

Delivering More Homes and Better Places in Scotland

Case Study 5: Dargavel

Introduction

Dargavel is one of five case studies featured in the report [*Delivering More Homes and Better Places: lessons from policy and practice*](#), which is jointly published by the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE) and the Scottish Land Commission. Dargavel demonstrates the importance of collaboration, masterplanning and upfront finance for infrastructure to unlock development land. The main report is part a series of reports that make up the Commission’s Review on Land for Housing & Development, which will report later this year.

Project description and background

Dargavel is a 954-hectare (2,357 acre) brownfield redevelopment project led by BAE Systems, which is one of the largest defence companies in the world.

Dargavel is a large-scale development to be delivered in several phases over a 30-year period. By 2035, the project is expected to deliver 4,000 new homes comprising a mix of for-sale and affordable homes. The bulk of these will be family homes with some smaller apartments and specialist housing for older people.

The development is located on the edge of Bishopton in Renfrewshire. The Inverclyde Railway Line runs between the existing and new settlements.

The land under development was the site of the former Royal Ordnance Factory. The Factory operated during both World Wars and continued to produce propellants for munitions until the late 1990s before closing in 2003, leaving a significant area of brownfield vacant land at the edge of Bishopton.



Figure 1: Aerial View of Dargavel development, January 2019 (Courtesy of Cass Associates)

Project promoter

In the early 2000s, Cass Associates conducted a feasibility study on behalf of the landowner (BAE Systems), Renfrewshire Council, the Scottish Executive (as it was at the time), Scottish Enterprise, and trade unions, to determine the future of the site. The study looked at how to regenerate the site and recycle the land in a way that was both cost effective for the landowner and beneficial to the public.

BAE Systems has since taken on the role and risk of the development, thereby effectively becoming the place promoter and facilitator. This is an unusual situation for BAE Systems. Ordinarily, when decommissioning a site like this, one might have expected a company such as BAE Systems to undertake some enabling investment, such as decontaminating the land, and then hand over to a developer. In fact, the original plan was for BAE Systems to hand over a decontaminated site, in a phased manner, to the development partner, Redrow Homes.

However, as a result of the Global Financial Crisis and recession, Redrow Homes withdrew from Dargavel. In the absence of an alternative development partner, BAE Systems decided in 2011 to begin investing in land remediation works and major infrastructure provision. The hope was that a new development partner could be found for the site, but when that did not happen BAE Systems continued to act as lead developer, taking responsibility for masterplanning, delivering remediation works, putting in roads and other services, all of the Section 75 obligations, and, ultimately, releasing parcels of platformed land on to the market.

Land assembly

Despite owning the majority of the proposed development land, in order to liberate the site, BAE Systems had to address some land assembly challenges in the early stages of the project. The two main access routes into the site had to be purchased from adjacent landowners. This was in addition to addressing the former industrial legacy issues. According

to several interviewees, the extent of the required remediation works raised concerns about the viability and developability of the site. However, both Cass Associates and BAE Systems have experience of decommissioning and regenerating former Royal Ordnance sites.

Planning and design

Upon completion of the feasibility study, Cass Associates, acting as agent for BAE Systems, took forward the preferred option and developed a masterplan for 250 hectares (618 acres) of core development comprising of 2,500 homes and 15 hectares (150,000 square meters) of commercial space within a business park.

The approved masterplan also includes a community woodland park; recreational spaces; community facilities; retail and education provision; infrastructure works including a new motorway junction and link roads; improvements to the railway station approach, as well as park and ride facilities; and retention of the existing BAE Systems environmental test facility.

In parallel to the local plan process, Cass Associates submitted a number of planning applications to address the future development and regeneration of the site as a whole. Each housebuilder then submitted detailed applications for their own parcels of land obtained from BAE Systems in accordance with a specified design code, which, according to a senior planning official at Renfrewshire Council, has helped to ensure connectivity and permeability, within the development and locally.

In 2015, the masterplan was revised to extend the north western housing neighbourhood up to the Core Development Area boundary (see areas H20-22 in Figure 3). The masterplan was revised again in 2017, this time to replace the proposed employment uses (see E1-4 in Figure 3) with more housing (see H23-H26 in Figure 4). The number of homes proposed thus increased from 2,500 to 4,000.

