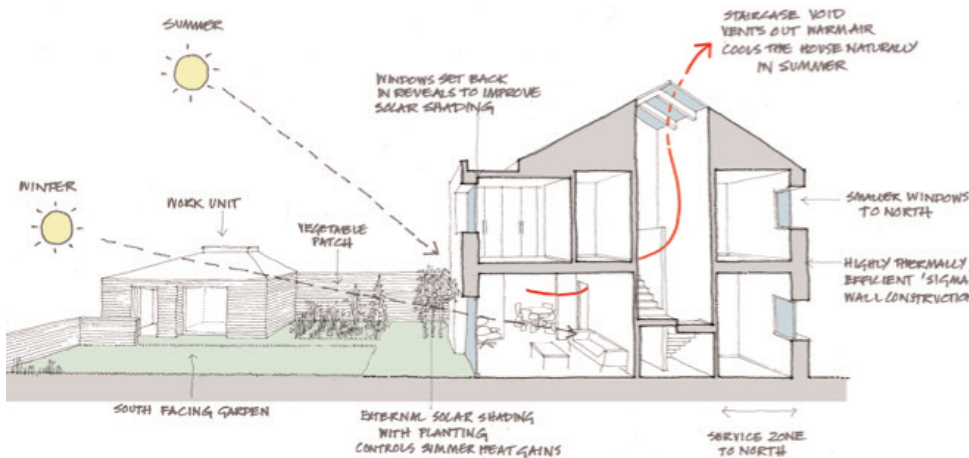
Fraser’s approach to sustainability in such schemes is simple – respect the integrity of existing built environment, pay regard to the urban utility and focus on

simple passive measures in terms of the detail. In the layout of Whitecross this is expressed in three simple patterns. Homes open onto south-facing gardens, the site is structured around green corridors of planting and open ‘squares’ and parking is kept to the edge or organised in small courts, opening up visual routes to the woods and the burn that border the site. Fraser is as critical of the Merton rule for its propensity to encourage unproductive environmental ‘gob-ons’ as he is of the house-builders’ passion for architectural ‘gob-ons’. (The Merton rule being the requirement in England since 2003 that any new residential development of more than 10 units or any commercial building over 1000 square metres must reduce its carbon dioxide emissions by a certain percentage through the use of on-site renewables. This has now been largely superseded by the Code for Sustainable Homes.) Fraser’s houses at Whitecross exhibit the eco-minimalist principles of good orientation, good insulation and good draught proofing.

Sandy Robinson concluded his presentation with the following statements –

- We need to deliver places that understand our behaviour and support it positively;
- We require places that are human in terms of scale and resource;
- Collaborative, design-led approaches can deliver great places that are positive human habitats.

Although expressed somewhat obtusely, this seems to be a fairly straightforward call for places geared around human needs (not too dissimilar to Malcolm Fraser’s vision of a modern version of Crail?) but delegates had some doubt as to whether ‘collaborative design-led approaches’ (a plug for charrettes?) were the best way of delivering sustainable communities, and of government supporting these aims.



House Section, Whitecross SSCI, Malcolm Fraser Architects

*(Substantial documentation on the SSCI projects, reports on the 2010 charrette series and further information on the framework contracts for the new series of charrettes can be found on the Scottish Government’s website.)*

**Sandy Robinson is Principal Architect in the Architecture and Place Division of the Scottish Government.**

**Malcolm Fraser is a Director of Malcolm Fraser Architects.**

# Collaborative Working: Examples of sustainable development

Presentation by Professor Howard Liddell (Review by Jim Johnson)

**H**oward Liddell's paper was a synoptic but angry view of sustainable design based on his many years of hard-fought experience.

Howard is angry because, as he concluded: *"We know all we need to know – pilot projects have been going on for years. But after 40 years of working in sustainable development I still don't see the main-streaming happening."*

His emphasis was on what should be, by now, the ordinary, routine and everyday sustainable design of towns and housing and not the special cases – the eco- or commitment communities such as CAT and Findhorn. So what are the parameters of a sustainable community and how can we measure them? He ran through a range of examples of completed sustainable developments from northern Europe including Amersfoort in Holland, Braamswich in Hamburg, Hedebygade in Copenhagen, Hammarby in Stockholm, Viikki in Helsinki and Bo-01 a harbour re-development in Malmo.

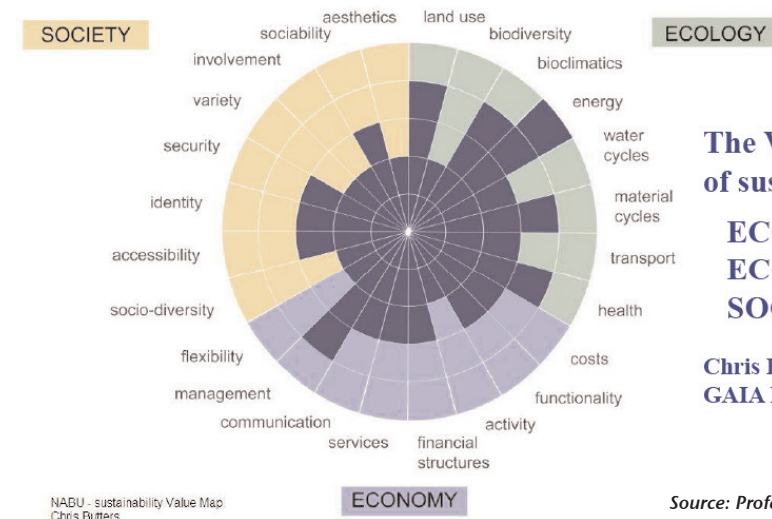
## Malmo

The goals of Bo01 were to create a leading example of a densely populated, environmentally sound neighbourhood, with ecological sustainability as a bonus, providing 100% locally renewable energy sources that serve the area, and an environmentally sound transport system. Diversity should be one characteristic of the area, without displaying a specifically "ecological look".

In addition to the accepted sustainability criteria such as minimising energy consumption, harnessing solar energy, the use of local renewable power sources and accessible public transport, many of the European examples demonstrated a wider sustainability agenda – minimising pollution, husbanding of natural resources, health, biodiversity and local food production.

## Eco-profiling systems

He then focussed on the need for a measuring tool by which to assess their success. A range of eco-profiling systems (sometimes referred to as Sustainability Value maps) were developed from the 1990s onwards, but many of the earlier tools failed to set a broad and holistic range of criteria. Howard attacked the current obsession with "carbon counting" which he called a distraction, pointing out that such issues as pollution, natural resource depletion, health, bio-diversity, and potential for



The Value Map of sustainability

ECOLOGY  
ECONOMY  
SOCIETY

Chris Butters  
GAIA International

Source: Professor Howard Liddell

food production were equally important to our survival. He instance the Viikki urban ecology project in Helsinki as a step towards a more holistic approach as it included qualitative dimensions of sustainability in its evaluation methods.

Going back in time to Patrick Geddes Howard suggested that Geddes' "place, work, folk" was a good starting point; redefined in contemporary terms as ecology, economy and society. This was the goal that all sustainable architecture and city planning should fulfil.

