

The Journey to 2030: How Glasgow's approach to housing renewal supports the City's transition to net-zero and the roll out of 20-minute neighbourhoods.

"Glasgow is making a transition to a greener, fairer and more sustainable city. We stand today as an international exemplar of physical and social regeneration".

Councillor Susan Aitken, Leader, Glasgow City Council, COP26

In the first two decades of the 21st century, Glasgow has built a reputation for the delivery of social and affordable housing after decades of challenge in the sector. Today, working with the City's Universities and the private sector, Glasgow has an ambitious programme of decarbonisation that puts people and place at the centre of the process to achieve net zero carbon by 2030 combining this with an ongoing commitment to social justice. The City's housing association movement, born out of challenges arising from de-industrialisation and modernist planning in the middle of the 20th century together with recent achievements in social housing contributes to these aspirations and also facilitates the City's approach to implementing the Scottish Government's policy promoting the 20-minute neighbourhood.

The Context

A bucolic founding of the city on the Clyde gave birth to the myth of Glasgow's name of 'Gleschu' in Scots Gaelic, literally 'little green hollow' transposed to 'dear green place'. This epithet is held dear by Glasgow's people as a part of their identity, but the modern history of Glasgow is more challenging and can be characterised by four distinct eras.

Industrialisation 1850-1925: From the middle of the 19th until the early 20th centuries, Glasgow grew from an agricultural and ecclesiastical centre to become an industrial giant. This growth gave the city status, prosperity, wealth, and an international reputation as one of the biggest cities in the world. This growth, however, came at a price for Glasgow citizens who powered the city's development. By the early 20th century, living conditions across the City had deteriorated badly.

Deindustrialisation 1945-1980: In the years following World War Two, the city's industrial base, artificially supported by a wartime economy, suffered systemic failure, and Glasgow entered a second era of economic hardship and widespread poverty. A national policy to depopulate the city together with experiments in modernist city planning escalated deindustrialization and decline, leading to displaced communities and impoverished people across the city. By the 1960s, the situation had become grave, and a major storm at the end of the decade caused citywide damage and destruction. From the efforts to create temporary repairs, a group of architecture students introduced a new paradigm of renewal that provided the impetus to establish citizen led housing associations, creating a movement to repair and transform the tenements of the city, as it was realized that deindustrialization and unemployment, not the city's stone buildings were the determinants of poverty and ill health. This work led to a change in direction for national policy, demolition and clearance of stone buildings was halted and replaced with a regeneration programme to improve existing housing and maintain communities within their neighborhoods.

Regeneration 1980-2015: As the 20th century closed, Glasgow embarked on a third era characterised by renewal, regeneration, and cultural renaissance that rebuilt the city's reputation for life and place.

“From the beginning of community-based associations in Glasgow, the involvement of tenants ... has built a movement to make the housing and housing management better in the city.”

David Bookbinder, Director, West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations

“When work started in the New Gorbals in the 1990s, there was ... a lot of political and community activism ... a real desire to change things. The critical factors were: control of the land, a project champion, and political and official support through the City. A master plan is essential. The Gorbals community owns ... our housing, and from ownership flows control. They are in charge, they own the housing, they own the process. We want the best of the modern design, which we were promised and never got in the 1960s, and we want the best of tenement living, which we had before the 1960s.”

Fraser Stewart, Director, New Gorbals Housing Association

In 2003. In an era defining moment, Glasgow's tenants voted for the voluntary transfer of city owned housing to a newly established city-wide Glasgow Housing Association. Development funding was transferred to Glasgow City Council as the strategic housing authority to deliver affordable housing to meet the city's diverse and changing needs and to enable Glasgow to move forward with a housing-led regeneration programme shaped by local communities.

“The Glasgow Housing Association is extremely proud of creating better homes, better lives and a better Glasgow through regenerating communities and handing power back to people to improve their lives ... The partnership working, that we've established has been key in propelling our ambitions forward. GHA wouldn't have been able to achieve what we have without excellent partnership with Glasgow City Council, with the Scottish Government and with other stakeholders ... The tenant voice (needs to be) at the core of every decision that is taken. As a tenant myself, that gives me comfort.”

Bernadette Hewitt, Chair, Glasgow Housing Association

Decarbonisation and a Green Transition 2015-2030-2050: By the end of the first decade of this century, Glasgow had established eight transformation regeneration areas with a 10-15 year programme to deal with areas of the city still scarred by mid 20th century deindustrialization by putting city living through affordable housing at the heart of city regeneration. This work is being delivered by Transforming Communities Glasgow, a partnership between the Scottish Government, Glasgow City Council and the Glasgow Housing Association.

“The regeneration areas are about creating new communities with local people involved from the outset. Transform Communities Glasgow is about building genuine mixed communities that are tenure blind. Local people are involved in the design of the neighbourhoods, forming the shape of their communities with local facilities ... local shops, leisure facilities, schools, medical facilities.”

*Councillor Kenny McLean, Convenor, Neighbourhoods, Housing & Public Realm
Glasgow City Council*

Since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, Glasgow has worked in partnership with the Scottish Government and with housing associations to retain and develop momentum in the provision of social and affordable housing across Glasgow, and in the wider City region. Together home to over 35% of Scotland's population.

“The leadership showed by Transforming Communities Glasgow is really important and the role of community-based housing associations has been absolutely critical. Partnership working is essential because we can't deliver “Housing to 2040” on our

own. Sustainability and placemaking are very important ... It's not just about bricks and mortar it's about the communities that those homes are located in ... with access to green space and that's been so important during the pandemic. A good example of placemaking is Clyde Gateway, which is developing a large area of land not just for homes, but for employment opportunities and leisure pursuits for local people and it's a lasting legacy from the Commonwealth Games ... I think Scotland and Glasgow are leading the way in just transition to net zero and I think that's by putting people in communities is at the heart of that transition."

