

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Fact-finding visit to The Park Ecovillage at Findhorn

Monday 31st March 2025



Introduction

The Committee's visit to the [The Park Ecovillage at Findhorn](#) presented an opportunity for members to see examples of the practical application of a number of housing technologies. The Committee anticipates having a role in scrutinising the revised Climate Change Plan and the forthcoming Heat in Buildings Bill later in 2025.

Housing at Findhorn takes a 'fabric first' approach and uses low carbon heating such as air source pumps in addition to the use of solar energy and solar thermal systems.

The community has also been supported by the Rural and Islands Housing Fund in developing affordable housing and has invested considerable time and effort in developing a Local Place Plan to help inform Moray Council's next Local Development Plan. Both the Fund and planning processes are areas which the Committee has an interest in.

The Committee met with representatives from a number of organisations that play a role in the development of The Park Ecovillage. These included Ekopia, Duneland Ltd, Green Leaf Design and Build, The Park Ecovillage Trust and Ecovillage Findhorn.

The Committee would like to thank the members of the community, their partners and neighbours, for their time spent organising its visit and for sharing their expertise and passion for the issues discussed with them.

The Park Ecovillage

The Ecovillage's main aim is to demonstrate sustainable development in environmental, social and economic terms. Known previously as the Findhorn Community it was originally founded in 1962, and the Findhorn Foundation began its ecovillage work in 1980s. This led to the emergence of a wide diversity of organisations and activities. In November 2024 due to a change in the Findhorn Foundation's business model the community residents were able to buy some of the Foundation's land and assets with the aim of regenerating the economy and community.

The Ecovillage features [125 ecologically-benign buildings](#) including 26 affordable homes, using solar water heating systems, energy from 3 wind turbines, and has both a biological 'living machine' waste water treatment system and a biomass boiler. The project has won a variety of awards and the ecological footprint of residents is half the UK average.



Touring the Ecovillage

Members spent the morning of their visit touring areas of the ecovillage, seeing first-hand the innovative designs and approaches to building homes. Within the village housing sits alongside community and economic functions, including a shop, a café, theatre space, and commercial units.

There are a range of tenures and ownership, with some homes built by individuals supported by the community. Design features which have been incorporated include:

- maximising solar warmth and energy through south-facing positioning of homes and the incorporation of glazed areas;

- in some instances minimising carbon footprint by consciously keeping property sizes small;
- thoughtful placement of garden spaces to provide both communal and more private areas;
- conscious use of terraced designs in order to maximise thermal properties;
- shared laundry facilities to minimise personal expense and maximise energy efficiency;
- use of air source heat pumps both for individual homes or part of a district heating solution, solar thermal energy to heat water, and photovoltaic roof panels to generate power;
- test of materials such as straw bale construction.

Areas of the village have been developed in different phases over the years with learning taken from each development to inform the next, and those phases have drawn on different funding sources. Early attempts to create affordable homes proved unsustainable due to increased cost of house building, and the value of privately owned properties on the site can be high.

More recently development has been taking place of new properties for both affordable rent and purchase, using the Rural and Islands Housing Fund, and the use of [Rural Housing Burdens](#) which will ensure that they remain affordable into the future. The burden can be added into the title of a property or house plot in rural Scotland and allows a rural housing body to be able to keep future sales of the property within the community through a right of pre-emption.

The community has endeavoured to build its most recent homes, four studios and four two-bedroom homes to meet the equivalent of Passivhaus standards. They incorporate an innovative heat network solution using heat generated by the village's waste-water treatment system, which the Committee viewed. Members heard about the increased cost of construction, but also the importance of defining 'affordability' not only through rent levels or purchase price, but also by the costs of maintaining and running a home in the long-term. These properties are both warmer and cheaper for their residents to run.

Committee members visited the latest build site in the village, the Duneridge Co-housing Neighbourhood, where additional affordable and sustainable homes are being developed. These will be built to Passivhaus standards, and the build is incorporating new innovations such as 'wood-crete' blocks which have half the carbon footprint of a concrete block. Using this material is a conscious choice to demonstrate to mainstream house builders who tend to construct housing using concrete blocks that there is an alternative. In order to 'future proof' this development sufficient room is being left to enable any future extension of the property to meet residents' needs.

Each cluster of buildings will have its own photovoltaic and solar thermal generation to deliver lower cost electricity, efficient heating systems through district heating, and electric vehicle charging. The design by Green Leaf Design & Build underwent a

study by University of Strathclyde Engineering to validate the energy and financial efficiency of the system.

The Park Ecovillage is a case study site for the [InterPED](#) project, which is funded by the European Union through UKRI and aims to maximise onsite renewable energy use. Researchers and community members are exploring the potential of Positive Energy Districts (PEDs), in particular the use of live data to inform energy use. This project aims to use technology to support flexibility for energy demand, something that is needed when relying on renewable energy.



Discussion: Housing Issues

In the afternoon, Committee members met with Alex Walker and Fasil Bogale from Ekopia, Alessandro Daboni of Duneland Ltd and the Park Ecovillage Trust, and Jay Caddy of Green Leaf Design and Build.

