Design Governance, Austerity and the Public Interest: Planning and the Delivery of 'Well-Designed Places' in West Dunbartonshire, Scotland

Robert Richardson & James T. White

Published online: 05 Aug 2021.

Submit your article to this journal ⬈

Article views: 832

View related articles ⬈

View Crossmark data ⬈

RTPI
Royal Town Planning Institute

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

🔓 OPEN ACCESS ⊗ Check for updates

Design Governance, Austerity and the Public Interest: Planning and the Delivery of 'Well-Designed Places' in West Dunbartonshire, Scotland

Robert Richardson (ID) and James T. White (ID)

Urban Studies, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper considers how planning authorities can achieve urban design ambitions in the context of deepening neoliberalism and fiscal austerity. Based upon a case study of West Dunbartonshire, Scotland, the paper reveals the innovative steps taken by the local authority to introduce new design governance tools in the face of significant resource constraints. The paper critically examines the role that the private sector plays in the governance of design and argues for a reconceptualisation of design governance that more rigorously attends to the challenge of delivering well-designed places in the public interest.

Introduction

During the first decade of the 21st century design-led planning was in the ascendency across the United Kingdom. The influential *Towards an Urban Renaissance* report of the Urban Task Force (1999) proved something of a watershed moment. As the property market boomed during the early 2000s, significant investment was targeted towards design-led urban regeneration schemes. The advocacy of design literate planning was widely supported and well-funded, particularly by the newly-established Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) in England (Carmona et al., 2016; Punter, 2011), by Architecture and Design Scotland, the Design Commission for Wales, and the Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment in Northern Ireland in the recently devolved nations (Carmona, 2019a; Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment, 2017; Punter, 2010a, 2010b; White & Chapple, 2018).

The political and economic upheaval triggered by the 2007–2008 financial crisis unravelled many of these urban design initiatives and shone light on the social inequities of urban design investment during the New Labour years (Porter & Shaw, 2009; Punter, 2010c). Austerity measures introduced by the Coalition Government from 2010 and subsequent Conservative Governments from 2015, restructured and downsized local government in the UK (Hastings et al., 2017; Lowndes & Gardner, 2016). Although public sector austerity has been widely deployed in response to the financial crisis (Ponzini, 2016; Tulumello et al., 2020), it has manifested varyingly according to existing political relations, path-dependencies and cultures of governance and regulation (Savini & Raco, 2019). Many European nations and cities have better resisted austerity than in the US

CONTACT James T. White ✉ jamest.white@glasgow.ac.uk ▢ Room 216, 26 Bute Gardens, Urban Studies, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8RS, UK

(Goldsmith, 2020; Lobao et al., 2018), for instance, where practices of austerity have been core to a longer-standing urban political economy (Hastings et al., 2017; Peck, 2012).

In the UK, the outsourcing of public services within a 'shrinking state' is more widespread than in other European countries (Lobao et al., 2018), and in nations such as Germany and the Netherlands the state retains a greater investment and participatory role in development and delivering place-making (James & Tolson, 2020). Deep cuts to public spending have therefore reinforced an already evolving ideological shift towards private sector involvement in UK planning practice (Parker et al., 2018; Wargent et al., 2020). This has had a particularly negative impact on the 'sobered discipline' of urban design (Ryan, 2017), which was often one of the first planning functions to be outsourced or withdrawn (Carmona & Giordano, 2017; White et al., 2020).

Our focus in this article is Scotland, where the new urban design policy agenda that emerged during the early 2000s was less closely aligned to the urban regeneration aims of the Urban Task Force than in England. Instead it focused on the role that design could play in improving the overall quality and sustainability of place (Punter, 2010b), albeit within the context of a wider neoliberal transformation of the Scottish planning system that sought to ensure land use planning was 'open for business' (Inch, 2018). Whereas England's CABE was a victim of the Coalition Government's 'bonfire of the quangos' (Curtis & King, 2010) and closed in 2011 (Carmona, 2019a), Architecture and Design Scotland,[1] the equivalent body in Scotland, continues to receive government funding and has played a key role in the development of an increasingly sophisticated urban design agenda that emphasises health and wellbeing (e.g. Architecture and Design Scotland, Scottish Government & NHS Scotland, 2015; Scottish Government, 2013). Delivering "healthier, inclusive, sustainable and well-designed places" (Scottish Government, 2020a, p. 31) is one of the key objectives in Scotland's emerging National Planning Framework 4, which emphasises the design-based concept of '20 minute neighbourhoods' as a route to creating zero-carbon places by reducing unsustainable travel, while also regenerating urban centres, enhancing social cohesion and improving health outcomes (Calvert, 2021).

Scottish urban design policy increasingly reflects the relationship between healthy and sustainable places and community empowerment, with a new 'Place Principle' encouraging a collaborative, place-based approach to public service delivery (Scottish Government, 2019). A community engagement initiative called the 'Charrette Mainstreaming Programme', later 'Making Places', recently saw the Scottish Government part-fund numerous design-based community engagement 'charrettes'. Although the part-funded nature of the initiative is symptomatic of a wider context of government austerity, these events had the effect of putting "planning and design issues 'on the radar' of local people" (Kordas, 2020, p. 281).

Despite flourishing national-level urban design policies, the delivery of well-designed places in Scottish towns and cities has proven more challenging, and the quality of new development has remained stubbornly low (Gulliver & Tolson, 2014; White et al., 2020). Although the political discourse in Scotland has generally been more supportive of planning than in England (Slade et al., 2019), economic growth, albeit couched in terms of 'sustainability', continues to dominate national policy (Scottish Government, 2020a, 2020b). Planning is often subordinate to other public policy and service functions and public sector planners are not sufficiently empowered to champion good places (James & Tolson, 2020). The long-term effectiveness of initiatives like 'Making Places' are therefore over-shadowed by the wider context of fiscal austerity in Scottish local authorities, which have seen declining budgets, and which increasingly focus on revenue-driven priorities (Kordas, 2020).

Facing tough resourcing decisions, Scottish local authorities have had to adapt to survive, and this has directly impacted their ability to deliver on the Scottish Government's design and

sustainable development goals (Scottish Government, 2020a, 2020b). In this paper our aim is to understand how public sector austerity has impacted the delivery of Scotland's urban design policy agenda at the local level by examining how one particular local authority has adapted its practice in pursuit of more design-sensitive planning outcomes. Our findings are drawn from a case study of West Dunbartonshire Council, a small, fiscally-constrained authority located in the west of Scotland, which has established a tentative authority-wide design programme since 2017. We argue that West Dunbartonshire Council has identified urban design as a strategic policy priority and introduced a series of innovative 'design governance' (Carmona, 2016) tools, but warn that its approach to delivery provides evidence of the deepening neoliberalisation of Scottish planning, and raises questions about the extent to which urban design decisions can be made in the public interest.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, we unpack the term 'design governance' (Carmona, 2016) and highlight the public sector's creeping reliance on private sector planning and design consultants in the era of austerity. Next, we present our research methodology, and share the results from our West Dunbartonshire case study. The paper concludes with a series of critical reflections on local authority urban design practice that challenge the notion that design governance operates with the aim of addressing "a defined public interest" (Carmona, 2016, p. 705).

Design Governance, the Public Interest and Austerity

Design governance is defined by Carmona as "the process of state-sanctioned intervention in the means and processes of designing the built environment in order to shape both processes and outcomes in a defined public interest" (2016, p. 705). It is typically practised through a range of familiar planning tools, including 'formal' statutory mechanisms and controls like design guidance and planning permission, as well as more 'informal' instruments like evidence of best practice, award schemes or education and skills training (Carmona, 2017). Although the 'public interest' is a contested concept within planning, it has long provided justification and legitimacy for state intervention in land and property markets (Campbell & Marshall, 2002) including on matters of urban design, and continues to underpin the stated aim of planning within the profession's Code of Conduct (Royal Town Planning Institute, 2016). Hack (2017) argues that the concept of design governance neglects the significant role played by private sector consultants in the urban design process, while the assertion that public and private sector actors share "responsibilities for delivery" (Carmona, 2016, p. 726) suggests that the operation of design governance demands further scrutiny.

The concept of the 'public interest' is often the subject of critical enquiry because, by its nature, it is difficult to define (Campbell & Marshall, 2002). Questions about how the 'public' is defined at different spatial scales and across generations continue to cause tension. Recent research on planning authorities across the UK by Slade et al. (2019) found that the 'public interest' is still an accepted rationale among planners seeking to improve planning and design outcomes for communities. Yet, the research found that this justification was complicated by its application in a diverse society and in response to government policy agendas focused on economic growth.

