

Urban Life, Public Space and the Role of Urban Design in Waterfront Development

Scottish Universities Insight Institute

Discovery Point in Dundee - Monday 1 December 2014

Project Partners: University of Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt University, City of Edinburgh Council, Dundee City Council, Glasgow City Council, Architecture and Design Scotland, Planning and Architecture Scottish Government, Scottish Canals

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This Knowledge Exchange programme brings together practitioners, policy makers and academics involved with waterfront regeneration in three of Scotland's cities which account for a substantial part of overall urban regeneration activity currently under way in Scotland. These three initiatives are evolving in parallel, developing their own independent approaches to city-building and to shaping the new places where people will live and work.

Through sharing experiences, the programme aims to contribute to the future development of the waterfront areas directly involved in the programme as well as other waterfront regeneration processes emerging in Scotland. In addition, it aims to guide a debate over issues surrounding economic, social and environmental aspects of regeneration activities in the country, in order to inform policy development and implementation.

The programme includes 4 workshops over 6 months, each exploring an aspect of development from each city (and including a field trip), with a final workshop providing the opportunity to draw together conclusions and identify next steps for an ongoing knowledge exchange network of policy-makers, practitioners and academics.

This note provides a summary of the second seminar in the series on Dundee which took place at Discovery Point in Dundee on Monday 1 December 2014.



Allan Watt, Dundee Waterfront Manager, described how Dundee's growth is predicated on its relationship with the river; how an unintended consequence of the 1966 road bridge was to isolate the city from the river. The waterfront regeneration project is therefore about re-connection. The central waterfront area ("*ludicrously ideal*", Stephen Fry) has been a confusing entry /arrival point and first impressions of the city have been poor. Dundee has been transforming over the last 20 years (e.g. Overgate shopping centre, public realm improvements, refurbishment of the City Square, demolition of Tayside House and the rail station).

The 8km long Dundee waterfront regeneration involves £1bn investment (already at £500k) and will help to create up to 9000 jobs across a number of zones:

1. Riverside – the former city dump is now an attractive park. Attracting and retaining talent (e.g. top cancer research; gaming industry) requires the creation of high quality places. The airport

acknowledges that global communities need global connections.

2. Seabraes (where the rail bridge comes in) – creating the right kind of environment for new and established gaming industry businesses to grow and expand; e.g. District 10 welded containers; new pedestrian/cycle bridge to connect city with waterfront.

3. City Quay – two large bodies of water (Camperdown and Victoria Docks) where the Council will invest in new tidal dock gates (by mid 2017) to help establish a new marina; Apex Hotel restoring the former Custom House into upmarket hotel; speculative office development linking with overheated Aberdeen market (only 1 hour from central Aberdeen, but rentals are half the price).

4. Dundee Port – installed a new road network and bridge to improve access and egress. The port is well positioned to cater for offshore renewable fabrication, maintenance and servicing.

5. Central Waterfront – everything has been demolished and cleared (Tayside House, Olympia swimming pool, railway station, bridge ramps and slipways, and overbridges). Changed from a dismal environment to lots of developer interest in plots coming to the market; north/South streets and central open space being laid out; planting commencing.

The Dundee Central Waterfront masterplan was approved in 2001, supported by a Planning & Urban Design Framework. This is further supported by a Strategic Infrastructure Plan along with site specific infrastructure information. Additional site specific development briefs are available for each site. The aim is to provide certainty to developers.

The masterplan seeks a mix of uses, active ground floors and variation in design. Building heights will reflect traditional heights. Dundee Council is the land owner and can exert ownership as well as planning control. There is desire to keep the experience unique and support local traders (i.e. avoid retail chains); this may require cross subsidy and lower rentals. The flagship V&A proposal will sit with its prow out into the Tay. There is a challenge to handle the scale of the central public space; to make it formal/informal; urban yet playful – a summer beach replaced by a winter skate park.

Redevelopment of the rail station will include mixed use (hotel, office, supermarket, restaurant/bar) and is being financed through partnership funding from Dundee City, Scottish Government, ERDF and prudential borrowing on basis of year contract with hotel operator.

The project has attracted considerable public interest and has been built into the local school curriculum. Every Department is aligned to assist delivery; there is a feeling that the City has been down and there is now a chance to do something.