This formed the basis for Chris Butters' "Value Map of Sustainable Development",

**"We know all we need to know ... after 40 years of working in sustainable development I still don't see the main-streaming happening."**

devised for the Norwegian Architects for Sustainable Development group (NABU) The map has eight parameters for each segment, ie. 24 in all, which can be varied if necessary to suit the particular requirements of each project. The strength of Butter's map is that it uses qualitative as well as quantitative indicators. Using the map Howard compared a 1970s scheme of Norwegian cluster housing which scored well in all aspects other than energy conservation (having been built to the then prevailing standards). This could be easily remedied by retro-fitting.. This was contrasted with an urban slum in Capetown, which had a very low carbon footprint – families in one room, no cars, no services – but was not sustainable in any wider sense.

## Low Carbon Africa

Howard demonstrated a more sustainable yet still very low carbon version of African construction with his recent work for the charity Children of Songea. The charity works in Tanzania to provide schooling and skills training for HIV/AIDS orphans, and Howard visited it in 2009 to plan and erect classrooms and workshops, using simple locally available materials, concrete, metal sheeting, timber, put together by a low waged but labour intensive workforce (including women carrying babies!).

He then described further schemes that scored highly on the Value Map. The Vauban and Loretto districts of Freiburg and Tübingen respectively were cited as excellent examples of "small parcelled mixed use". Each area contained cafes, shops, and small businesses integrated with the housing. Noticeable was the relatively high densities achieved: four- and five-storey flats, but set in well designed and maintained communal greenspace. (See also David Seel's article on Baugruppe which gives more details of Vauban, p14.)

In contrast Howard showed Gaia Architects' 21-year rehabilitation programme for the Fairfield area of Perth. Nine phases of work with close community involvement have transformed a hard-to-let area, initially by refurbishment and later with new build. The refurbishment started with relatively minor eco improvements - natural ventilation, insulation, non-toxic timber treatment – but as the architects and clients mutual confidence grew more radical work was carried out – passive solar, breathing walls. The new build of low-allergy houses also incorporated heat recovery and enhanced air-tightness standards.

## Key principles

Turning to individual buildings, Howard suggested the key principles for sustainabil-





Creative internal rainwater use. Prisma, Nuremburg  
Architect: Joachim Eble, Photo: Janice Foster

and rainwater storage and re-use. The Solarbau Group monitoring of this and two parallel projects claims that 1% added to the fees reduced energy consumption by 50%.

**Regional planning**

Howard then returned to Patrick Geddes who introduced the concept of regional planning 100 years ago – now apparently ignored or forgotten in the UK but not in Europe. Emscher Park in the Ruhr district is an example from Germany. Once one of the most polluted and environmentally devastated regions of the world, the Ems river valley to the north of the Ruhr has been reborn. Starting with the 1989

"International Building Exhibition (IBA) at Emscher Park", 800 sq.km. of largely derelict post-industrial wasteland along the river Ems were transformed over a 10 year period into a regional park linking 17 existing towns by infrastructural landscaping and recreation space with iconic buildings to renew each town's identity and kick-start opportunities for economic development. Many of the industrial buildings have been retained and converted to cultural uses (sometimes temporary), others form spectacular ruins taken over by vegetation. The redevelopment has given the region a greener image, created a more cohesive regional community whilst maintaining each town's identity. One participant in the project summed up Emscher Park as; "17 cities, three rivers, one current, many partici-

*pants, freedom for the raindrop, nature devours the city, the coal goes, the sun comes, change through culture."*

From Emscher, Howard turned to Joachim Eble's masterplan for a new eco-city in Tainan County, Taiwan. This exemplified Howard's dictum "Sustainable development masterplanning is not conventional masterplanning sprinkled with green dust – it starts from a fundamentally different set of precepts."

Each block of the development has a "green lung" oriented from south west to north east which helps to freshen the interior of the developments through induced but controlled natural ventilation on a large scale

Howard concluded with his plea to the professions and the government: "No more eco-houses, eco-villages or eco-towns. an eco-world please. We know all we need to know – these pilot projects have been going on for decades. Can we mainstream the whole agenda now and urgently?"

Further sources of information:

- <http://sustainablecities.dk/en/city-projects/cases/emscher-park-from-dereliction-to-scenic-landscapes>
- <http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/partners/emscher.html>
- <http://brozed.wordpress.com/project-examples/boo1-malmo/>

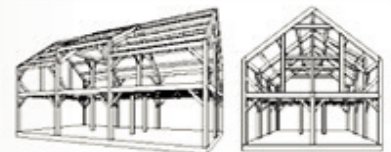
**Howard Liddell is a founder member of SEDA and Principal of Gaia Architects, Edinburgh.**

ity are:

1. **Supporting communities**
2. **Creating healthy environments**
3. **Minimising pollution**
4. **Enhancing bio-diversity**
5. **Effective use of resources**
6. **Managing the process**

These he demonstrated in the Prisma mixed use city block in Nuremburg by Joachim Eble. A vertical mix of shops, cafes, offices, apartments and water gardens are focussed around a spectacular glazed "winter garden" which incorporates many of the sustainable features such as climate control

## Lindisfarne Timber Frame Limited



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Pictured: Garden House at Humehall in the Scottish Borders (Icosis Architects) recipient of Scottish Borders Council's Sustainable Design Award.



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# Baugruppe: how to build shared places to live the way you want (or at least how they do it in Germany)

by David Seel

Often seen in the UK as the domain of 'alternative groups', joint self-build projects have become a mainstream way to develop residential buildings in many areas of Germany in the last 10 years, using the 'Baugruppe' model.

This has produced a large body of non-standard residential buildings, often forming a key part of major sustainable regeneration projects, supported by local authorities, at least in part due to their perceived ability to assist in 'growing a community' at the same time as constructing the buildings. Similar projects are now emerging in other countries, such as the Homerus Quarter in Almere in the Netherlands, but as yet there is no clear equivalent in the UK. In times when citizens are being encouraged to live more ecologically and to get involved in delivering services for themselves, such a model appears to be worth considering.

## What makes a Baugruppe?

'Baugruppe' literally means 'building-group' and is one of two German names given to the model: the National Association has adopted the name 'Baugemeinschaften' or 'building-communities', which suggests the more social role that such developments can aim to create<sup>1</sup>.

In comparison to other more familiar 'alternative' development models, Baugruppen are in many ways like co-housing projects, but without communal living as a definite aim. They could also be like Segal style self-build projects, but are

always communal, and do not have to have any direct user involvement in construction, or use any particular system. A Baugruppe could be used to build a project for either of these models, or equally a 'standard' tenement or close of houses. In most cases, it has been used to produce more specifically designed places to live than are offered by the usual providers, private or public, usually with a large degree of input from an architect or 'project facilitator'.