*Shona Robison MSP
Cabinet Secretary Social Justice, Housing & Local Government
Scottish Government*

Increased attention on the retrofitting needed to combat the climate emergency is focusing increased urgency to upskill workforce and work with residents and communities to better understand decisions around energy efficiency, and heat decarbonisation. The work goes beyond the 70,000 historically and culturally important pre 1919 stone tenements that give Glasgow its characteristic look and feel to embrace some 430,000 homes across the city region that will require adaptation to make them fit for the next 100 years while dealing with fuel poverty and upskilling the construction sector in a partnership that is interconnected and place based.

"The Glasgow standard is a set of principles for affordable housing which raises the sustainability levels and the space standards in the housing that we provide. Introducing the Glasgow standard has been a major success (and) been embraced by the housing associations in the City ... to provide Passive House Social Housing. The housing strategy and the housing investment programme both place emphasis on the place principle, improving neighbourhoods, and 20-minute neighborhoods. Each of the new developments takes these principles into account and includes ... distance to shops, amenity space, parking, and all the things that make a good community."

Michelle Mundie, Head of Housing, Glasgow City Council

In international practice, Glasgow was quick to embrace the 2013 United Nations Geneva charter on sustainable housing, seeing its core principles of environmental protection, economic effectiveness, social inclusion, and cultural adequacy as a validation of the city's own approach. This collaboration begun in 2015 led to the establishment of a UN Charter Center for Excellence at the Glasgow Urban Lab, a partnership between the Glasgow School of Art and Glasgow City Council. The Urban Lab has led on the preparation of "Place and Life in the UNECE, a regional action plan for 2030 intended to assist member states tackle challenges arising from the COVID pandemic, climate and housing emergencies across regions, cities and neighborhoods. The action plan, endorsed at the UNECE ministerial meeting of October 2021 furthers the principles of the Geneva UN Charter adopts the findings of the housing 2030 research and introduces three new principles born out of the Secretary General's 2020 policy briefs. Firstly, that cities are central to building back better. Secondly, cities cannot flourish without well-functioning housing systems. And thirdly, that housing, mobility, environment and economy are interrelated and require integrated responses.

This recognises not only the importance of individual Sustainable Development Goals, notably 11 and 13, but also their interrelated and indivisible nature, together with their vertical integration in global national sub national and local policy, design and delivery.

Migrating the lessons from community-led housing associations into 20-minute neighbourhoods:

From early beginnings in the 1970s, perhaps because they had a hand in the genesis of the community-led housing associations, the architectural and design community of Glasgow has played an important part in the quality of housing that has been delivered in the city over the last three decades. Enlightened procurement continues today in the urban architectural and landscape design of the Transformation Regeneration Areas. These also form the basis upon which to grow an approach to the roll-out of a programme for 20-minute neighbourhoods. The quotes included in this article demonstrate the degree to which the design and delivery of the Transformation Regeneration Areas embody the principle of access to everyday needs including local goods and services, shopping, greenspace, education and health which lie at the root of the 20-minute neighbourhood policy.

Glasgow's early growth resulted in a pattern of neighborhoods that were adversely affected by deindustrialization, but the pattern of place remains and can help augment the basis of a network of neighborhoods that provide local goods and services for the people of Glasgow within a 20-minute walk, cycle or wheel from their home. Glasgow believes that access to sustainable, affordable housing is a right and, as a consequence, the delivery of such housing is a necessary component of modern city planning and design. Housing is a pre-eminent necessity, but is not by itself sufficient to effect the transition required in the journey to net-zero. Only when supported by economic prosperity, environmental quality, sustainable movement systems and meaningful cultural life can it be hoped to have established the sufficient conditions for the integrated and indivisible delivery of the SDGs. That transition needs to be clean, green, and just and it must be done in a way that provides hope to help Glasgow's people transform their lives and the places they inhabit.

“A huge lesson to learn is that design is really important. You only get one hit at the design and building of something.” (Fraser Stewart)

“Tenant engagement is vital for success.” (Bernadette Hewitt)

“All our members believe in what local service means. It's that word local, being close to your challenge, understanding the area in a way that only a truly local organisation can properly serve its community.” (David Bookbinder)

“We produce some of the best quality social rented housing anywhere in the country.” (Michelle Mundie)

“I think mid-market rents are a really good idea because it's such a difficult time to buy property.” (Joanna Mullen, Partick Housing Association)

Brian Evans is professor of urbanism and landscape at the Glasgow School of Art and the City Urbanist for Glasgow.

Note:

The text of this article is based on the research undertaken for the film “*Living in Glasgow: A journey to 2030*” for COP 26. The interviews were undertaken in the preparation of this film and under the umbrella of the Place Commission work for Glasgow being led by the City Urbanist, Prof Brian Evans. The Place Commission will report in Spring 2022.

Living in Glasgow” is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSsdXnOqENQ>

Place and Life in the UNECE: A Regional Action Plan 2030 is available at: <https://unece.org/housing/regional-action-plan-2030>

<https://unece.org/hlm/documents/2021/08/session-documents/place-and-life-ece-regional-action-plan-2030-tackling>

The Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing is available at:

<https://unece.org/housing-and-land-management/publications/geneva-un-charter-sustainable-housing-english-french-and>

Housing to 2040, The Scottish Government Strategy is available at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-2040-2/>

Sustainable Communities Affordable Homes, Glasgow's Housing Strategy 2017-2022 is available at:

<http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=4584&p=0>

“The Glasgow 20-minute Neighbourhood Toolkit” is available at:

<https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=53409&p=0>