Allan reflected on whether the waterfront regeneration project has been smart practice:

a] smart scale – has operated at a transformational scale (project included in NPF3) to change the fortunes of the local economy; investing in the project is an investment in Scotland

b] smart engagement – the 2001 masterplan achieved long term cross party political support to provide project certainty; “don’t get blown off course”; strong school and university engagement

c] smart marketing – through Scottish roadshows, and working with Scottish Cities Alliance

D] smart employment – identify likely future employment opportunities; social benefits built in to contracts

E] smart visitor experience – new rail station, city park, unique bars and shops; V&A (five hundred thousand visitors estimated for first year after opening)

A subsequent Q+A included:

- The importance of pedestrian controlled crossings to slow traffic and enable links to the water edge from the centre.
- Funding represents £100m for central waterfront (roughly 1/3 each from Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise and Dundee

City), and £1bn across all the zones. The 2002 Cities Growth Fund allocated to this area (Fife, Angus, PKC) was targeted to Dundee waterfront project.

- There is a relationship with an overheated Aberdeen economy; though there may eventually be a downturn there's no predicting when oil/gas will run out; decommissioning work will remain; new renewable industries will emerge.
- Work to deliver the masterplan – don't change; picking it apart will result in chaos!

Allan led a walking tour through the central waterfront area; points raised in discussion included:

- a fierce loyalty to a city which has been through tough times and determination to change Dundee for the better
- the scale of the city and the project means it is possible to get on first name terms to build relations and working partnerships
- there is a strong informal network
- "put hope back into the house" – give people belief that there is opportunity
- scale of central space will require activation through event management – it may be a challenging environment to live next to / people need to know
- the importance of ensuring quality walking and cycling environments – particularly if car parking is located remote from residential

Lars Gemzøe, Gehl Architects, presented on international experience of designing for urban life and public space, and divided his talk into four sections:

1. People and Public Space

Two case studies were contrasted to evaluate environmental quality and demonstrate different 'people and public space' outcomes. In Oerestad, an area of Copenhagen is being developed along a new town concept with good infrastructure and superconnections with elevated metro, rail and public transport and motorway connections. However, there are no places for people. The shopping mall has a blank frontage; few places to sit; water features aren't useable; long distances between buildings and entrances; no transition external/ internal activities. A monitoring of the roughly 8000 people passing noted that the average number of people staying is 5.5.



In contrast, the waterfront at Aker Brygge in Oslo offers sheltered external spaces protected from the climate, and a variety of rich edges to mixed use developments. Where 5000 pedestrians pass through it every day the average number of people staying is 212. The fact that people enjoy doing things is down to the design and quality of the environment. Aker Brygge in Oslo thinks about people; the focus of Oerestad was on buildings and forgot about life!

2. People – Space – Buildings

A new approach is necessary that starts with life, then space, then buildings: *It's not what the city can do for the building, but what the building can do for the city!* A public space plan is required that considers differing uses and activities, rich edges with functions that relate to public life, uninterrupted pedestrian links and car-free environments. Public space is for all to enjoy.

Bjørnvika is a neighbourhood of Oslo that has been undergoing redevelopment and transformed from a container port into the city's cultural centre with the national opera. The building achieves more by allowing easy public access and a chance to walk across the gently sloping roofscape to enjoy the relationship with the context. This increased footfall benefits the restaurants, cafes and economy.

3. Different Strategies for Waterfronts

Cities used to be at the waterfront but other things got in the way! (e.g. roads, train lines, industry...) Ideas for how this might be overcome:

- Working harbour - (e.g. Hobart, Tasmania) is a great asset; work with it!
- Office harbour - (e.g. London and Copenhagen) mono functional city districts; lifeless in evenings, nights and weekends.
- Housing harbour - (e.g. former free port in Copenhagen) mono functional; privatised ground floor areas – can't do public things!

- Entertainment harbour - (e.g. Baltimore and Sydney) tourist entertainment industry - not a place to go to as a local.

Granville Island, Vancouver was proposed as a good lively waterfront which enables other things to happen. The strategy was to use what exists: diversity of places and landscapes; boat repair and house boats, art college and working cement factory; an incredible mix of things; small ferries; local character and true local identity; keep it unique; everything made or sold on the island is from the local area.

Islands Brygge is a harbourfront area close to central Copenhagen noted for its waterfront park, which is now one of the most popular areas along the Copenhagen harbourfront, and has an open harbour swimming baths. It was formerly an area where no-one wanted to go; dense housing with narrow courtyards and no parks or playgrounds. A local action group made the park (sign: *"the park is yours – take care of it"*); a waterfront for the people made by the people, based on what the people needed.