Key qualities of Baugruppen in Germany are:

- Emphasis on groups setting their own priorities to suit their needs and budget, with ultimate decision in all matters, as they control the funding. These priorities could be low cost construction, or high design or ecological performance, or living arrangements like live-work or shared facilities e.g. integrated childcare / social spaces
- Despite all this freedom, the model has been made into a well-understood and relatively standardised method, using similar contractual and financial models (at least in part to facilitate bank finance by keeping the project delivery method clear)
- Group members become outright owners, rather than co-operative joint owners, of a unit in the building on completion, with a joint share in communal areas (typically this amounts to the plot, access areas, gardens and stairs, and frequently a services system, such as centralised heating or even a CHP unit). Individual ownership means that Baugruppe developments are not normally connected to social housing providers.

## Where has it come from?

The model appears to have emerged in the south German university cities of

Freiburg and Tübingen in the mid 1990s, when developments in both cities were taken as an opportunity to rethink how areas could be developed. Freiburg was already involved in a major project at the Rieselfeld when major new sites became available in each city, as camps of French troops were withdrawn after reunification of East and West Germany: the Vauban in Freiburg, and the Französisches Viertel and Loretto in Tübingen. Both city councils proposed a degree of public involvement but had problems finding developers to deliver the mixed-use models they wanted. The new approach came from a combination of some ambitious planning officials (particularly in Tübingen) and local populations with a keen interest and expertise in ecological design and living (often deriving from the universities).

Particularly in Freiburg, this appears to have been a result of bottom-up pressure to change initial proposals to demolish the barracks and to use developers to rebuild (with support from an element in the city council). A group of 'interested individuals' proposed a radical user-centred method to create a low traffic, family friendly plan using greatly increased public involvement in masterplanning and organisation, and including the proposal for 'Baugruppen' to deliver the majority of the new, medium density homes. This ecological, self-administered proposal was accepted by the council, with powers given to a voluntary body, the Forum Vauban. With building land very limited in both cities, willing participants for the Groups were plentiful when incorporated in all three developments, chiefly as they enabled economic owner-occupation within cities, but also as they promised a way to realise more attractive neighbourhoods that suited their needs. All areas adopted plot allocation systems encouraging such private groups, and projects with ecological and social ambitions. All are seen as having been huge successes, with 80% of the Vauban being built by Baugruppen and the primary school having to be extended twice in 15 years. This also reflects a resulting domination of young professional families in some areas, to the extent that some are seen as ghettos for middle-class green types.

Since then the model has been introduced in other cities, varying in use with the situation. Baugruppen have arisen in Berlin in the last 5 years, largely through the initiative of young architects, without encouragement from the city authorities, often using undeveloped private gap sites, rather than in masterplanned settlements. Leipzig has used the model as a way to



Loretto / Französisches Viertel, Tübingen, Germany  
Various architects, masterplan by Lehen 3 Architects  
Photo: Universitätstadt Tübingen



regenerate depopulating areas, through offering groups newbuild infill sites, or existing buildings to refurbish. Their use has not always been successful, if clients could not be attracted or if sites were not affordable. While many projects have been used for 'starter homes' for families, others have been used as investment projects for wealthier clients for second homes or for retirement flats with more luxurious standards.

### What's the attraction?

For residents, the ability to reduce costs in building an owned home was most important: this results from sharing of resources, and also from avoiding a developer's profit, marketing fees, and re-sale taxes. According to a study <sup>2</sup> this saving typically amounts to around 10-20% compared to equivalent developer projects. At the same time, the ability to get something suited specifically to each user's needs was very attractive, and the opportunity to build on attractive, well-located sites - in most cases owned by the authorities - was also decisive in a project's success. For some groups the communal nature of the project was an attraction, so they would know people before they moved in, but for many this was just extra work, and appears to have been an obstacle for many to take part at all.

For authorities the model presents both potential benefits and complications. Relative to council housing it is a cheap way to build homes (being privately financed they need no subsidy) that are guaranteed to be popular with residents. However, the



E3 mixed-use building from massive timber, Prenzlauerberg, Berlin.  
Architect and photo: Kaden Klingbeil Architects



Residential building, Weihre, Freiburg, Germany  
Photo: David Seel

model's use also requires more co-ordination and input than professional providers would need, and longer timespans needed to realise projects. It appears that in most cases authorities need to set favourable rules on allocation of sites to give Groups a chance against the commercial developers (although in the present climate individuals 'clubbing together' may be one of the few ways to find sufficient finance). Most crucial though is the perceived quality of the projects, both physically (better standards of design and building) and in their 'stabilising' effect on neighbourhoods, in coming with an 'in-built community'. While it generally creates more diverse housing types and sizes, it is important to recognise that the existing model is accessible only to people with a minimum level of finance, and does not yet work as social housing, unless poorer households can be helped to participate e.g. by housing associations.

Potentially Baugruppe developments could meet criteria of sustainability in that they are:

- Economically sustainable generally, through reduced costs and tendency to use local services in (and after) production. While other uses are sometimes integrated, groups usually focus on producing homes, and other development types may need to be used to achieve the larger public and commercial services needed by communities.
- Ecologically sustainable generally, through having a link to the end-user at the design stage, giving the incentive to set specifications for longer lasting buildings with lower running costs. (The rule-free self-build areas in Almere also demonstrate that the model can be used for cheap, poor quality homes, if that is what the clients choose, and are allowed, to build.) <sup>3</sup>
- Socially sustainable potentially, if the project supports, or creates, local communities. If not well integrated, the interests of a single Baugruppe building could be 'in opposition' to those around it. What it does generally create is a greater sense of belonging for people to where they live,

through their having helped create it.

### British Baugruppen?

As in Germany, it would be a big leap here for a public body, developer or many people to adopt 'build-groups' as preferred way to build. As well as working out legal and organisational mechanics of such a design method to work in the UK, there appear to be additional major hurdles, most obviously access to affordable land (with less being publicly owned) and self-build finance. Possible ways around these issues are foreseeable: the credit crunch has made some sites available, and in England there is government direction to make public land available for self-build. It will take investigation through projects, and discussions with funders and landowners, to establish what a standard and easy way for groups to set up and run affordable projects could consist of. Comparing adjacent Baugruppe and housebuilder developments in Germany, it appears there could be obvious quality benefits if a way can be found to enable this option, provided enough people can be found to commit to the extra work needed. The empowerment it gives individuals, tapping into their creativity and urge for influence on where they live, could be important in improving future city development, if the model is used intelligently as opposed to just providing a licence for free-for-all construction.