On the ground, planners' notions of the 'common good' are increasingly wrapped up in negotiations among stakeholders (Murphy & Fox-Rogers, 2015) and serving the 'customers' of the planning system (Clifford & Tewdwr-Jones, 2013). For some, this characterises a set of post-political planning practices which make any claim to the public interest superficial at best (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012). In Slade et al.'s (2019) research, the notion of the "public interest" was sometimes used as a "partisan Trojan horse" (p. 13) that stakeholders, including housebuilders, communities and elected councillors, use to justify their private concerns. For Savini and Raco (2019) the very

purpose of planning is being reshaped from one focused on "input-centred forms of deliberation, place-making and social justice to an enhanced concern with output-centred agendas premised on expedited development and growth" (pp. 3–4). As yet, limited attention has been paid to how these evolving values are interpreted and enacted by the numerous actors responsible for delivering urban design.

Descriptions of urban design practice have typically drawn a clear distinction between the 'policy' (public) and 'development' (private) functions of urban design (Linovski, 2015). This assumes that urban design consultants working for private sector developers interpret and implement the policies and plans produced by public sector officials. Bentley (1999) has depicted the 'push and pull' between these actors as a 'battlefield' where each actor is constrained by a set of resources and rules that collectively produce 'opportunity space' for action. Developing this further, Tiesdell and Adams (2011) describe how the boundaries between the opportunity space of different actors are continually negotiated, meaning that the interpersonal and negotiation skills of public sector planners are crucial in determining design outcomes. To some extent the distinction between the 'policy' and 'development' functions of urban design (Linovski, 2015) and the 'battlefield' metaphor (Bentley, 1999) remain valid, but the boundaries between the public and private roles assumed by urban design actors have become increasingly blurred as fiscal austerity has accelerated the evolution of neoliberal governance practices and forced the privatisation of many public sector planning and design functions (Linovski, 2015; Lovering, 2010).

If, as Campbell (2002) argues, planners should use situated judgment to make decisions on behalf of others about what makes good places, the competing understandings of 'good places' and the 'public interest' introduced by different actors within design governance are deserving of further scrutiny. Although there is significant evidence of the wide-ranging health, social, economic and environmental benefits of well-designed places (Carmona, 2019b), inequities in delivery have been observed, with urban design frequently associated with 'spectacle' architecture and economic development (Gospodini, 2002; Lovering, 2010; Punter, 2010c). Financially-motivated commercial developers who deliver much of the UK's new development are often reluctant to invest in urban design (Gulliver & Tolson, 2014; White et al., 2020), and the onus falls on public authorities to use the policy tools at their disposal to compel developers to contribute to making better places (Bentley, 1999; Tiesdell & Adams, 2011). As Linovski argues in a recent edited discussion in this journal, this renders public sector capacity crucial for ensuring oversight of market-led planning (in Parker et al., 2020).

The combined effects of the block grant issued to Scotland, and budgetary allocation decisions made by the devolved Scottish Government, have meant that cuts to public spending have been less significant in Scotland than in England, although they have still been "substantial and severe" (Gray & Barford, 2018, p. 554). An era of "super-austerity" following the election of a majority Conservative UK government in 2015 has continued this trajectory (Lowndes & Gardner, 2016).

From a planning and urban design perspective, one of the most significant impacts of austerity has been a reduction in local authority staffing capacity, through job cuts. Despite accounting for only 0.63% of total local authority spending (Beveridge et al., 2016), planning departments in Scottish local authorities have faced some of the most significant cuts of any local government service in the years following the financial crisis. The Royal Town Planning Institute in Scotland (2019) recorded that local authorities experienced a 40.8% decrease in their planning budgets and a 25.7% reduction in planning staffing levels between 2009 and 2018. Public sector urban design services were particularly hard hit. A 2018 survey by the Heads of Planning Scotland, the representative organisation for senior planning officers in Scotland, found that 15 of the responding 35 planning authorities named design as one of their top five skills shortages (Birrell, 2018).

The mantra of "doing more with less" (Hambleton & Howard, 2013, p. 48) has forced local authorities to develop new ways of delivering public services (Lowndes & Gardner, 2016). Planning authorities increasingly enter "into a relationship of critical dependence with the private sector" (Wargent et al., 2020, p. 193) and must correspondingly behave more like a business and, often reluctantly, outsource work to private consultants (Slade et al., 2019). For example, the survey by Heads of Planning Scotland found that 86% of Scottish planning authorities paid for technical expertise, in areas such as public consultation, development appraisal, environmental impact assessment, and design and placemaking (Birrell, 2018). In Scotland, and elsewhere, private sector urban design consultants now produce many of the 'formal tools' of design governance (Carmona, 2017) such as design policy and guidance that, in the past, would have been written by public sector officials. This means that many urban design consultants simultaneously undertake work for private sector developers operating within the regulatory and policy context they have helped to shape (Cuthbert, 2017; Linovski, 2015; Wargent et al., 2020).

This blurring of lines raises questions about the transparency, accountability, and efficiency of the planning system (Parker et al., 2018) and, by extension, the role of design governance. While Carmona (2016, p. 720) argues that "the governance of design … will always be ideological in that it aims at achieving a set of aspirational public interest outcomes, namely 'better design' than would otherwise be achieved", Linovski's (2015, 2019) research on design and planning practice in Canada and the United States suggests that the growing role played by private urban design consultants on behalf of the public sector weakens the ability of local planning authorities to operate in that public interest. She argues that "[o]utside consultants … are often able to foster debate and push public actors in new and productive directions", but cautions that, "without strong public sector involvement, there is the tendency to view urban design as value-free and universal" (2015, p. 462). This proposition challenges us to treat Carmona's definition of design governance, focused as it is on shaping "processes and outcomes in a defined public interest" (2016, p. 705), with some caution.

In the UK, only 55% of planners are now employed by the public sector, compared to 70% in 2010 (Kenny, 2019). The close quarters within which public and private urban designers now operate arguably obscures the different interests they represent and creates the conditions for the "convergence of development and public interests" (Linovski, 2019, p. 1694). This shift of expertise and power from planning authorities to non-state actors represents the "cumulative incapacitation of the state" (Peck, 2012, p. 630), driven by public sector austerity within the sustained neoliberalisation of state governance. In this context, local authority reserves of knowledge are being hollowed out (Wargent et al., 2020), while many public sector planners are motivated, not by the hope of making a positive impact, but by the fear of losing control over development, being blamed for unsatisfactory development, or of losing their job (Sturzaker & Lord, 2018). Slade et al. (2019) conceptualise this cohort of local authority "austerity planners" as practitioners who feel they have little room for executing independent professional judgment, which erodes their job satisfaction and contributes to a highly mobile profession. The austerity planner's role in local authorities is also increasingly characterised by proceduralism and box-ticking, hampering their ability to "think proactively and strategically about how to meet the public interest" (p. 32).

Practices associated with the 'austerity planner' should be viewed alongside the "considerable depletion" in design leadership since the global financial crisis (Gulliver & Tolson, 2014, p. 13). A UK-wide study on design and housing quality in the UK recommends that better national level ministerial leadership needs to occur hand-in-hand with place and design leadership within local authorities (White et al., 2020). Successful design governance initiatives can often be traced back to

inspirational leadership and judicious management (White, 2015), such as the example of Larry Beasley's leadership as Co-Director of Planning during the design-led urban transformation of downtown Vancouver, Canada in the 1990s and early 2000s (Grant, 2009). As Dobson and Platts argue, planning must have a central role in ensuring place-making, and, by extension, design, is a corporate priority within local authorities (in Parker et al., 2020). Critical questions must therefore be asked about how the tools of design governance are deployed in planning practice, by whom, and crucially, whose interests they legitimise.

Research Methodology: The Case of West Dunbartonshire Council

We conducted our research as a single qualitative case study of West Dunbartonshire Council, a small local planning authority in Scotland which embarked upon an ambitious strategic urban design agenda in 2017. Informed by Flyvbjerg (2001), who argues that richer information tends to be found in atypical case studies, West Dunbartonshire Council was purposefully selected for its 'uniqueness' as a potential exemplar of design governance at the local level in Scotland. Our contention was that the case could provide empirical evidence on the challenges of practising design governance under conditions of widening neoliberalism and fiscal austerity in a local planning authority with limited resources and a weak local economy. Funding received by the Council from the Scottish Government reduced in real terms by 22% between 2010–11 and 2015–16 (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2015), and the Council had to make nearly £29.3 million in savings between 2015 and 2020 (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2020a), requiring the planning service to "look at new ways of working, the use of new technology and bringing in additional income" (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2016a, p. 2). Without yet taking the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic into account, a funding gap of £5 million is anticipated in the 2021–22 budget year, and over £12 million the following year (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2020b).

West Dunbartonshire, the second smallest of Scotland's 32 local authorities, by land area, is located in the west of Scotland between Glasgow and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. Its population of 89,610 (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2018a) is mostly distributed between the urban settlements of Clydebank, Dumbarton and the Vale of Leven, and the area's identity is rooted in its proud Clydeside industrial and cultural heritage (Madgin, 2013). Clydebank and Dumbarton grew around several shipyards, including John Brown's in Clydebank which built many famous ocean liners including RMS Queen Mary, and Denny's in Dumbarton, where the Cutty Sark was built and launched.