There are a series of overlapping activities, where walking past one leads to another; immense possibilities to do unexpected things. Multiple things: lawn, picnic tables, seats, BBQ grills, beach volleyball, ping-pong, skateboard park, play areas/things, water activities. The swimming facility allows many different groups to enjoy. There are 1000 users in the park on a regular summer weekday. With the swimming facility it becomes a regional hot spot. People want to live there; build new housing.

4. Life on the Waterfront?

What would you come there for? What is there for you? How to get there? What to do when you get there? What are other non-planned activities/possibilities? Overlapping activities – spatially and visually; surprising mix of uses; rich edges with open interfaces; invitations to enter, sit down, stay and enjoy, e.g. Western Harbour Malmo.

Mike Galloway, Dundee City Council, offered a personal reflection on a learning journey that has influenced the Dundee waterfront project. Early planning training emphasised 'big architecture', but changed to focus on systems theory and socio-economic factors. A subsequent post graduate urban design course was a "fortuitous move".

A career starting in Glasgow City Council in the design team quickly revealed that specialist influence can be curtailed in a big organisation; this led to a transfer to the city centre team where he worked on Merchant City (1981): the best urban regeneration projects that happened in spite of rather than because of the system; going counter to the establishment! Key points were the project was 'big building' led, but the quality of space, public realm and streetscape between was poor.



Time with London Docklands Development Corporation gained experience about how lots of money can ride roughshod across community interests, and the importance of working with politicians. A move to Manchester to work on the city centre showed the importance of incorporating planning, design and other disciplines.

Back to Glasgow where an initial focus was on a strategy for the River Clyde (but which ultimately didn't lead to places for people/the public!). The Crown Street/Gorbals regeneration was residential led and could have been more mixed use. Key to the project's success was land ownership; an ability to put in infrastructure which informs the basic street pattern that guides and implements further development. This allows design freedom within the context of a block pattern.

A return to Dundee focused on an urgent need to tackle the central waterfront: "an embarrassment but a fantastic opportunity"; south facing over the estuary and close to thriving city centre.

Initially different scenarios and a range of masterplanning options were drawn up and consulted on, to consider what the place might look like in 30 years. Feedback on different options (like/dislike?) identified successful components and distilled to a preferred option, and ultimate endorsement with a 97% approval rating. The process took 2.5 years to complete.

Entrenched thinking was challenged to pursue the notion of boulevards (e.g. 'can't do street trees as it interferes with underground services'; 'can't do pavement cafes because of licence regime'). The project seeks a balance between mixed use buildings and exciting, dynamic public space, with interaction along the water's edge; all being recognisably of Dundee.

Mike referred to Toronto where barriers have been overcome and a series of interlinked projects take the city to the Lake edge; each with its own character/approach within an overall strategy. The City of Bilbao benefited from the V&A Guggenheim effect; but only in terms of one night stay. The city wanted to deepen the strategy and worked with the wider city and region, to extend leisure into business tourism. This has turned the economy and brought business inward investment, of which only 1/5th is tourism.

The major focus for the Dundee waterfront project is to change the perception of the city, which is equidistant between Edinburgh and Aberdeen. The Dundee Partnership will complete infrastructure investment in 18 months. The site briefs call for a high quality environment with active ground floor where people stay and linger. The size of streets is relative to the heights of buildings (same scale as Edinburgh's New Town). The Partnership is prepared to take a long term view: to participate in the development; get more return on asset; take share in the profit; part of management of area in the longer term. There is a desire to stick by the principles and to deliver to the people of Dundee what they voted for 15 years ago.

A Q+A session raised the following considerations:

- The challenge of ensuring mixed use: normally only have planning controls and 'powers of persuasion'; however, ownership and installing the infrastructure can exert greater influence to achieve quality of outcome.
- Changed contexts - 16 years ago it was harder to refuse planning consent.
- What is the art of the possible? Move it over time to a position of greater influence.
- The importance of understanding and working with the politics of place.
- East/West routes will cater for 40k car movements; the boulevards can take the scale.
- Taken a financial hit to achieve socio-economic benefits; won't get direct financial returns on investment; but will realise indirect benefits.

The group reflected on lessons from the site visit and presentations to identify factors contributing to increasing the quality of urban life and public space in waterfront regeneration in Scotland in relation to three areas of discussion:

Resources

What resources are needed to achieve good quality public space and urban life in waterfront regeneration and development?