### References:

1. [www.bundesverband-baugemeinschaften.de](http://www.bundesverband-baugemeinschaften.de)
2. Hubert Burdenski in 'Baugemeinschaften im Südwesten Deutschlands', Gert Kuhn & Tilman Harlander, 2010. pgs.129-133
3. Hopkirk, Elizabeth 'Dutch lead the way in self-build communities', *Building Design*, issue 1968, 03 June 2011. Pgs. 8-9

*David Seel is currently a freelance architect who has worked in Scotland and Germany, and recently carried out a study of Baugruppen as part of a sustainable design MSc at Edinburgh University.*

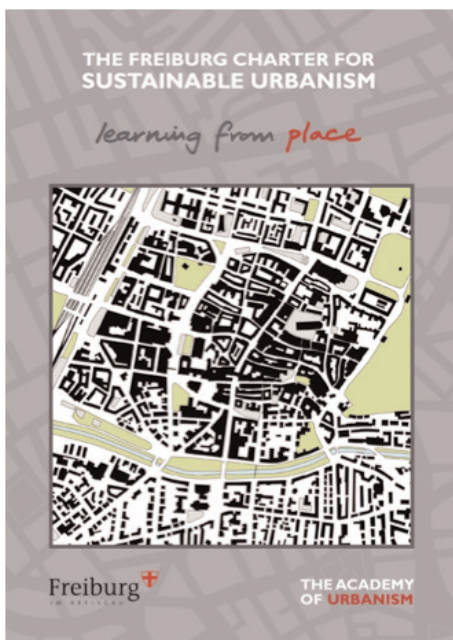
# Collaborative working: existing communities driving change

Presentation by Kevin Murray (Review by Andrew Guest)

**M**urray started his talk by adapting Maslow's concept of the human 'hierarchy of needs', interpreting this hierarchy (ranging from the most fundamental physiological needs of keeping the body going to the 'higher' needs of realising our individual potential) in more of a community than an individual sense. And he adapted it to what he named a 'hierarchy of aspiration' for green living, with a range from grey-green to deep green. "Where are we really at in this hierarchy?" he asked.

Most of Murray's work as an urban design consultant has to reckon with tapping into the aspiration of the people whose places he is working in: this is one reason why he puts such emphasis on engaging communities and, as the title of his talk indicated, facilitating communities to guide and drive the change in their own places. The first part of his talk summarised his belief in this approach.

But as if to cite a benchmark for all work of this kind, Murray first talked about Freiburg – the city chosen by Germany in 1992 as its Environmental Capital, and which has become the model of a 'Green City' for other cities and communities



across the world. In 2010 the Academy of Urbanism awarded Freiburg the title of European City of the Year. Freiburg's journey to reach this acclaim started with the conscious decision after 1945 to reconstruct the majority of the historic city, eighty percent of which had been destroyed in the Second World War. A passionate and committed approach to the care of the city has been embedded in Freiburg since this time, constantly fed and renewed by good leadership and continued discussion. This has in turn established an on-going tradition of co-operation amongst the townfolk, Murray here citing the example of the inter-denominational church of Santa Maria Magdalena. The church is used by both Catholic and Protestant congregations who, at Easter and Christmas, roll back the dividing walls between their two sections to create a single dual-faith church. But part of Freiburg's success has been some key decisions at key stages – in the 1960s deciding to retain and expand its tram network, to prioritise the protection of green areas, and then the decision to use the public transport network as the backbone of all future development of the city. Strengthened by a strong Green movement in the area, in the 1970s and 1980s the city realised that environmental considerations needed to play a much greater part in urban planning, with a renewed focus on preserving greenfield, saving natural resources, and prioritising public transport over private.

With Freiburg as an international benchmark, Murray proceeded to talk about his involvement in three towns in Scotland – Kilmarnock, Strathaven and Grandhome. In Aberdeen, with some mention of work on a Glasgow City Vision 2061 project.

In Aberdeen Murray had had a long involvement with the Grandhome Trust, the owner of an estate in green field on the edge of Aberdeen, and had advised on their wish to develop the estate. The 'Grandhome & Whitestripes' proposal, partly put together by Kevin Murray Associates, was one of the 11 projects selected by the Scottish Government as 'working towards a Scottish Sustainable Community' (see Scottish Sustainable Communities elsewhere in this magazine). Grandhome was also one of the 3 SSCI projects selected by the Government to benefit from a charrette led by Andres Duany and DPZ in 2010 (for further explanation of a charrette also see the article on Scottish

Sustainable Communities). The outcome of this charrette may have had as much to do with Murray's prior input to the site as with the 8 day charrette itself, but Murray was keen to demonstrate the virtues of the charrette process, whether carried out in the DPZ mode, or in alternative modes already practised by Murray and fellow collaborators on other occasions. In Murray's view the key aspects of the charrette model are -

- intensive, collaborative placemaking
- takes place over the timescale of 4-8 days
- it has a design focus, and visual outputs
- involves both an agency and a community input

He made much of DPZ's use of the 'urban transect' tool which analyses the full range of what are seen as the settlement patterns of any one area, analysing the built form, density, degree of urban and non-urban components, and comes up with a series of 'types' that are then used as models for designing new development. But the key to charrettes is the intensive way in which drawing is used as a tool to bring ideas to life and to promote wider understanding of concepts, and as a communication tool between experts and non-experts.

Murray then moved to the project in Kilmarnock where, over the winter of 2010/11, his team of consultants prepared an Integrated Urban Development Plan. Kilmarnock, then reeling from the closure of the Diageo plant, was a depressed economy, torn apart by through roads and with little self-confidence, but with the backbone of a rich history and considerable local pride.



Street sculpture, Kilmarnock

The plan's consultees were:

- public agencies & policy 'stakeholders'
- education (especially the College)
- businesses and traders
- community and civic bodies



- residents and shoppers (visitors)
- young people



*Improving townscapes by reducing street clutter,  
Kevin Murray Associates*

Recurring themes of the consultation were: people come first, make the town more attractive and welcoming, build on assets, build a leisure and recreation role, aim for a compact, convenient town centre, but also connect places in and around the

town centre; also connect people and organisations, nurture small business and social enterprise and support existing business; above all - celebrate Kilmarnock.

At the end of the process a vision was drawn up which saw 'Kilmarnock as a resilient town, turning itself around, and creating interplay between people + place + economy'

A similar process was carried out in Strathaven, but with a marked emphasis on consulting young people. The process used was - 1 Survey sample of community, 2 Interviews, 3 Walkabout, 4 Ideas workshops and 5 Consultation on ideas/priorities. Murray ended his presentation with four questions to ask about any process of working with communities as drivers of change -

- Who is the client, the ones who pay or the users?
- Who is collaborating with whom?
- Is it a narrow project – or does it have wider connections?

- What skills, toolkit, method, aids collaboration, or inhibits it?

His feelings are:

- There needs to be a client, but that the views of users matter too
  - Collaboration is good, but a programme and a logic has to be followed, together with an appropriate protocol
  - You have to be clear about the focus of every project, but if the boundary of this is hard to draw, you have to acknowledge the connections to other areas
  - There is a variety of skills, methods, toolkits to use in such projects (the charrette being only one). Get advice and use the most appropriate of these.
- And good luck!

*Kevin Murray is Chair of The Academy of Urbanism and Principal of Kevin Murray Associates*

## Sustaining Dunbar

Presentation by Sue Guy (Review by Jim Johnson)

The 'Sustaining Dunbar' project funded by the Climate Challenge Fund was described in the summer 2011 issue of the SEDA magazine (p19) by Philip Revell. This brief article draws on some additional points made by Sue Guy in her presentation at the SEDA conference.