Today West Dunbartonshire is a very different place and its more recent history has been shaped by tragedy and decline. Bombing raids on the area's industrial infrastructure during the 1941 Blitz killed 1,200 people and made 35,000 homeless, leaving just seven buildings in Clydebank unscathed (Finlay, 2006). Shipbuilding and manufacturing then fell into decline in the post-war years, leading to rapid de-industrialisation and high unemployment. West Dunbartonshire's urban challenges have been exacerbated by poor quality post-war housing estates and tower blocks (Finlay, 2006) which co-exist alongside 163 hectares of vacant and derelict land within the local authority boundary (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2020c). A weak local economy means that the (pre-Covid 19) unemployment level was 4.8%, compared to the Scottish average of 4.1%, and West Dunbartonshire faces strong competition for jobs and investment from neighbouring areas, particularly Glasgow (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2018a). Scottish Government data on 'multiple deprivation' places 44% of West Dunbartonshire's data zones in the top 20% most deprived nationally, the fourth highest local share of any Scottish local authority area (Scottish Government, 2020c).

We collected the primary data for this case study from two sources. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted in person with eight key informants, in 2019. They included two Council planning managers, two Council planning officers, an elected councillor, two developers, and one private sector consultant. All participants had first-hand experience of planning and design governance within West Dunbartonshire. We audio-recorded all of the interviews and fully transcribed them before conducting a thematic analysis. All participants have been anonymised and are referred to using generic role descriptors (e.g. 'planning manager', 'developer', etc.). Second, we collected and analysed documents including planning applications, committee reports, meeting minutes and national and local planning policy. All of the documents we analysed were publicly available online. The College of Social Science Ethics Committee at the University of Glasgow granted the necessary ethical approval for the research.

The Origins of a Design Governance Agenda

Since 2017, West Dunbartonshire Council has introduced a series of design governance initiatives to strengthen its control over the quality of new development and address developers' widely held perception that, as a small local authority operating in a weak economy, planning decisions are largely made on the basis of economic development, without much critical attention paid to design (see Table 1). A local authority planning manager explained this *modus operandi* in the following terms: "it's employment, it's economic regeneration, and it's easy to get sucked into that and think 'right this is going to bring jobs, going to bring homes … we refuse very little here because we always have to try and make it work" (Planning Manager, interview 2019). A developer who had recently sought planning permission for a housing scheme in West Dunbartonshire agreed with this characterisation, noting, "as an authority who haven't had an awful lot of private residential development in recent years, I think they were quite welcoming" (Developer, interview 2019).

Public sector austerity has exacerbated this challenge. Amid significant resource constraints, planning authorities across Scotland have struggled to maintain workforce capacity and retain a sufficiently skilled workforce (Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland, 2019). In West Dunbartonshire, this has directly impacted planning and design decision-making, particularly when the Scottish Government's performance indicators encourage efficiency – the perception amongst planners being "right, get this through the system" (Planning manager, interview 2019). A private sector developer operating in the local area explained that, in his view, public sector staffing cuts have made the planning application process "slower than it ever was" because local authorities simply "don't have the staff" (Developer, interview 2019).

This lack of resources meant that, prior to 2017, West Dunbartonshire had no dedicated in-house urban design staff and only a very limited amount of policy on design matters. The current Local Development Plan, adopted in 2010, also offers very little guidance on urban design (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2010). A revised Local Development Plan was produced in 2014 and does pay closer attention to urban design through a policy on "successful places and sustainable design" (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2016b, p. 44). Unfortunately, however, a dispute between West Dunbartonshire Council and the Scottish Government over the allocation of a controversial site for housing development meant that it was never fully adopted (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2016a), and only serves as a 'material consideration'. The Council also produced supplementary design guidance on residential development in 2014, which aims to support innovative and context-sensitive design, based on a checklist of criteria covering character and setting, layout and plot size, house design, landscaping and open spaces, creating streets, and community safety (West

Table 1. Key initiatives that have reshaped design governance in West Dunbartonshire between 2014–2020.

Date	Initiative	Contribution to design governance
June 2014	Proposed Local Development Plan submitted for Examination.	The proposed plan, although unadopted, served as a material consideration and demonstrated a greater interest in design than the previous 2010 Local Plan. It contained specific policy on 'successful places and sustainable design', and was written alongside supplementary design guidance on residential development.
November 2014	First pre-application design briefing for Councillors is held.	Councillors are briefed on the design of major planning applications and can ask questions about proposals at an early stage of the planning process. The briefings seek to involve and educate elected Councillors in design matters.
March 2016	Planning Permission in Principle for Queens Quay, Clydebank, including a site masterplan and design guidance, is granted permission at the Planning Committee.	Planning Permission in Principle for the Council's flagship regeneration site includes a site masterplan and accompanying design guidance; tools not previously used for a Council-owned site. These tools will be supplemented by additional design codes (forthcoming).
February 2017	£75,000/year for three years is committed to fund a design review panel and design officer.	Funding committed on a trial basis in response to Councillor McGlinchey's ambition to address wellbeing and economic vitality through design, at a time when several key regeneration sites in the area were due to be redeveloped.
September 2017	A full-time design officer is recruited, and undertakes consultation and research prior to establishing a design review panel.	Full-time design capacity raises the profile of urban design within the Council. Consultation with stakeholders from different built environment sectors across Scotland aims to develop a consensus around the Council's design agenda and its emerging design governance tools.
February 2018	Planning staff and Councillors undertake a study visit to Kings Cross, London, led by the Scottish Government.	The visit served to educate Councillors on the benefits that high-quality urban design could have in West Dunbartonshire, and raised the ambitions of key Planning Committee members.
March 2018	The first Place and Design Panel sitting is held.	The design review panel enables the Council to access a range of design skills not available in-house and issue specific design advice on development and policy proposals.
September 2018	A proposed new Local Development Plan is released for consultation.	The proposed plan affords design a central role within the Council's planning policy. It facilitates the increased use of a range of formal design tools including masterplans for key sites, and contains four policies on 'creating places', to be supported by forthcoming supplementary guidance.
February 2019	Planning staff and Councillors undertake a study visit, led by the Scottish Government, to view housing projects in Manchester and Liverpool.	Planning managers wished to continue the momentum it had generated by involving key members of the Planning Committee in design matters, and this visit was arguably more reflective of West Dunbartonshire's urban context than the previous visit to Kings Cross.
September 2019	Council hosts *Place and Design: Interventions to Create Successful Places* event.	The event was attended by stakeholders from across Scotland, and forms part of the Council's endeavours to widely promote its evolving design governance regime.
March 2020	Funding for the Place and Design Panel and design officer is made permanent through approval of the 2020/21 budget by Council.	A permanent funding commitment is forthcoming despite a change in administration following the May 2017 local elections.

Dunbartonshire Council, 2014). It also serves as a material consideration for housing development applications.

The emergence of an urban design agenda at West Dunbartonshire Council in 2017 was spearheaded by a former local councillor called Patrick McGlinchey, who was a member of the Planning Committee between July 2013 and May 2017, and chair of the Infrastructure, Regeneration and Economic Development Committee between May 2014 and May 2017. McGlinchey had been working with senior planning officers to forge a more design-sensitive approach to planning, and to address the fact that West Dunbartonshire Council did not always appear to be particularly interested in design quality. He wanted to avoid the Council repeating the mistake of approving poor quality development. Explicitly recognising that pushing developers on design matters can be daunting for planning officers and councillors alike, McGlinchey nevertheless sought to build consensus by "seeing design as a means to achieve economic benefit" (The Improvement Service, 2017, p. 4). In a budget speech to Council in February 2017, McGlinchey outlined his intention "to develop [governance] structures to oversee the enhancement of design quality in the built environment" and proposed that the 2017–18 Budget included £75,000 *per annum* for three years to employ a design officer and establish a design review panel (McGlinchey, 2017).

In his speech, McGlinchey focused on the need to approve this funding expeditiously because West Dunbartonshire was "on the cusp of so many major developments" (McGlinchey, 2017), including the ambitious 'Queens Quay' regeneration project on the former John Brown's shipyard site in Clydebank. In approving McGlinchey's proposal within the budget, a majority of councillors agreed that Queens Quay was a crucial 'catalyst' that had the potential to transform the fortunes of Clydebank. One of the planning managers at West Dunbartonshire reported that, while the investment in design governance did gain majority support from Council, it was not without resistance, and one opponent argued that the funding could pay for two social workers (Planning Manager, interview 2019). The same manager reflected that the decision was thus "a really bold step by the Council, in an area of deprivation, where that money could have been used elsewhere" (Planning Manager, interview 2019), demonstrating the significant role of leadership in securing support for investment in design governance among councillors and senior officers.

