



Cardiff Futures Forum Think Piece
The Built Environment

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Aims:

This paper analyses Cardiff's built environment, and assesses the threats to its quality. It proposes a number of courses of action to enhance the quality of the built and natural environment in Cardiff over the next decade.

Priorities for the built environment are defined as: improving its energy and resource efficiency; raising the quality of design of new development, particularly apartment development; suburban infill, intensification and new suburbs; and the public realm of the city as a whole; facilitating a shift from private car use to more use of public transport and walking/cycling; reducing the use of 'big box retail' as a method of 'cross-subsidizing' other developments; implementation of the public art strategy; and better protection of the city's natural environment from urban development.

Issues Discussed:

The paper notes the compact development of Cardiff and its well conserved Victorian and Edwardian suburbs: its well-protected river valleys and their links to the sea, high quality woodlands and upland landscapes; its fine parks, historic gardens and nature reserves. It notes the extent to which the city's appeal is enhanced by the proximity of natural countryside, an abundance of green space, strong neighbourhood identity, a good rail network and the potential to be a highly 'walkable and cycleable' city.

The paper identifies a number of threats to these assets, as a result of inadequate planning, an shortage of well-located family housing, a shortage of affordable housing and the potential impact of 'gentrification' on Cardiff's 'southern arc' of less affluent suburbs. Specifically, the author identifies 'megaproject developments' as major threats to the city's environment and its eco-footprint as they will 'exacerbate the rapid growth of car travel' and are often (as in the case of Wentloog) environmentally sensitive and flood-susceptible areas of the city.

Cardiff Council's Vision is criticised as 'over-ambitious' in its efforts to position Cardiff as a 'premier league city'. The pursuit of 'rapid growth' uncritically is described as 'significantly impairing' Cardiff's liveability. It is noted that the Vision 'talks about...'project management'' but not the revival of strategic city-wide planning and a more demanding development control regime'.

The paper assumes that the aspiration to be a more sustainable city is imperative given the current global environmental context and WAG commitments to "A Sustainable Wales". It is argued, therefore, that 'the built environment must be made much more energy efficient and carbon neutral'. To achieve this will require 'transformations in both development and regulatory norms'. Community participation and local political leadership are also essential to persuading the city's residents to change their patterns of transport and consumption, particularly given the high ecological footprints of Cardiff residents, and the increasing number of small households.



Energy-efficient, carbon neutral buildings which are accessible by public transport are seen as a primary goal for the built environment. There is also a strong emphasis upon increasing the quality of the public realm, and the need for high-quality urban design and new architecture, which the author feels is conspicuously lacking in today's Cardiff. There is an urgent need to increase traffic calming measures and pedestrianisation to make the city safer, cleaner and more walkable and cyclable..

It is accepted that Cardiff has well protected its built heritage, through 'extensive designation of conservation areas across the city', and drawing up a 'local list' of buildings it wishes to protect would deepen this effort. There has been less success with the management of 'suburban intensification' but this can be addressed now.

Strong emphasis is placed upon the need to protect Cardiff's green heritage. It is suggested that a Greenspace/Ecology Strategy (such as has been adopted in many English cities) is needed to link up the green spaces and watercourses of the city. The paper claims that a 'major corporate initiative' is required to join up thinking and action on park systems, cycle trails and footpaths.

The issue of housing availability is described as 'ever more problematic' with a shortage of 'new, affordable family housing' in the suburbs. Reference is made to the growing trend for young families to move towards the lower Valleys in search of affordable housing, thus promoting 'urban sprawl and car dependency'. It is also argued that the future of the city's Council Estates needs particular attention with regard to quality of stock and supply of rental property.

Recommendations for Cardiff:

The paper makes nine recommendations for achieving its priorities:

- A Local Development Plan with positive policies and strong political backing.
- A genuine Community Strategy that can underpin the LDP and prove to be a key means of promoting behavioural change in the city.
- Development of a sustainable development code that can regulate development to ensure the progressive improvement of resource and energy efficiency in construction, and the lowest impact on the local environment, especially in terms of transport.
- Enforced provision of social housing, and an increase in the provision of affordable housing as a part of private residential development.
- Commitment to consistently high standards of urban design, architecture and public arts, as befits a capital city
- Creation of a city-wide ecology plan that protects the city's finest countryside and parkland, and maximises its biodiversity and accessibility to the people.
- A public realm strategy for the city centre and the proximate Bay.
- An exemplar development that can demonstrate the potential for sustainable development (possibly at Dumballs Road, Roath Basin, or The Pointe).
- Improved engagement between the Council and the inhabitants of Cardiff to promote more sustainable behaviours.