Philip explained that the project started with extensive local consultation and research. Sue went into more detail on the mapping of local resources, natural and human, the changes over time, and visions for the future and memories of the past. Some 1500 local people from Dunbar and the surrounding area were invited to record their views by marking up maps of the area, showing where they lived, their memories, their travel etc. This was a more proactive technique than questionnaires – looking at the maps could trigger thoughts and ideas. People recorded food sources (past and future), energy, transport etc. This helped to assess local capacity, existing and latent, and enabled the potential resilience of Dunbar to be examined (local resilience

being a key issue in transition towns). The interviews covered as many people as possible, with door knocking where necessary.

The survey gave a deeper understanding of local people's awareness and understanding of the challenges faced. Awareness of climate change appears strong but is not a driver for change. The rising costs of fuel for transport and heating is a much bigger driver, and focussing on the local implications helped to clarify the issues and bring them home to respondents. Carbon saving does not appear a priority to many, but the rising cost of fuel is.

They also found that people do want to make changes but face major barriers:

- Cost – difficult to access funding such as loans or grants.
- Lack of time
- Lack of ownership and access to land
- A feeling that the local authority does just what it wants rather than listen to the community
- Planning regulations – Dunbar being largely within a Conservation area, controls on development and alterations can be strict.

Looking at the future of the 'Dunbar 2025; local resilience action plan' Sue outlined several ways forward:

- The infrastructure is not there to enable people to change – impossible for any individual to live a three tonne lifestyle<sup>(1)</sup> without major structural changes in the way our economy and society is organised.
- Localisation – developing local sources of food, energy and material supplies.
- Re-localisation - looking back and trying to revive local suppliers who have been driven out by supermarkets and other national companies (e.g. a community-funded and run bakery has just been opened in Dunbar).
- There is great importance in teaching children the skills that will be needed – some new, many old.

*(1. 'Three tonne lifestyle' refers to the quantity of carbon dioxide emitted by one person during the course of a typical year. Currently each person in Scotland is responsible for an average of ten tonnes of carbon dioxide each year.)*

*Sue Guy is has 18 years experience of working directly with communities and Local Authorities to help local people to make things happen.*

# A Summary of Conference Discussions

by Jim Johnson

## Access to land

The major problem facing any group aiming to create a new sustainable community is accessing land – it is both in short supply and often prohibitively expensive unless in public ownership. The role of planning in determining the supply and cost of land was emphasised – an example was cited where land available for building was 200 times the cost of land for agriculture. The SNP manifesto at the last election promised that more land should be made available for communities. Nicholas Falk advised getting started somehow and then relying on land values rising.

Andy Wightman has argued that Common Good land belongs to the local community - not to the Local Authority - though this distinction has become blurred by many authorities. In theory, such land should be available for community use, though many local authorities assume it is theirs for disposal as they wish, usually for maximum profit.

A suggested alternative approach would be to build shanty towns, on the lines of the '1000 Huts' campaign by Reforesting Scotland and Town and Country Planning Association. See <http://www.thousandhuts.org/> and also Colin Ward 'Cottars and Hutters'.

It was pointed out that in the inter-war period, before the introduction of large scale land use planning in the 1947 Act, land prices around major cities remained fairly constant, enabling huge numbers of suburban houses to be built with prices remaining steady and accessible.



One of the huts at Carbeth, a hutting community.

Photo: Frances McCourt

## Scale of public investments precludes community involvement

The UK Government favours large scale public investment programmes, such as PFI for schools and hospitals,

which preclude any meaningful community involvement. On the evidence so far the Scottish Government's alternative, the Scottish Futures Trust, appears to favour similarly large, centrally planned programmes. A further example is the pressure on smaller Housing Associations, many of which have a close relationship with their tenants, to amalgamate with much larger national Associations which are remote and often driven by more commercial objectives.

This is exacerbated by the too-frequent changes to public bodies (or re-badging of existing ones) which leads to changed criteria for decision making and changed timetables. Community groups and professionals can be confused and impeded by these changes which are often made for political purposes. One delegate made a heart-felt call for "no more clever new policies and fewer bodies to implement them".

Many felt that a major impediment to achieving a more sustainable environment was the plethora of regulations and rules that control construction. The undue influence exerted on practice and legislation by the big contractors and their chain of materials suppliers was noted – examples were given such as chemical rot-proofing, insurance requirements, NHBC and many others. Politicians can be tempted to support quick-fit 'solutions' to environmental problems (e.g. 'zero-carbon homes') perhaps influenced by lobbying from vested interests. Industry looks for profitable technological fixes, such as micro-renewables, rather than the simpler (and more labour-intensive) answers suggested by eco-minimalism.

## Community

The first question is how to define a 'community'? For many (including funders) it has to be locational, but how realistic is this in an electronic age? Do SEDA members not form a community of interest though widely dispersed physically? Is it possible to rekindle a sense of a local community, or is this a hopelessly nostalgic concept? What are the mechanisms available to create a local sense of community?

The importance of mixed communities

was emphasised by others, who instanced allotment groups which often have a wide social mixture. It was pointed out that community groups can be divisive if rewards are perceived to be unequally shared.

The transfer of public assets can provide an opportunity for community groups, but the process is uneven across the country – rural authorities are often keen to dispose of unused facilities to local groups, but in urban areas councils are more interested in realising the capital value of their property. URBED is preparing a report on asset transfer for English Heritage. It was suggested that 'best value' might be measured by community benefit rather than value for money. When local groups do receive capital funding there has can be difficulties in alignment with Local Authority revenue funding – timing can be a serious problem.

Lack of resources, particularly finance,

## "a major impediment to achieving a more sustainable environment is the plethora of regulations and rules"

is the principal problem for communities. When adequate resources are available, as to the community based Housing Associations in Glasgow in the 1970s, huge achievements were made. Recently the Government's Climate Challenge Fund has allowed many local groups to benefit.

People and community are necessary for any urban improvement - aka 'place making' - to succeed. Communities are rarely asked what they would really like and need, and too often are asked to choose between predetermined 'choices' which may bear little relationship to real needs.

Kevin Murray stressed that in his experience people are more accepting of change at face to face meetings, whereas electronic means often lead to conflict.

## Planning Issues

Large scale clearance and redevelopment tends to deny local communities any influence, despite the statutory



'community consultation'. The alternative gradual renewal process, Geddes' 'conservative surgery', allows local communities more chances to influence what is built. Large scale projects can have a depressing effect on local areas due to their long timescale, but can be alleviated by short term 'meanwhile planning' such as earth-filled skips for temporary planting. The importance of a diversity of building types and uses, allied to smaller plot sizes, was emphasised for renewal projects. The current argument for the sustainability of high density urban development must be balanced against providing room for amenities such as green spaces for residents.

The improvement of existing urban areas together with the upgrading of their building stock was of utmost priority. It was more sustainable than new developments on green field sites. Local, small scale efforts such as those advocated by the Transition Town movement are useful, but Government should be giving a lead with informed and large scale funding.