Time is a needed resource – it takes 2 to 3 years to develop a masterplan

People – is another essential resource. This includes professionals developing the masterplan above. There is also a need for a committed team in place to lead the necessary consultations (such as during masterplanning).

Interactions are very important – these consultations and development of masterplan needs to take place in consultation with the community. Therefore, time as resource (above) is also needed to 'talk to people'. There is a variety of disciplines involved in the process and to ensure good communication and understanding it is essential to allow for time for interaction.

Research and Information – as resource. It is key to obtain empirical information about people, patterns of movement for pedestrian users, cyclists, etc. This research could contribute to modelling number of users, how they use the area, in order to achieve a good understanding of what the development may mean for people. Questions such as 'what makes a good public space?' 'what infrastructure may be needed?' should be addressed through research.

Consultancy – Particularly when international consultants are involved as it may stimulate imagination. This could be channelled also through design/development charette programmes. International skills brought into the development of the masterplan could contribute to increase 'education' in relation to the regeneration, and understand what is possible. This could also help with understanding that 'there may be other ways of thinking about waterfronts'.

Space – as resource. It should be able to attract people, if they have 'things to do' in the area. The waterfront area should provide a 'place' – which is different from creating a destination in relation to only one 'flagship' attractor building. There should be a mix of uses in the area for it to be successful.

A place should also avoid commercialising public spaces. It would be beneficial in this context to avoid excessive car traffic and car parking. More thought could be given to understanding walking/cycling journeys (including bridges across the water), the different possible experiences and the variety of opportunities for development.

Careful planning is essential

Activity (as a resource) can be thought and proposed at different scales, local, regional, international.

Connectivity – is linked to the point above and if provided is also a resource. This should include a variety of means such as pedestrian routes, cycling routes, public transport routes, etc. There is a need to invest in **infrastructure** – i.e. public transport, bridges, cycling lanes, etc.

What resources do waterfronts already have that may contribute to this?

Water.

Proximity and connections to the city centre.

Land - Usually waterfront areas present large amounts of land to be made publicly accessible. (It is essential in this context to ensure access)

The fact that waterfront areas can be a 'blank canvas' for development and include a variety of possibilities for use, design, technologies, etc.

History and identity.

Industry and productivity – waterfronts can still be productive areas for the economy of the city.

Summary of discussion in relation to resources:

- Need time – this is a big masterplanning exercises that took 2.5 years to pull together.
- Involve the right people at the right time
- The importance of having land in public ownership
- Space is limited – need well planned circulation that considers modal split – cars, pedestrians, cyclists + public transport
- Space available for mixed uses to attract people and allow connectivity
- Close proximity to city centre – how best to link with and use it?
- Public space – how best to use it? Continued public use on regular basis may require management

Rules and Organisations

What organisational arrangements and inputs can foster good quality public space and urban life in waterfront regeneration and development?

What rules / regulations may contribute to providing good quality public space and urban life on the waterfront?

The discussion identified two different organisational models in waterfront regeneration and development which are exemplified by Edinburgh and Dundee respectively: an arms-length development company and direct management by the local authority.

Direct management by the local authority appears to allow it to provide a higher focus on high quality public realm and community. In the case of Dundee there is the added advantage of having one person at a very senior level with cross-departmental responsibility which offers clarity of vision at high level, joint goals across departments and minimisation of internal politics. Continuity in the position of the Director of Development appears to have also contributed to the delivery of a vision. This is facilitated by the Director of Development's control over infrastructure (which is implemented first) and estate. This model enables blending of uses, which is important to achieve public life.

The arms-length development company model, as exemplified by EDI in Edinburgh, provides an independent vehicle for waterfront regeneration which is able to do things. Being external to the local authority does however have its drawbacks, including being unable to deal with internal local authority politics from outside, depending on integration between departments within the local authority (which often have different targets), and being affected by political changes within the authority despite it being external.

Regarding rules, design briefs and frameworks allow the setting up of a framework for designers and developers, but require cross-disciplinary working. Design briefs can be useful to control design outcomes, but they can also be complied with while not delivering the product that was envisaged when preparing the brief.

Experience in waterfront regeneration and regeneration of other types of site has shown that consultation needs to start from the beginning, and be tailored to the scale of the development. Early consultation has been shown to reduce or even eliminate objections to master plans. This can

take a long time, with the experience of Govan, Glasgow, being one of working with the community for a period of at least two years to ensure real involvement.