A subsequent report to the Planning Committee, submitted in March 2017, sought to highlight how improvements to the built environment could enhance the lives of local residents while simultaneously addressing the area's struggling economy. The report stated that: "Good quality urban design is important to making successful places. This in turn will assist the area's future economic vitality and its well-being" (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2017a, p. 16). This dual motivation signalled West Dunbartonshire's ambition to enforce design quality standards 'in the public interest', and meant that Council planning officers could engage more robustly with urban design issues and begin to shift the culture of planning decision-making. One planning officer reflected that "it's right that we have our standards, and say 'actually this is the standard, West Dunbartonshire deserves better'", (Planning Officer, interview 2019), while a planning manager stated that the challenging social and economic conditions in West Dunbartonshire meant that the local authority had "an even more important role in creating great places" (Planning Manager, interview 2019).

The Council's funding for design governance kick started a series of initiatives that are outlined in Table 1 and discussed in the following paragraphs. A new Local Development Plan 2, initially written between October 2017 and September 2018 and currently under review by the Scottish Government, provides the basis for an increasingly proactive design policy framework premised on the links between economic regeneration and health, but also reflecting the wider turn towards 'placemaking' at the national level in Scotland (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2020c). The new plan

presents a spatial strategy predicated on delivering a number of specified regeneration sites, which are identified by a policy called "delivering our places" and are deemed necessary for "creating places which strengthen our existing communities" (p. 6). A range of policies focussed on 'creating places' are included, one of which requires development to take a design-led approach and demonstrate the Scottish Government's six qualities of successful places (Scottish Government, 2013). Another concerns green infrastructure, and links design to health by aiming to integrate the area's green network with new development. The new plan places significantly greater emphasis on the importance of urban design within decision-making than previous policy, presenting an implementation strategy which is "focussed on placemaking" (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2020c, p. 15).

The plan anticipates that several design governance tools will be used on a regular basis, including a new design review panel called the Place and Design Panel, discussed in more detail later. Also, through a policy on masterplanning and development briefs (p. 77), developers will be expected to produce masterplans for significant projects, including named regeneration sites and those within a sensitive spatial context, such as a Conservation Area. Encouragingly, the plan gives planners a stronger policy basis for the preparation or commissioning of these masterplans and development briefs. Several of these have been produced in parallel to the plan making process since 2014, and the majority have been written by private sector consultants on the Council's behalf (see Table 2).

Two of the planners we interviewed felt that the enhanced commitment to urban design contained in the emerging plan expanded their 'opportunity space' (Tiesdell & Adams, 2011). One reported how "it's given a lot more scope for us, a lot more power to the planners" (Planning Officer, interview 2019), while a manager reflected that without "a clear framework of planning policy, that sets out what the expectations are, and clear guidance … you're leaving yourself open" (Planning Manager, interview 2019).

The Place and Design Panel

The cornerstone of the Council's evolving design governance regime is the aforementioned Place and Design Panel. It was launched in August 2017 alongside the recruitment of a full-time design officer who is tasked with running the panel and providing both strategic and case-specific advice to planning officers (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2017b). Design review panels usually involve a group of experienced professionals providing 'peer-to-peer' advice on planning proposals in parallel to the standard application process (White & Chapple, 2018). Before setting up its panel, West Dunbartonshire Council gathered existing research on design review panels, including guidance produced in the 2000s by CABE, and the 2010s by its successor, the Design Council (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2019a). It also sought advice on the nature and operationalisation of design review from government, third sector and industry stakeholders across Scotland, including the Scottish Government, Architecture and Design Scotland, Glasgow and Strathclyde universities, nationally-recognised architects and planners, as well as developers operating in the area and Homes for Scotland, the powerful housebuilding industry lobbyist (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2017b, 2019a). The terms of reference that were produced, following this consultation process, envisaged that the Place and Design Panel would act as "an enabler not an obstacle maker" and "work collaboratively with developers, architects and contractors" (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2019a, p. 9).

The Place and Design Panel reviews pre-application proposals that are classified as a 'major development' or identified as key regeneration sites, and the Council's development management

Table 2. Site-specific design policy, adapted from the schedule of masterplans contained within the proposed Local Development Plan 2 (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2020c).

Date	Name	What	Status	Promoter	Produced by
2005 (revised 2010)	Lomondgate Business Park	Masterplan	Approved	Strathleven Regeneration and West Dunbartonshire Council	Private consultant
2008	Alexandria Town Centre Masterplan	Masterplan	Adopted	West Dunbartonshire Council	Private consultant
2010	Vale of Leven Industrial Estate	Green Network Enhancement Study leading to masterplan	Approved	West Dunbartonshire Council	West Dunbartonshire Council (funded by the Central Scotland Green Network Development Fund)
2014	Dumbarton Town Centre and Waterfront Revised Urban Strategy	Combined urban strategy consolidating a separate former masterplan and former design framework	Adopted	West Dunbartonshire Council	West Dunbartonshire Council, Architecture and Design Scotland, and Scottish Natural Heritage (through the Sustainable Placemaking Programme)
2014	Bowling Basin Charrette Report	Charrette report	Adopted	West Dunbartonshire Council	Private consultant
2015	Dumbarton Castle and Rock Charrette Report	Charrette leading to a masterplan	Adopted	West Dunbartonshire Council	Project team led by private consultant
2015	Clydebank Town Centre Charrette Report	Charrette leading to a development framework	Adopted	West Dunbartonshire Council	Project team led by private consultant
2016	Queens Quay Design Framework	Design framework/ masterplan	Approved	West Dunbartonshire Council	Private consultant
2016	Bowling Basin Masterplan	Masterplan	Approved	West Dunbartonshire Council and Scottish Canals	Private consultant (commissioned by Scottish Canals)
Ongoing	Queens Quay Design Codes	Design codes	Undergoing consultation	West Dunbartonshire Council	Private consultant
Ongoing	Clydebank Can Making Places Report	Further design policy and implementation work following previous charrette project	Emerging	West Dunbartonshire Council	Private consultant (through Scottish Government-funded 'Making Places' partnership between West Dunbartonshire Council and Scottish Canals)
Ongoing	Alexandria Town Centre Strategy	Town centre strategy	Emerging	West Dunbartonshire Council	Yet to be appointed
Ongoing	City Deal: Esso Bowling and Scott's Yard	Development Framework	Emerging	West Dunbartonshire Council	Yet to be appointed

officers meet regularly with the design officer to decide what forthcoming proposals should be reviewed (Planning Manager, interview 2019). The Panel also comments on draft planning policy, design guidance and masterplans produced in-house by Council officers or by external private consultants on the Council's behalf. The format of Panel meetings is semi-formal. Typically, a presentation is made by the proponents, usually the project architect or a Council officer if the topic of discussion is a draft policy or plan, before panellists are invited to discuss the scheme with the proponent in a workshop-like setting. The panellists comprise a pool of over 70 built environment professionals from a range of sectors and disciplines who responded to an advertising campaign in early 2018 (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2019a), or who are subsequently added to the pool to fill a recognised skills gap. They include practising architects and landscape architects, planning and urban design consultants, conservation and heritage consultants, civil and environmental engineers, university academics, and developers. The panellists are invited to attend the panel in rotation on a voluntary basis, and each panel meeting is usually attended by a minimum of four panellists. In addition to the presenting design team, Council officers involved in the project may attend to highlight relevant policy considerations or topics which, from the Council's perspective, require the Panel's attention. The Council's design officer acts as a facilitator during Panel sittings (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2019a). Although it is conventional for design review panels to comprise design experts, notable in the context of this paper is the fact that panellists do not include members of the public. A "tension between 'expert' advice and local 'democracy'" (Punter, 2011, p. 185) remains a feature of design review panels, in West Dunbartonshire and elsewhere, and brings into focus the influence of private actors within the sphere of design governance.

The remit of the Place and Design Panel is advisory only and usually no votes are taken on the outcome of the Panel's discussions, although a vote can be held if necessary for forming a consensus view (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2019a). A report is produced by the Council's design officer soon after each meeting. This is shared with the presenters who attended the Panel, the Panel members and local authority staff responsible for the project. It is also submitted to the elected members of the Council's Planning Committee when a corresponding planning application is to be considered. The Council's development management officers are not obliged to follow the Panel's advice when determining a planning application or submitting a recommendation to the Planning Committee, but the written summary of the Panel's deliberations is treated as a 'material consideration' in the assessment of planning applications. This is written into the proposed Local Development Plan 2 through a dedicated policy on the Place and Design Panel, which also states that applicants will be expected to show how they have responded to the Panel's recommendations (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2020c). Although the Panel is still in its infancy, its impact is already being felt on some of the strategic projects underway in West Dunbartonshire. One member of a presenting team explained that the Panel's advice was an important early intervention in the design process that enabled changes to be made before too many design decisions had been taken (Private Sector Consultant, interview 2019). In particular, the participant noted that the Panel's comments led to a more prominent gateway being established on the project and an additional means of pedestrian access being introduced.