#### Energy

The comparative merits of practical measures such as micro-renewables, CHP,

district heating (with issues such as scale and urban density), wind farms, biomass heating were discussed – all topics familiar to members of SEDA. It was suggested that public authorities could do more to compel big developers to adopt such



*It is vital to ensure that electrical demand is minimised before considering how to generate it.*

*Photo: Kim Hansen*

measures where appropriate. However it was emphasised that demand reduction was the crucial first step, and that simple

passive measures should be adopted in industry areas such as construction.

#### Natural resources and biodiversity

It is important to retain and encourage biodiversity in all building projects, especially in urban areas. In such areas the possibilities for local food production should be explored.

#### Possible roles for SEDA.

Underlying many of the discussions was impatience with the slow response of Government and other public authorities to the challenges facing us, and dissatisfaction with the short-termism of many of their initiatives. Is there anything SEDA should be doing to improve this situation over and above its current activities? How can SEDA make its voice heard?

The very considerable experience of SEDA's members could provide feedback and education. How can this best be achieved? There is a need to raise the general level of aspiration. Leadership on environmental issues is needed but was missing from Governments obsessed with economic development. Here is a big topic for future discussion with the membership.

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# SEDA Sustainable Communities issue: Conclusions

by Jim Johnson

**W**hat did we learn about sustainable communities from the SEDA New Lanark conference?

Its title was a question “What makes a Sustainable Community?” As a useful start Mary Kelly supplied some varying definitions; from the UK Government’s 2003 “Sustainable Communities: building for the future.”, the Egan report 2004, and the Scottish Government’s Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiatives (SSCI) programme, 2008. All defined sustainability as much broader in scope than merely carbon cutting – including issues such as economic and social health, social cohesion, good public services, a vibrant and creative local culture and a safe and healthy environment. The one common feature was a requirement for the built environment to have flexibility in use to ensure its long life.

If that’s a definition of “sustainable”, what about “community”? Much harder to define. One discussion group spent some time on this – can a community be defined by its locality anymore? Or are we in a global village where instantaneous electronic communication binds strangers together? What about communities of interest (such as SEDA)? Is there a sense of community anymore, especially in our large cities?

As a working definition, “community” seemed to be generally accepted as shorthand for a group of people living in proximity. The trouble with both “sustainability” and “community” is that they are too often coupled together to add a green tinge to some very dubious projects.

## European Precedents

Nicholas Falk and Howard Liddell gave us a number of very clear examples of building sustainable communities (or at least neighbourhoods) mainly drawn from northern Europe and Scandinavia. We learnt that the design and building of sustainable developments is becoming more common in northern Europe and both speakers showed a range of built schemes from which some principles could be derived. Common features include that:

- European schemes are generally built at a higher density than most UK developments, typically 4 or 5 storey flats, meaning that

district heating and CHP could make economic sense.

- Shared communal spaces between blocks are well designed and often maintained by the residents themselves.
- Procurement methods are more varied than in the UK, with more involvement by future residents and more mixed tenure.
- The buildings are constructed to a better standard with higher levels of insulation and air-tightness than in the UK.
- Neighbourhoods are masterplanned by the local authority, with individual building developers working under tight control.
- European developers may be required to meet a wider sustainability agenda; to meet a programme which lays down standards for pollution, natural resources, health, bio-diversity and food production, for example.
- Regional planning is stronger in Europe than the UK, and is important in setting such wider objectives. The extraordinary achievement of Emscher Park in revitalising and greening the post-industrial Ruhr region is a prime example.

Most of the European examples cited were housing districts – nothing beyond the scale of a neighbourhood, although the redevelopment of the Western harbour at Malmo forms a substantial ‘zero carbon’ area. These European developments embody many of the ideas behind the UK’s “Urban Renaissance” and compact city theories. One example is URBED’s redevelopment of densely planned, mixed use “Sustainable Urban Neighbourhoods” in Manchester and elsewhere described in Nicholas Falk’s presentation..

[“Towards an Urban Renaissance; Mission Statement” Urban Task Force 1999 and “Sustainable Urban Neighbourhood; building the 21st century Home”, Rudlin and Falk, 2009]

In contrast the SSCI programme aims to work at the larger scale of town extensions, but with the lower densities traditional in the UK, especially where the volume house-builders are involved. The conference did not address the question of which is best – more compact “urban” developments giving the potential for very low carbon footprints, or lower densities with more green spaces for recreation and food growing, but less potential for cheap public trans-

port and district heating. Given this apparent dilemma I suggest the Transition Town (TT) movement’s concept of resilience a very valuable way to widen the argument.

## Transition Towns

For example the introduction to Sustaining Dunbar’s 2025 Local Resilience Action Plan says: “The Action Plan will show how we might start creating a more localised, vibrant and resilient local economy which can not only cope with the major challenges which lie ahead but can create significant opportunities – for meaningful work, to develop new skills, to strengthen community networks and working to enhance the local environment.”

The question of scale, of community or of development, was not overtly discussed at the conference but seems to be of crucial importance. It’s not too difficult for a family to live sustainably. John and Sally Seymour’s life described in “The Fat of the Land” in 1961 or the Vales’ “Self-sufficient Home” in 1980 are early examples. Within limits it is possible in a small intentional community such as Findhorn, but becomes progressively more difficult as you move up the scale to the small towns in the forefront of the TT movement such as Totnes and Dunbar. Above this scale it gets much harder to initiate comprehensive action, hence the TT movement’s stress on localisation – for food production, retailing and services.

## Scale matters

What size of settlement has the most potential to be sustainable? Does it have something to do with the individual’s perception of their ability to influence the group of which they are a part? Andy Whiteman recently bemoaned the effects of the 1975 and 1996 changes in local Government in Scotland, whereby some historic 200 local Burgh councils have now been replaced by 32 unitary authorities. He argues that this was a weakening of local democracy. Small identifiable councils were replaced by huge impersonal groupings with little geographical or historical rationale. He contrasted the apparent apathy of Scottish voters in local elections with the active democracy he found in Norway, where small local councils are still powerful. [<http://www.andywhightman.com/wordpress>]



and <http://www.localworks.org/node/135>

The Scottish burghs which were swept away in 1975 still live on in local memory as ghosts of their former selves. They represented actual physical communities. This is clearly to be seen in an area like Dumfries and Galloway (D&G) where every small town and village preserves its individual festival or gala week, or its annual ridings – they even still elect (powerless) Provosts in some places. 72% of the population of D&G live in small towns or villages set in rural or coastal hinterland. Does that make the area's communities inherently more sustainable than a city like Edinburgh or Glasgow? In such a region there are opportunities for local food producers and retailers, people usually have enough space to grow their own food if they wish, there is less pollution and more access to recreational green spaces. Given an improved public transport system and some effective regional planning D&G could form an exemplar for a sustainable region.