It is also important to get all ages and groups involved. Including young and old together can make the process more vibrant. This approach allows all voices to be heard and different visions put forward – e.g. on the Edinburgh waterfront there are residential areas which residents want to keep quiet rather than urban and vibrant. Involving everyone and examining everything requires using existing networks and dealing with politics between communities. EDI has had positive experience with quarterly meetings with ward councillors, which act as a sounding board and avoid rumours.

The approach in Dundee exemplifies a move away from blueprint masterplanning to using the master plan as a process over 30 years – visioning. In the discussion it was suggested that long term city planning would be more helpful than constantly changing local plans.

A challenge that any form of masterplanning faces is working at the finer grain, e.g. to achieve a particular mix of shops as is the aim in the Dundee waterfront development. Stages in masterplanning therefore need to include working with the finer grain in smaller areas, thinking at the block and plot scale. Creation and involvement of local businesses in the process can be encouraged through provision of temporary units.

In general, the discussion led to considering that the place needs to be created ahead of the development of buildings, and that rules set by the landowner can be more important than regulations, as the latter can only go so far.



Summary of discussion in relation to rules and organisations:

- Dundee is exceptional in the way it is organised
 - Leadership (champion)

- Joined up thinking – teams and departments
- Long term planning & vision (30 years)
- Continuity (17 years leader)
- Clarity of vision – joint goals and political support
- Local control of infrastructure & estates
- Different model: arms-length development company
 - Flexibility & ability to do different things
 - Disadvantage: less control of political issues
- Full control requires ‘owning’ the land, which will affect the development the (regulations only go so far – landowners can set rules)
- Voluntary consultation: from early stages involving all groups & using existing network –
- Good communication – council+ agencies
- Long term city planning & stages at different scales
- Different layers of considerations: macro, meso, micro – big picture + getting down to nitty gritty of fine grain
- Effective rules for public transport (buses, train) versus car (traffic challenges)
- Moving away from ‘blueprint masterplan’ to masterplanning processes through effective consultation based on long term vision

Ideas and Mindsets

What constitutes good quality public space and urban life on the waterfront?

Key considerations included:

- Good quality public space: it looks nice and invites use
- Need to understand different types of space: both linear (inter-relations) and destination (stopping points),
- Importance of sequencing – different overlapping activities – and connections
- (City centre) places for people need to include families and children (safe), as well as generational perspectives
- Diverse identities
- ‘Indicators’ and infrastructure
- The above raises issues around: how to change (conservative) local authority mindset; how to link sense of place with sense of ownership; and how to involve the community
- It also raises issues around who: professional roles and responsibilities, but also role for universities and students
- Need to consider management of spaces, including methodologies and links to rules
- Importance of seasons / times / users (e.g. user identity) and cultural linkages respecting memory (use of place)
- But how to get to know what we don’t know?
- Focusing on the waterfront as a place, this is characterised by:
 - Visibility (to water)
 - Protection (weather + safety)
 - Accessibility (to water edge and to water)
 - Land / sea interface
 - Quality of public space
 - Responsive to user requirements – formal/informal
 - Scale
 - How to manage edges
 - Flexibility – scope for invention
 - Quality of water important
 - Dynamic and temporary uses on water’s edge
 - Exposure and sequencing as issues along linear space

What attitudes are in place to contribute to good quality public space and urban life in waterfront areas?

Mindsets



- Changed aspirations and different citizenry (including young people’s awareness) with recent referendum
- Use of spaces changed over time – flexibility and adaptability over time
- Importance of data and evidence
- Professional roles / political mindsets
- ‘Top down’ view? What is the ‘Public view’?
- Rethink approaches
- Changing perceptions – from industrial to cultural in Dundee: cultural space on a world stage
- Have a ‘can-do’ mentality, challenging conventional orthodoxy and doing something different: beach, marina

Attitudes

- Permission to do, to occupy, to inhabit, to enjoy (creation of spaces)
- Allow to use in different ways
- Responsive to different ways of use
- Council approach to masterplan – seek agreement and follow through to delivery

- People who live here will have to adopt the urban lifestyle envisioned (right attitude to the commercial use of public space – big concert test)
- ‘Can do’ approach to implementation, with acceptance of risk whilst being responsible with public money
- Be opportunistic, entrepreneurial – be prepared to take advantage of opportunities as they arise