The Place and Design Panel offers the Council access to expertise that is otherwise unavailable in-house, thus increasing the 'opportunity space' (Tiesdell & Adams, 2011) for discussions about design, not only on specific planning applications but also on Council policy and guidance. West Dunbartonshire Council's is an effective model in an area which does not have the development pressures to support the introduction of fees for design advice, as has occurred in more affluent parts of England, for example (Carmona, 2019c; White et al., 2020). One of the planning managers reflected that being able to hold debates about design at a panel, before the planning application

process started in earnest, allowed for difficult issues to be resolved in advance of 'high-risk' decisions being made by the Planning Committee. "If we can influence it, before it hits that … ", the planning manager explained, " … it can make a difference" (Planning Manager, interview 2019). At the same time, the Panel also provides the panellists, many of whom are private sector actors, with a more powerful voice within the planning decision-making process. Another planning manager suggested that this increased the Council's awareness about 'viability' from "people that work in the real world" (Planning Manager, interview 2019).

A New Culture of Design-Aware Decision-Making

Despite the ongoing challenges associated with fiscal austerity and a change from a Labour majority to an SNP-led minority coalition during the May 2017 local elections, West Dunbartonshire Council voted in March 2020 to make its £75,000 *per annum* funding for design governance permanent (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2020b). As a result, the roles and responsibilities of the Place and Design Panel have been written into the Local Development Plan 2 (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2020c, p. 77) and the Council's 2020/21 budget commits to establish "the Place and Design Panel as a permanent feature to help deliver regeneration and increase economic vitality" (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2020b, p. 22). This economic justification hints at a rhetorical shift in priority since the Panel's inception, when it had been more widely characterised as delivering both economic and health and wellbeing benefits. Nevertheless, the fact that the budget was extended with a new political party in power suggests that design governance has been accepted into the culture of planning decision-making in a relatively short period of time.

The acceptance was due, in part, to the work of planning officers who acted as 'design champions' in meetings with other local authority officers and senior managers. This research demonstrates that such design leadership, which is lacking in many UK local authorities (Gulliver & Tolson, 2014; White et al., 2020), is a key part of successful design governance. As one planning manager explained, there was a focus on "breaking down barriers with other departments and working with them, to say, 'yes you need to deliver 'x' amount of Council houses, but why can't that be excellent quality housing?'" (Planning Manager, interview 2019). Another planning official reflected that the Council's relatively small size facilitated this approach because of the myriad opportunities there are to influence the work of other departments and, crucially, access senior managers (Planning Officer, interview 2019). For instance, gaining support from the Housing team was said to be critical because it has an active role in delivering new development. The Council plans to supply 356 new Council homes directly between 2018 and 2022 (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2020d), and a planning manager reported how "we've really noticed the difference in the attitude of our housing colleagues, they're actually coming to us and asking for things to go to the Panel" (Planning Manager, interview 2019).

Another important facet of the Council's design governance agenda has been securing the support of local councillors who ultimately have the power to decide whether to grant planning permission or approve design policy and supplementary design guidance. Recognising that they "had to do a bit of work at the beginning to get them on board" (Planning Officer, interview 2019), one of the planning officers explained that the Council organised training sessions to address the design skills gap among elected councillors. As a further capacity building mechanism, a group of planning officers and councillors participated in a February 2018 study visit to the well-known regeneration project at Kings Cross in London (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2018b). Despite initially being sceptical about the justification for such a trip, one councillor who participated felt

that "there's actually a really good reason why . . . . you can say 'there's things from that we can bring to our own area'" (Councillor, interview 2019). While the parallels between a multi-billion pound regeneration project in London and a small local authority in the west of Scotland might be questionable, the visit nevertheless appeared to be inspiring and also led to a subsequent visit to an arguably more comparable series of housing-led regeneration projects in Manchester and Liverpool a year later in February 2019 (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2019b).

To further improve the ways in which elected members receive information about urban design, West Dunbartonshire Council has also started to hold detailed design briefings for councillors about major development proposals at the pre-application stage. This allows councillors to highlight any issues they might have at an early stage of the planning process (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2018b). It also provides officers with an opportunity to offer further advice or education on design matters on a case-by-case basis, in addition to the reports of the Place and Design Panel. The briefing tool was initially trialled in late 2014 and has been used regularly since 2017. In 2018, the local authority won a Scottish Award for Quality in Planning, a programme run by the Scottish Government, for the contribution that the briefings have made to shaping design quality and delivery (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2019b). One of the councillors explained how the briefings had not only enhanced their understanding of design but also provided an early opportunity to ask questions: "you can say 'what about this, how does that work, why is that there?' You get it in before it all goes to committee. I think it's a great thing, it educates councillors as well" (Councillor, interview 2019). Developers also saw value in the briefing process, and one explained that "it was good for us because it flagged up things that were important to elected members" (Developer, interview 2019).

In addition to the steps taken within West Dunbartonshire Council to provide planning staff and elected members with better information and education on matters of urban design, the Council has also sought to alter how its planning and development decision-making practices are perceived by developers. A culture change is underway that encourages development management officers to negotiate more assertively with developers rather than allowing poorly-designed proposals to pass smoothly through the planning application process, as frequently happened in the past. A development management officer confirmed that "the culture is you can be quite candid with developers. Not to the point where you're rude, but if something doesn't work, you should be able to say so" (Planning Officer, interview 2019). A planning manager also explained that the Council's efforts to change the culture of planning and design decision-making have led to changes in the way recruitment decisions are made. The planning team now look for "the right personalities, people with drive, enthusiasm and energy", and the "strength of character to say 'no, we're not accepting that'" (Planning Manager, interview 2019), to support the delivery of the Council's urban design ambitions. Driven by champions within the planning service and supported by emerging local planning policy, the Council has tried to counteract the impact of a broader trend towards proceduralism within planning (Slade et al., 2019) by empowering its planners and providing the space for public interest concerns around urban design to be considered and debated.

The same planning manager spoke of their confidence that the culture change at West Dunbartonshire Council is beginning to impact the attitudes of developers and, in particular, is causing them to think more carefully about design quality when submitting a planning application. The manager stated that "I'm definitely seeing the difference now and I think that's reflected in the quality of applications that we're having in for some of our bigger sites" (Planning Manager, interview 2019). A developer who has experienced how the Panel and associated design governance processes work first-hand remarked that "[West Dunbartonshire Council are] very robust in

their statements about what they wanted to see in order to get planning permission" (Developer, interview 2019).

Finally, West Dunbartonshire Council's planning officers have actively promoted their new 'design-aware' approach to planning within the close-knit professional built environment community in Scotland. Social media has played a key role in this, as one planning manager explained: "we're doing lots on social media about raising the profile of planning and what we do, and selling that we're all about quality" (Planning Manager, interview 2019). In 2019, the Council also hosted a well-attended event entitled *Place and Design: Interventions to Create Successful Places* (Partners in Planning, 2019). This involved a variety of speakers reflecting on aspects of the Council's design governance agenda for an audience of stakeholders from across Scotland, including practitioners from other local authorities, government agencies, consultancy firms, developers and academics.

Discussion: Design Governance in the Public Interest?

The findings presented in this paper illustrate the innovative ways in which West Dunbartonshire Council has identified urban design as a strategic priority during a time when the impacts of austerity mean local authorities are "doing more with less" (Hambleton & Howard, 2013, p. 48). This is being executed via the design governance tools described in previous paragraphs and summarised in Tables 1 and Tables 3 (below). To deliver this agenda, West Dunbartonshire Council has prioritised the need for better collaboration, both internally within the Council, between professional staff and elected councillors, and externally with private sector professionals. In this respect, West Dunbartonshire Council has been able to gain access to largely cost-free skills and capacity while, at the same time, challenging developers to 'up their game' when seeking planning permission.

We argue that the evolution of West Dunbartonshire's design governance agenda signifies a significant culture change which, as White (2015) has argued elsewhere, is necessary if urban design is to be established as a long-term local priority. On the one hand, the authority's collaborative ethos has increased the capacity for more informed and design-aware decision-making, and has given planning staff the confidence to assert greater influence over development outcomes. This

Table 3. The tools of design governance used by West Dunbartonshire Council, categorised in accordance with Carmona's (2017, p. 31) formal/informal typology.

Tool	Formal/Informal	Category
Local Development Plan policy	Formal	Guidance
Supplementary design guidance	Formal	Guidance
Site-specific design policy, including masterplans (used for sites such as Queens Quay, Clydebank, and Dumbarton High Street and Waterfront), and design codes (which are being produced for Queens Quay)	Formal	Guidance
Planning consent	Formal	Control
Research and consultation with nationwide stakeholders prior to establishing the Place and Design Panel	Informal	Evidence
Study visits to London, Liverpool and Manchester by planners and elected Councillors	Informal	Evidence and knowledge
Design training for Councillors	Informal	Knowledge
Briefings to Councillors on design matters during the pre-application process	Informal	Knowledge
Inter-departmental collaboration through the work of internal design champions	Informal	Knowledge and promotion
Promotion of the Council's design governance agenda through social media and nationwide stakeholder events	Informal	Knowledge and promotion
Place and Design Panel	Informal	Evaluation

arguably stands in contrast to the experience of planners elsewhere in Scotland (James & Tolson, 2020) amid a UK-wide trend towards proceduralism and away from the execution of independent judgment (Slade et al., 2019). On the other hand, it has meant that private sector developers and consultants operating in West Dunbartonshire now have more opportunities to influence the planning decision-making process directly, especially through the Place and Design Panel but also through the plan and policy-making process. As stated earlier, and like many local authorities in the UK struggling under the conditions of fiscal austerity (Parker et al., 2018; Slade et al., 2019; Wargent et al., 2020), West Dunbartonshire has outsourced the production of local masterplanning initiatives associated with the new Local Development Plan 2 to private consultants, some of whom also act as panellists for the Place and Design Panel (see Table 2).

