

The Herald

Town planners labelled sexist Experts claim male dominance in urban design means female values ignored

Adam Fleming exclusive

Published on 1 Sep 2000

COUNCIL planning officials will tomorrow be labelled as sexist and out of touch with the needs of local communities. The double attack will come from an international group of urban planning experts at a three-day conference in Glasgow, which begins today. The academics will make their criticisms on the second day of Strathclyde University's conference, Designing with Communities 2000. The university's architecture and urban design department has brought together a group of developers and experts from Scotland and across the world. They will explore ways of increasing community participation in urban planning processes, and urge local people to take control of urban areas. Mr Michael MacAulay, a lecturer in architecture at Strathclyde, led the criticism of planners, saying of Glasgow officials: "There is too much of a top-down approach from the authorities. Their problems come down to not asking local people. There's an unwillingness on the part of the council to listen." His criticisms were backed by Mr Rob Joiner, director of the Reidvale Housing Association in Glasgow's East End. He claims there was no public consultation over plans for a huge new business park in the centre of Glasgow. Now residents fear they will be cut off from the city. He dubbed the development a "monumental disaster". Dr Jaqueline Leavitt, professor of urban planning at the University of Southern California, joined the attack, claiming that urban planning was riddled with discrimination against women. "The values of women lay the basis for society but are pretty much ignored when it comes to property, building and real estate," she said. The award-winning planning expert blames the under-representation of women in the profession. Women make up an estimated 1% of Scottish architects. Professor Leavitt accused planners of putting tall buildings higher on the agenda than the improvement of society. She urged women to take control of urban development and follow the lead of a group of women in Nepal who built grass shelters. She also pointed to women in Los Angeles who took to the streets when their houses were earmarked for demolition by the government. They occupied buildings and halted traffic. Ms Pauline Gallacher, initiative director for Glasgow's year of Architecture and Design, explained that school runs, informal childcare arrangements, and other "invisible" networks formed by women were usually ignored by male planners. An all-female housing co-operative, which tried to build new homes for women on low incomes, will set a precedent in this country when it builds its first homes next spring after a seven-year struggle with male planners. Members of the Take Root group found the authorities to be "over-cautious, inflexible, and shocked" when they presented their plans for a dozen timber-framed homes in the Gallowgate area. A spokesman for Glasgow City Council admitted the planning department did not employ enough women: "It's not a good thing in terms of social inclusion

or planning. The council could be charged with setting a bad example," he said. Council chairman of development and planning, Mr Steven Purcell, admitted his department often found it difficult to balance the needs of local communities with the city's business interests. "We cannot listen to people in local communities because we need to make strategic decisions for the city as a whole," he said.