Key points discussed include:

- The financial pressures of delivering high quality, net zero housing, when the funding available does not incentivise that approach to building.
- The provision of affordable housing at The Park Ecovillage has been supported by [Ekopia Social Investments Limited](#) - a community benefit co-operative which provides a community investment mechanism through Community Shares. This allows the community to empower itself. Crucial to the success of investment in affordable housing was access to the Rural and Islands Housing Fund and having a trustworthy construction company.
- There are too few small building companies like Green Leaf who specialise in this area, and large housebuilders prioritise maximising profit rather than quality. There need to be incentives for building properties which reach an EPC 'A' rating.

- The opportunities presented by the community sharing its experience and expertise more widely, for example with housing associations who need support to work in this way. A centralised resource of information/expertise could ensure they don't need to start from scratch.
- As part of the Rural and Islands Housing Fund (RIHF) there should be robust follow up by the Scottish Government with analysis of these new homes and their efficiency – in terms of the cost to run the homes as well as the ecological building methods. This way there is better understanding of how public money is being spent. The outcome should be to make case studies of what works available to future users of the RIHF.
- The Rural and Islands Housing Fund has been essential to create affordable rural housing and must be continued. The Fund provided grants of around £70k per housing unit, however this does not take into account the long-term benefit of affordable heating systems and the higher up-front costs of integrating those. Developers who build to net-zero standards have their profits squeezed compared to those who don't meet those standards. There needs to be a way of acknowledging projects that build to net-zero in the funding process. In the long run these houses are more affordable for the occupants to run.
- Support needs to be provided to local authorities and housing associations to encourage more innovative builds like those in the community.
- Centralised heating systems need management, and so the community is creating income generating cooperatives to ensure residents have a source of funding to cover maintenance costs.
- The community has used the Scottish Government's Just Transition Fund to model heating systems, and Democratic Finance which supports community and financial enterprises.
- The community has an important multi-generational impact, and its new developments consciously ensure a mix of homes to meet people's needs at different stages of life.
- Deed conditions are included to ensure that properties cannot be left empty or used as holiday homes.
- The Scottish Heat Network Fund is a challenge, it appears to have strict criteria and there is a gap between ambitions and what can be delivered. Development will progress at the village if an application to the fund is unsuccessful but use of the Fund would mean the optimal balance can be achieved.



Discussion: Local Place Plan (LPP) development

Local Place Plans (LPPs) are community-led plans setting out proposals and aspirations for the development and use of land. Once completed and then registered by the planning authority, they are to be taken into account in the preparation of the relevant Local Development Plan. Moray Council is currently in the process of developing its new Local Development Plan and invited communities to prepare LPPs to feed into their work on the LDPs.

[The Park Ecovillage](#)'s Local Place Plan Group's work on the community's LPP is based on options appraisals work commissioned by the Findhorn Foundation in 2023. At that time Collective Architecture prepared a strategic framework which could be submitted to the Local Development Plan process. The process included multiple consultations within the community and its neighbours and with Moray Council. The deadline for submission to the Council was the end of 2024. The next phase of Local Development Plan work is led by the Ecovillage's Local Place Plan Group.

Committee members discussed this process with Mari Hollander, a Director of the Ecovillage Findhorn, Eian Smith who is a non-executive Director of [Ekopia](#), and also sits on the board of [Duneland Ltd](#) and with Edward Bichan, who farms the land adjacent to the community and has set aside part of his agriculture land for housing development.

The key points discussed include:

- One impetus for undertaking the work was reflecting on the impact of events such as Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic and looking again at what land could be used differently.
- The scale of engagement that took place in developing the LPP which involved every demographic and type of tenure in the community, and numerous regular meetings. The community benefitted from a history of community engagement, but it still entailed a lot of work for community

members to drive the process forward. The process has involved social gain and people connecting together.

- Collective Architects were commissioned to develop a strategic framework, and considerable public consultation took place with sessions on housing, infrastructure and economics, and surveys.
- The initial draft LPP was very lengthy at 80 pages and it is difficult to keep community members focused. This was felt to be too unwieldy to be useful so it was distilled to 11 pages. The Scottish Government have stated that LPPs can be short and simple but that can be difficult for communities across Scotland who feel they are being given a voice and an opportunity to activate their agency and shape the environment around them.
- Funding from Moray Council or the Scottish Government wasn't available for the process, but they were successful in obtaining some support from Moray Third Sector Interface.
- Support and engagement by the council has been mixed, with limited attendance at meetings, and changing timescales for the process.
- The LPP will be an ongoing project, there are areas ripe for development on site and a need for more affordable housing.
- The community's neighbour Ed Bichan has been involved throughout the process which is unusual as landowners are more often typically viewed as being at odds with place planning. Ed has previously sold land to the community for development, and should his land become part of Moray's Development Plan he wants to ensure that any development is in keeping with the community and is innovative and ecologically benign.
- The process has not just been about housing, but also incorporates food production and economic stimulus and the plan envisages integrated allotments and commercial units within a mixed use settlement.
- The LPP process can be an opportunity to bring communities together, and needs to build in a human element to all interactions, to enable participants to get past 'roles' of local authority, developer, community member etc. Facilitation is important to the success of that.
- Coastal flooding is a concern for the area, and there is conflicting information available to model this. SEPA's modelling tool has numerous different parameters which each provide different outcomes depending on which parameters are set on the website interface.

**Committee Clerks,
April 2025**