The rationale for employing private consultants for their expertise or inviting them to volunteer their time on a design panel is undoubtedly well-intentioned. Nevertheless, a comment by one of the local authority's planning managers, quoted earlier in the paper – that private sector actors provide insights into the 'real world' – suggests that, despite the authority's powerful regulatory function, the planner still felt that the final decisions about design are ultimately determined by economic viability and therefore rest with developers. With this in mind, we contend that the public-private relationship in design governance demands more scrutiny than it has hitherto received.

The composition of West Dunbartonshire's Place and Design Panel is a case-in-point and aptly demonstrates the 'fuzzy' boundary between public and private actors and the professional activities within which they are engaged. Design review is a contested process and is heavily shaped by its participants, as reviewers display a variety of attitudes and perceptions towards both design and process (Black, 2019). Panellists fulfil a quasi-public role while participating in design review as, strictly speaking, their remit is to act in the public interest by providing constructive and independent design advice. This role is complicated, however, by the differing motivations of each individual panellist, which may include a combination of business interests, personal development and altruism. By way of example, a planning manager noted that several developers currently involved in pre-application discussions with the Council had also expressed an interest in sitting on the Panel (Planning Manager, interview 2019). In another example, over the last five years, one local architectural practice has organised public engagement events for the Council, produced a masterplan for a key regeneration site and been commissioned to write the design codes and design one of the first projects on another major regeneration site. Asked about this, a Council planning manager told us that "working with [company name] is an experience in itself, because they're all about quality. That empowered us to say, 'we need to get something of equal quality'" (Planning Manager, interview 2019).

The planning manager's reflections point to the Council's desire to deliver better quality development in the public interest. Yet, their reflections do nevertheless demonstrate that public sector planners are developing ever-closer working relationships with private sector partners. This echoes Linovski's finding that authorities form close ties with "friendly firms" (2019, p. 1694) that move fluidly between contracts for the public and private sector. The case of West Dunbartonshire Council therefore illustrates not only the innovative ways that a small local authority has adopted a more design-aware approach to planning decision-making, but also the growing influence that non-state actors have acquired during this process.

The privatisation of planning practices, whether well-intentioned or not, has significant repercussions for how public values are understood and negotiated (Linovski, 2019; Slade et al., 2019). This challenges us to question the interpretation of design governance as shaping "processes and outcomes in a defined *public interest*" (Carmona, 2016, p. 705) (our italics). Yet, while we should

view this public-private realignment through a critical lens, we must also recognise that it is through closer collaboration with the private sector that West Dunbartonshire Council has been able to introduce tools like the Place and Design Panel and foster a wider culture change within the local authority. With this in mind, we propose that the case study raises three key implications for local planning authorities pursuing 'the public interest' through design governance.

First, the growing prominence of non-state actors within design governance has significant accountability and transparency implications (Parker et al., 2018). The weight that West Dunbartonshire Council places on the views of Place and Design Panel members, the outsourcing of policy writing, and close relationships forged with private sector consultants, demonstrates how non-state actors can exert influence on the public functions of the local authority. Given the corporatist culture of the small and highly professionalised national planning community in Scotland (Inch, 2018), this is a cause for concern. While West Dunbartonshire's Place and Design Panel operates a code of conduct that includes provisions for managing conflicts of interest (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2019a, p. 31), the blurring of the boundaries between public and private activities means conflicts are perhaps inevitable if not overt, especially when a limited number of private consultants regularly work for local authorities and developers simultaneously. The scenario of a private planning consultant producing policy outsourced by a local authority, while that very same consultancy continues to seek business from local developers and eventually designs a project for a site covered by policy of its own making, might prove difficult to prevent (Cuthbert, 2017; Wargent et al., 2020).

Second, planning authorities are increasingly reliant upon external design expertise in a way that is likely to further undermine public sector capacity in the long term, resulting in a "relationship of critical dependence with the private sector" (Wargent et al., 2020, p. 193). As design review panels are increasingly used by local planning authorities to fill design skills gaps (Carmona & Giordano, 2017), the voluntary role of the panellists introduces an uncomfortable power dynamic whereby local planning authorities are beholden to the assistance of private sector actors to fulfil their regulatory duties. The motivations of these actors to volunteer their time, as we have suggested earlier, might very well be driven by commercial interests rather than notions of the wider 'public good'. Such dependence is likely to be reinforced as the role of the private sector in planning continues to grow across the sector (Kenny, 2019) and the recruitment of specialist public sector planning staff, such as urban designers, remains a low budgetary priority in the context of austerity (Wargent et al., 2020). This also raises a further question about how the public sector can ensure the supply of leaders (Gulliver & Tolson, 2014; Hambleton & Howard, 2013) necessary for delivering well-designed places in the future.

Third, while an emphasis on collaboration and negotiation with private sector actors provides potentially constructive opportunities for shaping developer behaviour (Inch, 2018; Linovski, 2015), an over-reliance on external stakeholders can also have the opposite effect and leave local authorities vulnerable when the public and private parties fundamentally disagree. Reflecting the trajectory of planning in Scotland and the UK, Ryan argues that achieving urban design goals will always be challenging in societies where "urban form is governed by the negotiation of powerful capital interests with comparatively weak local government" (2017, p. 148). Discretionary design governance tools, such as a design review panel, thus rely heavily on the mutual cooperation of stakeholders who, as noted earlier, might have differing motivations. For example, if a developer or their design consultants believe that issues of urban design addressed by a design review panel are likely to be downplayed when a decision is required from elected councillors, the developer is much less likely to engage positively with the local authority on matters of urban design. In this context, West

Dunbartonshire Council's emphasis on improving the design awareness skills of its elected coun-cillors may therefore prove to be well targeted.

Carmona (2016, p. 722) argues that, for the purpose of conceptualising design governance, it can be assumed that "private organizations engaged in such processes effectively assume the role of a pseudo-public authority within their realms of influence". Yet, as Linovski (2015) found and our own research confirmed, "with little public sector capacity, the ideal of design as a collaborative process was weighted heavily toward private sector expertise" (p. 462). Although practices of collaboration, negotiation and partnership are now common within planning, the concept of partnership "presumes common ground where public and private interests may converge" (Lovering, 2010, p. 239). This, of course, cannot be taken for granted given the existence of competing and evolving understandings of how planning should fulfil the public interest (Murphy & Fox-Rogers, 2015; Slade et al., 2019). Indeed, the evidence presented in this paper suggests that the complexity of the relationships between public and private actors requires a deeper considera-tion of their respective motivations to fully appreciate how a "defined public interest" (Carmona, 2016, p. 705) is understood and ultimately served by design governance.

Conclusion

In this paper we have explored the emergence of a design governance agenda in West Dunbartonshire, a small local authority located in the west of Scotland. The paper began with an introduction to the concept of 'design governance' (Carmona, 2016) and considered the challenges associated with delivering a local authority urban design agenda in an era of fiscal austerity and expanding neoliberal governance practices that have deepened the private sector's influence over planning in the UK. We argued that producing well-designed places at the local level in Scotland remains a challenge, as it does in many other jurisdictions, where ambitious national objectives are difficult for fiscally-constrained and resource-starved local planning authorities to deliver upon. We then introduced our methodology and the single case study of West Dunbartonshire Council, before tracing the evolution of a design governance agenda which, we contend, has generated a new culture of design-aware planning decision-making, albeit one that is threatened by the growing privatisation of planning and its diminution of the public interest.

Our findings highlight the potential of micro-scale cultural changes to support local authorities in their pursuit of higher quality design outcomes through discretionary planning practices. By using design-oriented policy tools, working collaboratively with internal and external stakeholders on design matters, and empowering planners to negotiate for higher quality design, West Dunbartonshire Council has sought to change the way it is perceived by developers in the long-term. Initial findings indicate that the desired changes are beginning to take place. Our research also suggests, however, that the overlapping roles of public and private sector actors within urban design practice necessitates greater scrutiny (Linovski, 2015). Although the commitment of private urban design consultants to creating well-designed places might, in many instances, be genuine, these actors are also faced with the requirement to secure future business from developers whose priorities are driven more singularly by economic viability. Given the business interests of private actors, common ground with the public sector should not be taken for granted. The differing and sometimes competing interests of each party precludes any straightforward and shared under-standing of the meaning of good design or a well-designed place (Linovski, 2015).