Another aspect of scale was noted in the "Dunbar 2025 Action Plan". This is the constraint on the individual or family (or even small community) to effectively reduce their carbon footprint without the economic and social infrastructure to support them. As Mike Berners-Lee points out, in the UK we need to reduce our individual carbon footprints from our current 15 tonnes p/a to 3 tonnes if we are to meet the UK's 2050 emission reduction targets. It is impossible to do this without a fundamental change in the way our society is run – there has to be national and global economic reorganisation. The individual family is literally helpless, leading to the apathy which initiatives like the Transition movement are trying to combat. [*"How Bad are Bananas?"* Mike Berners-Lee, 2010. See book review in SEDA 20th Anniversary issue.]

### The Rocky Road

But there are limits even at the TT scale. Dunbar can have its own community bakery, Totnes and Lewes their own currency valid in local shops, but these initiatives, however valuable in themselves and in promoting wider actions, can only scratch the surface on the national scene. The TT movement is careful to avoid political affiliation, but it's at the national political scale that

the battles have to be fought. In a sympathetic but detailed critique of the TT movement the Trapeze Collective write: "(The Transition movement) argues that communities can shape things as they like.....But this is only realistic if people are also prepared to take on the vested interests in the media, Government and business. Rejecting systems of control that only benefit a minority and defending our rights to self-organisation are the bedrock of real transition.....We believe this could lead to a real transition that isn't afraid to challenge power. The threats of climate change and peak oil provide opportunities for us to challenge some of the basic assumptions about how our society is organised, ask who are the winners and losers, and rejuvenate our political processes and communities." [*Rocky-road-a5-web.pdf*]

Such a vision for our future appears to be beyond the imagination of our current politicians. As the New Economics Foundation says: "Business as usual has failed. Yet prime ministers, finance ministers and governors of banks are still running around...trying to allay fears and convince us that this is not the case". [*"The Great Transition" NEF, 2010*]

### SEDA has a role to fulfil

How should SEDA respond to these challenges? SEDA is not resourced to be a campaigning organisation. I believe many members see their role as pushing forward the boundaries between theory and practice, testing out ideas and techniques, on the assumption that others (hopefully Government) will mainstream the successes.

But Government and the industry are proving too slow. Can SEDA exert more pressure for action other than by its members individually through the ballot box? One short-term suggestion would be for SEDA to ally itself with campaigning organisations like WWF, Friends of the Earth and perhaps new, on-line lobbying groups such as 38 Degrees and Unlock Democracy. I guess many members are already active in these organisations, but SEDA could feed them with research and cutting edge practice on the issues we believe to be important.

As an example, VAT reform is an issue

SEDA has been advocating for many years. We know that equalising VAT between new build and repairs could help to boost retrofitting the existing housing stock and create very many green jobs. If it hasn't already done so, SEDA should be signing up to the "Cut the VAT" campaign [<http://www.cutthevat.co.uk/cut-the-vat/>]. We might be only a small voice amongst many bigger players, but at least we would nail our colours to the mast.

In the longer term perhaps SEDA should shift its focus away from the hardware of the built environment onto the "software" – the broader issues of behavioural change, community empowerment and democratic restructuring – the fields in which the Transition movement is engaged. As Howard Liddell says about the built environment "we know all we need to know – pilot projects have been going on for years." We need to mainstream the changes and that can only be done through political processes. I think the time has come to be more militant before it's too late!



Looking over one of New Lanark's many waterwheels to the river Clyde. Photo: Wendy Hebard

# The Jeely Piece Song

by Adam McNaughtan

On page 9 we note that in Freiburg parents must be able to communicate from their flats with children playing at ground level; this reminded the editors of this 1960s song from Glasgow.

*I'm a sky scraper wean, I live on the nineteenth floor  
But I'm no goin' oot tae play any more.  
'Cause since we moved to oor new house I'm wastin' away  
For I'm getting one meal less every day.*

Chorus:

*Oh ye canna fling pieces oot a twenty story flat  
Seven hundred hungry weans will testify to that  
If it's butter, cheese or jeely, if the bread is plain or pan  
The odds against it reaching us is ninety-nine to one*

*On the first day my Maw flung oot a daud o' hovis broon  
It came skitin' oot the windae and went up instead o' doon  
Noo ev'ry twenty seven hours it comes back into sight  
Cause my piece went intae orbit and became a satellite*

*On the next day my Maw flung me oot a piece again  
It went up and hit a pilot in a fast, low flying plane  
He scraped it off his goggles, shouting through the intercom  
The Clydeside Reds have got me wi' a breid 'n jelly bomb*

*On the third day my Maw tho't she would try another throw  
The Salvation Army band was standin' doon below  
'Onward Christian Soldiers' was the tune they should've played  
But the Oompah man was playing piece 'n marmalade*

*We've wrote awa' to Oxfam to try an' get some aid  
We all joined together and have formed the Piece Brigade  
We're gonna march to London tae demand our civil rights  
Like nae more hooses over piece flinging height*

**Reproduced by kind permission of Adam McNaughtan whose recording of the song is on "The Words I Used to Know", CDTRAX 195D from Greentrax Recordings Ltd. 2000**

## St Peter's Seminary, Cardross

by Ed Hollis

**T**he enchanted forest of Kilmahew, around twenty miles to the west of Glasgow, conceals a mythical architectural icon or, at least, a well-known cautionary tale.

Once upon a time a medieval castle by a gorge, then a shipping magnate's mansion surrounded by an exotic arboretum, the landscape was radically transformed by the construction of modernist building in the 1960s.

St Peter's Seminary was built to house around a hundred Roman Catholic novices. Its plan and section, the work of the architects Gillespie Kidd and Coia, were the rigorous statement of the maxim that form should follow function.

But, within a decade of its completion, there were not enough priests to fill the building and the church shut the seminary down. St Peter's became, as so many buildings do, a form without a function. That was 1987 and since then St Peter's has

resisted numerous attempts to provide it with a new one. There have been proposals to turn the building into a conference centre, a hotel, and flats but, designed as closely as it was to clothe one particular programme, the building remains empty and increasingly derelict.

The caution is a simple one: design a building around one specific function, and once that's gone, you'll be left with an unusable ruin. It's happened again and again to modernist buildings, and it leaves a huge question mark over the design ideology that spawned them.

A new proposal for St Peter's was presented at this year's Edinburgh International Book Festival but there were no images of what it would look like, or when it would be ready. St Peter's isn't going to be restored any time soon.

Instead, Arts Charity NVA propose to leave much of the building incomplete – part entropic ruin, part perpetual building site, forever unfinished either way.

Whatever occupation there is will be used for community education and art programmes, whose subject and mechanism is the building itself.

Tilman Latz, the landscape architect responsible for the transformation of the derelict, toxic, steel and chemical plants of Duisburg Nord, Germany, into a thriving public park comments:

*In modern civilization we tend to try and solve problems immediately...we look for immediate salvation – a hotel and conference centre, an adventure park, an outdoor sports centre...but what is needed is an innovative conception and adaptive approach. We do need to think about what St Peter's was, and what it is today. That is a discussion about values and collective memory... (1)*

This is a radical strategy; NVA can't, or won't, predict what St Peter's will be like in the end - and that's the point. They are challenging the modernist trap of imagining that buildings and activities can be neatly mapped onto one another – in the





# Addendum

to 20th Anniversary issue

The Scottish Ecological Design Association Magazine

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Andrew Guest was keen that readers were given the references for the authors quoted in the article in the summer 2011 magazine 'Bringing It All Together'.

