

Case Study: Producing a robust evidence base to resolve infrastructure constraints in Stewarton

Attribute 6: This Planning Authority has a robust policy and evidence base

Context

Stewarton is a historic burgh in the north of East Ayrshire and had a population of around 7500 inhabitants in 2016. Close to the M77 and served by frequent rail services, the town has become an increasingly popular dormitory settlement for people working in Kilmarnock, Glasgow and further afield. Pressure for residential development is high and a large number of sites were submitted when the Council undertook its Call for Sites in 2017. At the same time, there was considerable concern from residents and elected members in terms of infrastructure capacity in the town; education, health care, road network, water and wastewater etc. In the early stages of producing LDP2, it was clear that the matter of future growth in Stewarton would be a significant issue for the Plan to address and plan for.

What happened

In 2020, the Council responded to a 'Call for Interest' from the Key Agency Group (KAG) for projects where a collaborative approach could support green recovery. KAG agreed to work with the Council to take a place based approach to exploring how Stewarton could develop sustainably; arriving at a new development strategy for Stewarton, built upon a detailed understanding of the realities of the infrastructure constraints within the town and an analysis of the qualitative and quantitative opportunities within the town.

A number KAG workshops were held during 2021 and 2022. These brought all interested parties round the table, to discuss infrastructure in the town in order to allow any capacity issues to be fully understood.

Qualitative data was also gathered, piloting use of the place standard with a climate lens through community workshops that prompted conversations around mitigation and adaptation actions that could happen in Stewarton to help address the climate and biodiversity crises. A 'living local' survey was then carried out to gain further insights into walking distance thresholds, frequency of using services, and the quality of routes to move around

Building on this work, consultants were appointed to summarise and report on the infrastructure situation and to produce a development strategy for future development within the town.

Key findings of the KAG work and the consultants study have had a significant influence on LDP2. Specifically:

- A far clearer understanding is now held by all parties, as to what the infrastructure issues are in the town, separating out perception from fact. This is critical going forward, to ensure that any new development can move forward based on sound evidence.
- As part of an infrastructure first approach for the town, LDP2 ensures that new housing cannot be developed without an agreement being reached with developers for the provision of new primary school accommodation, within the site of the one significant housing land release (site ST-H2).

- Should a new school be developed on site ST-H2, the existing primary school site will be safeguarded for new healthcare facilities and/or affordable housing, ensuring this central site is utilised to address infrastructure needs.

Areas of collaboration

The KAG approach is built upon collaboration; bringing together all key agencies, as well as other stakeholders with an interest in the town, to explore the infrastructure constraints and map a way forward.

KAG involvement as led by Architecture & Design Scotland (A&DS), was fundamental to being able to fully understand the constraints, and indeed the opportunities within Stewarton.

The community have fed into the process, giving insight into how local people use the town, move about it and feel about it.

Elected members have been supportive of the work undertaken in Stewarton. The local elected members are very aware of the infrastructure concerns of constituents and have embraced the infrastructure first approach that has been embedded into LDP2 as a result of the work undertaken.

What was the overall result

The LDP2 framework for Stewarton is robust and based on a clear understanding of the constraints and opportunities in the town. The approach was highlighted in the LDP2 Examination report (published December 2023) as a good approach to meeting the infrastructure first principles embedded within NPF4:

‘Overall, I am impressed by the level of attention that the council has paid to these matters. The proposals and mechanisms set out in the supplementary guidance and the proposed plan go a good way towards meeting the infrastructure first principles promoted in NPF4. Detailed evidence regarding infrastructure capacity and needs has been prepared, and some key infrastructure requirements and developer contributions are included in the plan (most notably land for a new school).’ LDP2 Examination Report, Page 786

The added value of working with the Key Agencies Group and the place based approach taken, was highlighted through its inclusion as a case study within the Scottish Government Planning Guidance ‘Local Living and 20 minute neighbourhoods’.

Lessons learned

High level of collaboration – the work has brought a range of interests around the table, addressing silo working and ensuring all interested parties have a better understanding of the challenges facing the town. Critically, the work has also resulted in better joint working across Council departments; the challenges facing the town are not just planning matters, they require a range of council departments and external stakeholders working together to find solutions. This is important going forward, as the development of Stewarton will continue to be a priority for some time.

Digital mapping – the work with A&DS and the KAG allowed the Council to tap into digital mapping analysis that it has not used previously. Going forward with LDP3, the Council will reflect on the added value that this mapping capability brought and explore ways in which it can adapt to in-house capabilities.

Time & resources required – the work carried out in Stewarton was, in its depth and intensity, a new approach within East Ayrshire. This was considered necessary for Stewarton given the complexities of the infrastructure constraints and the level of concern from the community and elected members. However, Stewarton is just one of over 30 settlements across East Ayrshire. A place based approach like this could not feasibly be undertaken across all settlements. Moving forward, decisions will have to be taken as to where resource are prioritized and how the experience of undertaking this work in Stewarton can be taken on board for other settlements, but perhaps in a less time and resource intensive manner.

What contribution did it make towards delivering outcomes?

NPF4

☐ Sustainable places

- ☐ Climate change and nature crisis
- ☒ Climate mitigate and adaptation
- ☐ Biodiversity
- ☐ Natural Places
- ☐ Soils
- ☐ Forestry, woodland and trees
- ☐ Historic assets and places
- ☐ Green belts
- ☒ Brownfield, vacant and derelict land and empty buildings
- ☐ Coast development
- ☐ Energy
- ☐ Zero waste
- ☐ Sustainable transport

☐ Liveable places

- ☒ Design, quality and place
- ☒ Local living and 20 minute neighbourhoods
- ☒ Quality homes
- ☐ Rural homes
- ☒ Infrastructure first
- ☐ Heat and cooling
- ☐ Blue and green infrastructure
- ☐ Play, recreation and sport
- ☐ Flood risk and water management
- ☐ Health and safety
- ☐ Digital Infrastructure

☐ Productive places

☐ Community Wealth Building

☐ Business and industry

☒ City, town, local and commercial centres

☐ Retail

☐ Rural development

☐ Tourism

☐ Culture and creativity

☐ Aquaculture

☐ Minerals

Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

☒ Movement

☒ Spaces

☒ Resources

☒ Civic

☒ Stewardship