It is our contention that the concept of design governance and future research on urban design practice must approach the interests and influence of the various actors responsible for design

processes and outcomes more critically, and ask how the public interest is being upheld, while the capacity and power of local planning authorities appears to be weakening. Our case study demonstrates how the leadership of design champions has been crucial in securing wider support for design governance within a local authority. To avoid the positive outcome we observed in West Dunbartonshire being a 'one off', it is our view that the range of skills that planners and local councillors bring to their work need widening (White et al., 2020), whether that is better awareness of good design principles and process or a better understanding of property markets and their influence on the planning system (Adams & Tiesdell, 2010). We share Parker et al.'s (2020) contention that to achieve such outcomes, stronger relationships must be forged between professional bodies, the practice community and universities, to support the planning profession to fulfil its duty to the public. While this paper has been primarily concerned with design governance and new processes that are still in their infancy in West Dunbartonshire, further research is necessary to understand the outcomes from these new practices in Scotland and within other planning contexts, while recognising that the pursuit of the public interest is never straightforward.

Note

1. The Design Commission for Wales and the Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment in Northern Ireland also continue to operate.

Acknowledgments

Disclosure statement

West Dunbartonshire Council contributes 10% of the funding to Grant ES/P000681/1 and is a collaborative partner in the associated studentship.
    There are no other competing interests to declare.

Funding

Notes on contributors

James T. White is Senior Lecturer in Urban Design at the University of Glasgow. He studied planning and urban design at Cardiff University before completing his doctoral studies at the University of British Columbia. His research focuses on the theory and application of design governance. James is a Chartered Town Planner. @DrJTWhite.

Robert Richardson is a doctoral researcher in Urban Studies and is the recipient of an ESRC Collaborative Scholarship. Robert studied Geography at the University of Cambridge and Planning and Real Estate Development at the University of Glasgow. His doctoral research focuses on the delivery of urban design quality through the local planning system. @RichardsonRobK.

ORCID

Robert Richardson http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6232-1323
James T. White http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6315-3165

References

Adams, D., & Tiesdell, S. (2010). Planners as market actors: Rethinking state-market relations in land and property. *Planning Theory and Practice*, *11*(2), 187–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649351003759631

Allmendinger, P., & Haughton, G. (2012). Post-political spatial planning in England: A crisis of consensus? *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *37*(1), 89–103. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2011.00468.x

Architecture and Design Scotland, Scottish Government, & NHS Scotland. (2015). *Detailed guide: Why do we need a Place Standard?* Retrieved June 25, 2020, from https://www.placestandard.scot/guide/full

Bentley, I. (1999). *Urban transformations: Power, people and urban design*. Routledge.

Beveridge, C., Biberbach, P., & Hamilton, J. (2016). *Empowering planning to deliver great places: An independent review of the Scottish planning system*. Scottish Government. https://www.gov.scot/publications/empowering-planning-to-deliver-great-places/

Birrell, J. (2018). *Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS) survey on the use of shared services and planning skills across Scotland*. Heads of Planning Scotland. https://hopscotland.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/final-report-skills-and-shared-services-survey-october-2018.pdf

Black, P. (2019). Beauty in the eye of the design reviewer: The contested nature of UK design review. *Journal of Urban Design*, *24*(4), 556–574. https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2018.1511973

Calvert, R. (2021). *20 minute neighbourhoods: Implementing 20 minute neighbourhoods in planning policy and practice*. Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland. https://www.rtpi.org.uk/research/2021/march/20-minute-neighbourhoods/

Campbell, H. (2002). Planning: An idea of value. *Town Planning Review*, *73*(3), 271–288. https://doi.org/10.3828/tpr.73.3.3

Campbell, H., & Marshall, R. (2002). Utilitarianism's bad breath? A re-evaluation of the public interest justification for planning. *Planning Theory*, *1*(2), 163–187. https://doi.org/10.1177/147309520200100205

Carmona, M. (2016). Design governance: Theorizing an urban design sub-field. *Journal of Urban Design*, *21*(6), 705–730. https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2016.1234337

Carmona, M. (2017). The formal and informal tools of design governance. *Journal of Urban Design*, *22*(1), 1–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2016.1234338

Carmona, M. (2019a). Design review in the UK. *Journal of Urban Design*, *24*(4), 519–522. https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2019.1577582

Carmona, M. (2019b). Place value: Place quality and its impact on health, social, economic and environmental outcomes. *Journal of Urban Design*, *24*(1), 1–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2018.1472523

Carmona, M. (2019c). Marketizing the governance of design: Design review in England. *Journal of Urban Design*, *24*(4), 523–525. https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2018.1533373

Carmona, M., De Magalhaes, C., & Natarajan, L. (2016). *Design governance: The CABE experiment*. Routledge.

Carmona, M., & Giordano, V. (2017). *Design skills in English local authorities*. Urban Design Group. http://www.udg.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Design_Skills_in_Local_Authorities_2017_final_draft.pdf

Clifford, B., & Tewdwr-Jones, M. (2013). *The collaborating planner? Practitioners in the neoliberal age*. Policy Press.

Curtis, P., & King, M (2010, October 7). Government's "bonfire of the quangos" plan will cost as much as it saves. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/oct/07/quangos-government-multibillion-pound-bill

Cuthbert, A. (2017). Urban decay and regeneration: Context and issues. *Journal of Urban Design*, *22*(2), 140–143. https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2017.1288873

Finlay, R. J. (2006). Urbanisation and industrialisation: West Dunbartonshire since 1750. In A. Brown (Ed.), *Changing identities, ancient roots: The history of West Dunbartonshire from earliest times* (pp. 67–91). Edinburgh University Press.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2001). *Making social science matter: Why social enquiry fails and how it can succeed again*. Cambridge University Press.

Goldsmith, W. G. (2020). Urban planning, austerity, and resistance. *International Planning Studies*, *25*(1), 122–127. https://doi.org/10.1080/13563475.2019.1703655

Gospodini, A. (2002). European cities in competition and the new 'uses' of urban design. *Journal of Urban Design*, *7*(1), 59–73, https://doi.org/10.1080/13574800220129231

Grant, J. L. (2009). Experiential planning: A practitioner's account of Vancouver's success. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *73*(3), 358–370. https://doi.org/10.1080/01944360902965875

Gray, M., & Barford, A. (2018). The depths of the cuts: The uneven geography of local government austerity. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, *11*(3), 541–563. https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsy019

Gulliver, S., & Tolson, S. (2014). *Delivering great places to live: 10 propositions aimed at transforming placemaking in Scotland*. University of Glasgow & RICS. https://scotland.landscapeinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Creating-and-Delivering-Great-Places-to-Live.pdf

Hack, G. (2017). The curious subject of design 'governance'. *Journal of Urban Design*, *22*(1), 41–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2017.1283812

Hambleton, R., & Howard, J. (2013). Place-based leadership and public service innovation. *Local Government Studies*, *39*(1), 47–70. https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2012.693076

Hastings, A., Bailey, N., Bramley, G., & Gannon, M. (2017). Austerity urbanism in England: The 'regressive redistribution' of local government services and the impact on the poor and marginalised. *Environment and Planning A*, *49*(9), 2007–2024. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X17714797

Improvement Service. (2017). *Lead practice paper: The tools to deliver successful places*. https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/9903/tools-successful-places-paper.pdf

Inch, A. (2018). 'Opening for business'? Neoliberalism and the cultural politics of modernising planning in Scotland. *Urban Studies*, *55*(5), 1076–1092. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098016684731

James, G., & Tolson, S. (2020). *Delivering more homes and better places*. UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence. https://housingevidence.ac.uk/publications/delivering-more-homes-and-better-places/

Kenny, T. (2019). *Resourcing public planning: Five stories about local authority planning in England and recommendation for the next chapter*. Royal Town Planning Institute. https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/5906/resourcingpublicplanning2019.pdf

Kordas, M. S. (2020). *Whose vision, whose places, whose future?: Charrettes in the Scottish Planning System*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Glasgow]. Enlighten. http://theses.gla.ac.uk/81322/

Linovski, O. (2015). Politics of expertise: Constructing professional design knowledge in the public and private sectors. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, *36*(4), 451–464. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X15620656

Linovski, O. (2019). Shifting agendas: Private consultants and public planning policy. *Urban Affairs Review*, *55*(6), 1666–1701. https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087417752475

Lobao, L., Gray, M., Cox, K., & Kitson, M. (2018). The shrinking state? Understanding the assault on the public sector. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, *11*(3), 289–408. https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsy026

Lovering, J. (2010). Will the recession prove to be a turning point in planning and urban development thinking? *International Planning Studies*, *15*(3), 227–243. https://doi.org/10.1080/13563475.2010.509476

Lowndes, V., & Gardner, A. (2016). Local governance under the Conservatives: Super-austerity, devolution and the 'smarter. *State'. Local Government Studies*, *42*(3), 357–375. https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2016.1150837

Madgin, R. (2013). A town without memory? Inferring the industrial past: Clydebank re-built, 1941–2013. In C. Zimmerman (Ed.), *Industrial cities: History and future* (pp. 283–304). Campus Verlag.