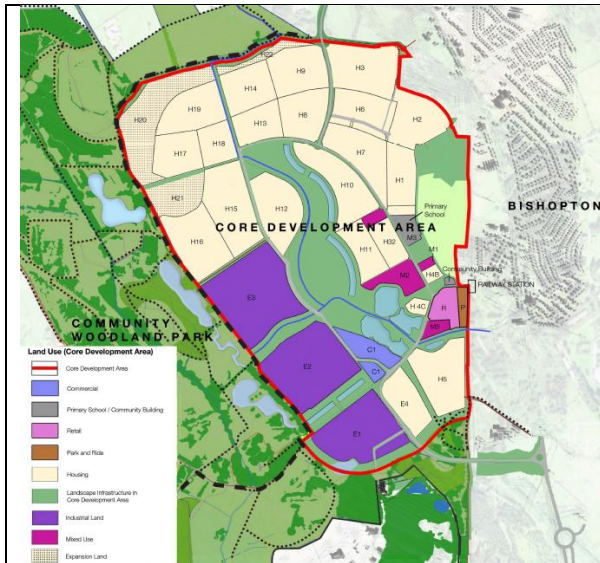


Figure 3: The original masterplan and neighbourhood expansion plan, 2015 (Courtesy of Cass Associates)



Figure 4: The revised masterplan to replace proposed employment land use with more housing, 2017 (Courtesy of Cass Associates)

This change was driven by low demand for commercial space at Dargavel given alternative opportunities at established employment locations nearby. The Scottish Government and Renfrewshire Council were also keen to see more housing on brownfield sites in suitable locations instead of on Green Belt land.

Other revisions to the masterplan include a new site and accelerated programme for delivery of a new primary school; a multi-purpose central park to be built earlier than initially planned; a phased release of land in the community woodland park to give residents early access to green spaces and woodland around Dargavel; and a central location for shops near the railway station with land reserved for a new health centre.

Development commentary

Some of the early phases of development at Dargavel are now complete. At the time of writing there are seven housebuilders on site with over 2,500 consented units (Table .1).

The new motorway junction, link road and park and ride facilities have all been delivered. The

first phase of the new village centre, developed by Cumbrae Properties, opened just before Christmas 2019 and includes a local supermarket, a coffee shop, a fast-food outlet, a barber shop, and a dental surgery. There is therefore an emerging mix of uses on site which could help to promote further social and economic development.

Table 1 shows that the Council has built 80 homes for social rent, which they did with the benefit of fully serviced land provided by BAE Systems at no charge. A new phase of development, which started in January 2020, will see delivery of a further 60 social rented homes, as well as specialist accommodation for the over 55s.

While there is clearly an emerging mix of tenures, the percentage of affordable housing appears to fall far short of the expected 25%. Further investigation is required to determine whether or not any of the other consented units includes housing for social and affordable rent, besides those developed by the Council itself.

Table 1: Consented units and breakdown by house size and type (as of 2019)

Developer	Units	Size and Type
Avant Homes	121	3-4 bedroomed, detached houses
Bellway Homes	177	3-4 bedroomed, detached and semi-detached houses
CALA Homes	89	4-5 bedroomed, detached houses
David Wilson	109	3-4 bedroomed, detached houses
Persimmon Homes	644	A mix of 2 bedroomed flats & 2-5 bedroomed, detached and semi-detached houses
Renfrewshire Council	80	35 x 1-2 bedroomed flats 45 x 2-4 bedroomed houses
Robertson Homes	206	33 x 2 bedroomed flats 173 x 3-6 bedroomed detached houses
Stewart Milne	320	241 x 3-6 bedroomed houses (mix of detached, terraced and townhouses) 71 x 2-3 bedroomed flats 8 x 1 bedroomed coach houses
Taylor Wimpey	774	3-5 bedroomed, detached and semi-detached homes
Total	2520	

Source: Renfrewshire Council and relevant planning application documents

The masterplan allows for significant green space and the accompanying design code aims to ensure a strong movement framework. Pedestrian and cycle routes encourage active travel and facilitate movement within the development, as well as to and from the centre of Bishopton itself. According to Cass Associates, there is no part of the development, once completed, that will be beyond a mile from the school or the railway station.

With at least 15 years remaining until the completion of Dargavel, there are a number of outcomes that have yet to be delivered. However, it is worth noting that the new

double-stream primary school is set to be delivered in 2021, five years ahead of schedule, which will help to relieve pressure on other local schools and should contribute to a sense of place and community at Dargavel.

The proposed country park, also set to be delivered earlier than initially planned, will facilitate access to nearby woodland. At 450 hectares, this woodland park will be larger than Strathclyde Country Park. If well designed and maintained, it could make a significant contribution to place.

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