Steven Moore's 'manifesto for a regenerative architecture' is included in his essay 'Technology, Place and Nonmodern Regionalism', published in 'Architectural Regionalism' edited by Vincent Canizaro, Princeton Architectural Press, 2007.

'Design after Modernism' by John Thackara was published by Thames & Hudson in 1988. The writer quoted, Tom Mitchell, is the Director of the Center for Design Research at Indiana University, USA.

There is evidence of a more process-oriented approach to regeneration in 'Delivering Better Places in Scotland', published by the Scottish Government in January 2011. This is research carried out

by the University of Glasgow into successful regeneration projects in 8 cities in Europe and the UK. A key message was that more attention needed to be paid to the 'software' of the processes we used to make places than to the actual 'hardware' of the places themselves. See <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/12/31110906/0>

'Spaces of Labour' is a project of the post-graduate design school at Strathclyde University's Department of Architecture. The exhibition 'Spaces of Labour' was first shown at The Lighthouse in Glasgow from 14 November 2009 to 14 March 2010. [www.spacesoflabour.com](http://www.spacesoflabour.com)

The quote from Pat Kane came from an article 'The 'I'm happy I'm green' consensus won't placate our lust for novelty' published in The Guardian on 26 April 2011.

long term anyway.

This is an approach of wider import than a woodland in western Scotland. Buildings are, in environmental terms, one of the most expensive things we make: we shouldn't really be building more of them at all, but should be working out how to turn what already exists to contemporary uses.

St Peter's was originally designed to teach moral lessons, but NVA's proposals present quite a different ethical challenge. It may seem strange to preserve architecture by embracing its decay but it is surely better to misuse the ruins of existing buildings than to create new ones.

(1) Latz, Tilman, *Once upon a time..., To Have and To Hold/Future of a Contested Landscape*, Luath Press 2011 p 64

*Ed Hollis teaches at Edinburgh College of Art and is the author of "The Secret Life of Buildings" Portobello Books Ltd. 2009*



St. Peter's Seminary  
Photo: [glasgowarchitecture.com](http://glasgowarchitecture.com)





# Endpiece: Patrick Geddes

by Jim Johnson

**T**wo powerful presences underlay the Sustainable Communities conference: one was New Lanark itself, still functioning as a community after 225 years; the other was the Scottish polymath Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) whose name was invoked by several speakers.

He is not as well known in Scotland as he should be for two reasons – firstly because he spent much of his working life out of the country, in London, later in France, Jerusalem and India ending up in Montpellier where he founded the Collège des Écossais. The second reason is that he was firmly in the intellectual tradition of the Scottish Enlightenment; his gifts included a special aptitude for synthesis, coupled with a deep understanding of the complexities of human society and the natural world. Also like his 18th century predecessors he believed in combining thought with practical action.

Born in Ballater, and completing secondary education at Perth Academy, Geddes went to London to train in natural science under T. H. Huxley, a great supporter of Darwin's theory of evolution. From his grounding in natural science, Geddes went on to make significant contributions in many emerging fields of investigation. Today, he is mainly remembered for his pioneering work in town planning\* and environmental studies, but his publications reveal a much wider range of disciplines: biology, botany, civics, ecology, economics, education, evolution, exhibitions and museums, geography, Scottish affairs, sociology, social reconstruction, statistics, urban history and zoology.

In 1879, Geddes accepted an appointment in the Faculty of Medicine at Edinburgh University. He took up residence in James Court in the heart of the medieval Old Town and became intimately involved in the physical and cultural regeneration of the area. Geddes was aware that the elimination of deep-rooted social problems, such as poverty and abuse of the natural environment, would require fundamental changes in society. This understanding encouraged him to conceive constructive remedial projects in the Old Town.

Essentially a pragmatic reformer who believed in the principles of evolutionary social change, Geddes was a committed

decentralist, his preference being for voluntary civic action rather than bureaucratic forms of government intervention. As an idealist, he was less interested in creating the "perfect place" than in promoting "good places" in many locations. In his writings, he used the term "Eutopian" to convey this basic message.

Geddes began to put his ideas about voluntary civic action into practice. He played a key role in the development of a new local network of activists, which succeeded in persuading the Town Council to undertake housing improvement in the Old Town. Geddes urged the municipality to adopt a more incremental approach than hitherto, one that would show greater respect for the built heritage of the Old Town and its current residents. Over the course of the next decade, he demonstrated the advantages of a piecemeal approach. Many years later in his planning reports for Indian cities he described it as the "conservative surgery" method.

This concept had three overriding aims: minimising the unnecessary destruction of the built heritage, avoiding significant disruption in the lives of local residents, and respecting the social and cultural traditions of the community. With these principles in mind, he investigated the possibilities for fine-grained physical solutions combining an appropriate mix of rehabilitation and infill new construction within the existing street pattern. These principles were demonstrated in his creation of academic spaces and student hostels in Castlehill and the Lawnmarket, and his renovation and rebuilding of the area round Wardrop's Court for workers housing.

Geddes was an early advocate of regional planning, seeing cities as intimately connected to their hinterland. He was a passionate educator, and created his famous Outlook Tower, on Castlehill, as a museum of local, regional, Scottish, and world history. The tower was topped by a camera obscura from which visitors could (and still can) survey Edinburgh in its regional context.

He regarded the regeneration of the Old Town as a potential focal point for the revitalisation of Scottish life and culture. One of the cornerstones of Geddes' vision was the notion that the area should once again become a mixed income residential community, where people from all walks of life had common interests and shared the experiences of daily living. He was aware that in

Edinburgh the most fertile period of Enlightenment thinking had occurred when the wealthier classes in Edinburgh were still residing along the Royal Mile, in close proximity to the city's poor.



Patrick Geddes (Image: The Geddes Institute, University of Dundee)

The spirit of Geddes lives on in Edinburgh's Old Town. In 2007 a community group was formed to safeguard Riddles Court, a historic complex converted in 1891 by Geddes for use as a student hall of residence. The group plan to restore the building and develop it as an innovative Learning Centre. This would capitalise on its historic location at the top of the Royal Mile and promote activities and events which would draw on the philosophy of Patrick Geddes and other luminaries, and re-examine them in the light of contemporary city living. The activities would involve visitors, residents and international Geddesian scholars.

In October 2010 the group ran a three-day school "Re-thinking the City" in collaboration with many other bodies including City of Edinburgh Council, the Open University, the Saltire Society, the Sir Patrick Geddes Memorial Trust and Edinburgh Old Town Development Trust. This Geddes-style gathering attracted huge interest and has created demand for further such events.

*This article is based on extracts from "Renewing Old Edinburgh; the enduring legacy of Patrick Geddes" by Jim Johnson and Lou Rosenburg, 2010, Argyle Publishing.*