McGlinchey, P. (2017). *West Dunbartonshire Council budget speech 2017 – Deputy Leader Patrick McGlinchey*. West Dunbartonshire Council Labour Group. https://wdclabourgroup.wordpress.com/2017/02/26/wdc-budget-speech-2017-deputy-leader-patrick-mcglinchey/

Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment. (2017). *Information booklet*. Department for Communities. https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/communities/mag-booklet-sep-2017.pdf

Murphy, E., & Fox-Rogers, L. (2015). Perceptions of the common good in planning. *Cities*, *42*(B), 231–241. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2014.07.008

Parker, G., Street, E., & Wargent, M. (2018). The rise of the private sector in fragmentary planning in England. *Planning Theory & Practice*, *19*(5), 734–750. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2018.1532529

Parker, G., Wargent, M., Linovski, O., Schoneboom, A., Gunn, S., Slade, D., Odeleye, N.-D., Maidment, C., Shepherd, E., Doak, J., Elliot, T., Nicholls, V., Street, E., Dobson, M., Platts, S., & Tasan-Kok, T. (2020). The future of the planning profession. *Planning Theory & Practice*, *21*(3), 453–480. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357. 2020.1776014

Partners in Planning. (2019). *Place and design: Interventions to create successful places*. https://www.partnersin planning.scot/learn/urban-design/place-and-design-interventions-to-create-successful-places

Peck, J. (2012). Austerity urbanism: American cities under extreme economy. *City*, *16*(6), 626–655. https://doi. org/10.1080/13604813.2012.734071

Ponzini, D. (2016). Introduction: Crisis and renewal of contemporary urban planning. *European Planning Studies*, *24*(7), 1237–1245. https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2016.1168782

Porter, L., & Shaw, K (Eds.). (2009). *Whose urban renaissance? An international comparison of urban regeneration strategies*. Routledge.

Punter, J. (2010a). Wales: An introduction. In J. Punter (Ed.), *Urban design and the British urban renaissance* (pp. 281–302). Routledge.

Punter, J. (2010b). The Celtic capitals: An introduction. In J. Punter (Ed.), *Urban design and the British urban renaissance* (pp. 241–280). Routledge.

Punter, J. (2010c). Reflecting on urban design achievements in a decade of urban renaissance. In J. Punter (Ed.), *Urban design and the British urban renaissance* (pp. 323–352). Routledge.

Punter, J. (2011). Design review – an effective means of raising design quality? In S. Tiesdell & D. Adams (Eds.), *Urban design in the real estate development process* (pp. 182–198). Wiley-Blackwell.

Royal Town Planning Institute. (2016). *Code of professional conduct*. https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/1936/code-of-conduct-newcover2017.pdf

Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland. (2019). *Resourcing the planning system: Key trends and findings 2019*. https://www.rtpi.org.uk/research/2019/april/resourcing-the-planning-system-key-trends-and-findings -2019/

Ryan, B. D. (2017). Urban design in an age of recessions: Reflections on a sobered discipline. *Journal of Urban Design*, *22*(2), 147–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2017.1288874

Savini, F., & Raco, M. (2019). The rise of a new urban technocracy. In M. Raco & F. Savini (Eds.), *Planning and knowledge: How new forms of technocracy are shaping contemporary cities* (pp. 3–17). Policy Press.

Scottish Government. (2013). *Creating places: A policy statement on architecture and place in Scotland*. https:// www.gov.scot/publications/creating-places-policy-statement-architecture-place-scotland/

Scottish Government. (2019). *Place principle: Introduction*. Retrieved February 26, 2021, from https://www.gov. scot/publications/place-principle-introduction/

Scottish Government. (2020a). *Fourth national planning framework: Position statement*. https://www.gov.scot/ publications/scotlands-fourth-national-planning-framework-position-statement/

Scottish Government. (2020b). *Growing the economy*. Retrieved June 25, 2020, from https://www.gov.scot/ policies/economic-growth/inclusive-growth/

Scottish Government. (2020c). *The Scottish index of multiple deprivation 2020: Introduction*. https://www.gov. scot/publications/scottish-index-multiple-deprivation-2020/

Slade, D., Gunn, S., & Schoneboom, A. (2019). *Serving the public interest? The reorganisation of UK planning services in an era of reluctant outsourcing*. Royal Town Planning Institute. https://www.rtpi.org.uk/research/ 2019/january/serving-the-public-interest-uk-planning-services-in-an-age-of-outsourcing/

Sturzaker, J., & Lord, A. (2018). Fear: An underexplored motivation for planners' behaviour? *Planning Practice and Research*, *33*(4), 359–371. https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2017.1378982

Tiesdell, S., & Adams, D. (2011). Real estate development, urban design and the tools approach to public policy. In S. Tiesdell & D. Adams (Eds.), *Urban design and the real estate development process* (pp. 1–33). Wiley-Blackwell.

Tulumello, S., Saija, L., & Inch, A. (2020). Planning amid crisis and austerity: In, against and beyond the contemporary conjuncture. *International Planning Studies*, *25*(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1080/13563475. 2019.1704404

Urban Task Force. (1999) . *Towards an urban renaissance*. Spon.

Wargent, M., Parker, G., & Street, E. (2020). Public-private entanglements: Consultant use by local planning authorities in England. *European Planning Studies*, *28*(1), 192–210. https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019. 1677565

West Dunbartonshire Council. (2010). *Local plan*. https://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/media/811177/west_dun bartonshire_local_plan_-_web.pdf

West Dunbartonshire Council. (2014). *Residential development: Principles for good design*. https://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/media/4312635/residential-development-principles-for-good-design-local-development-plan-proposed-plan-planning-guidance-april-2014.pdf

West Dunbartonshire Council. (2015). *Delivering for the future 2015/16: Strategic budget and capital plan*. https://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/media/4271560/delivering_for_the_future.pdf

West Dunbartonshire Council. (2016a). *Planning performance framework 2016*. https://hopscotland.org.uk/publications/planning-performance-framework-reports/

West Dunbartonshire Council. (2016b). *Local development plan (proposed plan)*. https://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/media/4311810/ldp-proposed-plan-nov-2016.pdf

West Dunbartonshire Council. (2017a). *Report by the strategic lead- regulatory, to planning committee, 29 March 2017: West Dunbartonshire urban design panel*. https://wdccmis.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/cmis5/Meetings/tabid/73/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/410/Meeting/7836/Committee/507/Default.aspx

West Dunbartonshire Council. (2017b). *Report by the strategic lead- regulatory, to planning committee, 20 December 2017: Place and design panel terms of reference and governance*. https://wdccmis.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/cmis5/Meetings/tabid/73/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/410/Meeting/8045/Committee/539/Default.aspx

West Dunbartonshire Council. (2018a). *West Dunbartonshire by numbers 2018*. https://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/media/4315785/se-profile-2018.pdf

West Dunbartonshire Council. (2018b). *Planning performance framework 2018*. https://hopscotland.org.uk/publications/planning-performance-framework-reports/

West Dunbartonshire Council. (2019a). *Place and design panel: Terms of reference and governance*. https://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/media/4317717/x-planning-building-standards-place-and-design-officer-terms-of-reference-and-governance-place-and-design-panel-terms-of-reference-and-governance-revised-2019.pdf

West Dunbartonshire Council. (2019b). *Planning performance framework 2019*. https://hopscotland.org.uk/publications/planning-performance-framework-reports/

West Dunbartonshire Council. (2020a). *Transforming our council: Budget prioritisation 2020*. https://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/media/4317631/transforming-our-council-web-version.pdf

West Dunbartonshire Council. (2020b). *West Dunbartonshire Council minutes 4 March 2020*. https://wdccmis.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/cmis5/Meetings/tabid/73/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/410/Meeting/8107/Committee/543/Default.aspx

West Dunbartonshire Council. (2020c). *Local development plan 2*. https://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/media/4319309/wdc_ldp2_2020_web-26.pdf

West Dunbartonshire Council. (2020d). *New council homes*. Retrieved June 25, 2020, from https://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/new-council-homes/

White, J. T. (2015). Future directions in urban design as public policy: Reassessing best practice principles for design review and development management. *Journal of Urban Design*, *20*(3), 325–348. https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2015.1031212

White, J. T., & Chapple, H. (2018). Beyond design review: Collaborating to create well-designed places in Scotland. *Journal of Urban Design*, *24*(4), 597–604. https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2018.1529537

White, J. T., Kenny, T., Samuel, F., Foye, C., James, G., & Serin, B (2020). *Delivering design value: The housing design quality conundrum*. UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence. https://housingevidence.ac.uk/publications/delivering-design-value-the-housing-design-quality-conundrum/