

Good morning and welcome to the full plenary day of the UN Economic Commission for Europe conference on City Living. And welcome to Glasgow Caledonian University, one of several of our city's internationally regarded higher education institutions.

My name is Susan Aitken and I'm the leader of Glasgow City Council.

I cannot over-state how delighted I am that our great city is hosting UNECE. This is a tremendous opportunity for Glasgow to showcase the huge strides it has made in the past two decades - in both physical and social regeneration.

We remain a city in transition. Our evolution - from our unenviable status as Europe's pre-eminent post-industrial city to one now globally regarded as a leading centre for culture, creativity, hospitality, learning and innovation - is still work in progress.

But increasingly our peers are recognising the bold, pioneering, inclusive and sustainable approaches we take - particularly to the challenges of our past and our long-ingrained inequalities and injustices.

I've had the honour of twice addressing the UNECE in Geneva on how Glasgow has been building healthier, more sustainable, more inclusive communities.

I took great pride in explaining to delegates how Glasgow used the opportunity of transferring the majority of its social housing away from municipal ownership – at the time some of the poorest housing in the United Kingdom - to embark on a programme of demolitions, refurbishments and building.

This was the catalyst for biggest physical transformations this city has experienced in its recent history. I also told how this went far beyond bricks and mortar to really enhance and increase the flourishing network of community-based housing association. Our people have led much of Glasgow's recent renewal.

So, it's fantastic to see - here in my home city - some of you who were so generous with your time and contributions when I was in Geneva.

I'd like to especially welcome Elena, who chairs the UNECE housing and land management committee and who will be speaking next. Also to Daniella, Elena's vice chair. To Gulnara, the secretary of the committee.

One city re-emerging back into the world after many difficult decades is the Albanian capital Tirana. That sense of renewal is something that many of us here in Glasgow will recognise. So we're delighted to welcome the Mayor's international representative, Deputy Mayor Anuela Ristani and the City of Tirana to our family of cities making that journey of transition. So welcome to Glasgow, Anuela.

Here in Glasgow, the rainy season usually lasts around 50 weeks of the year. But I hope yesterday's weather didn't interfere too much with your experience of the New Gorbals.

Perhaps more than any other Glasgow neighbourhood, the Gorbals has a resonance – and sometimes a reputation – far beyond our city boundaries. Perhaps more than any other city community it suffered from the poor decisions of post-War redevelopment and many of the accompanying social issues. And it was recognised throughout the UK as such. Until relatively recently, whole swathes of the area, like many inner city areas, were near derelict and abandoned.

But the work of Linda Malone, the tenant chair of New Gorbals, who spoke yesterday, her director Fraser Stewart, and all those in their teams over the years who have had the vision, the talent, the perseverance and indeed the patience, New Gorbals is one of the most successful regeneration schemes in Europe..

New Gorbals is work which has been 30 years in the making. But it's also an illustration of the changes which have occurred since the devolution of housing to the Scottish Parliament in 1999 – policies such as the abandonment of the 'right to buy' for example - and the flexibility to take a more nuanced approach, more sensitive to local need. It has also allowed Glasgow City Council to better focus our commitment to community-controlled housing.

Because as everyone in this room knows, a safe and secure home is the basic requirement for living. But liveability is about so much more.

New Gorbals is shown how getting housing right must be inextricably linked with creating a community, a place, a neighbourhood with real liveability.

They have become the flag bearers for the 'place-making' agenda being replicated throughout Glasgow, a wonderful beacon of the principles of the Geneva UN Charter On Sustainable Housing. I'm absolutely delighted that – yet again – they have had the international recognition they deserve.

Yesterday, Elena, and our very own City Urbanist, Professor Brian Evans, who I will come to very shortly, commenced the discussions on the Glasgow Declaration and that discussion on adopting the Declaration will be finalised this afternoon.

I think it's suffice for me to say it's fantastic that Glasgow can send a message of support to the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management and give our firm commitment that we will continue to work with you, the Scottish Government and all our partners to secure our shared ambitions.

This conference is very much about putting the work we do here in Glasgow into the international context within which UNECE operates. We in Glasgow can benefit from the international perspective the conference provides.

Today's keynote speakers include Professor Jim Stockard. As well as serving as a commissioner of the Cambridge Housing Authority in Massachusetts from 1973 until 2013, Jim has direct experience of Glasgow, having been the Fulbright Scholar at the Glasgow School of Art, studying social housing in Scotland. Boston and Glasgow share many characteristics; metropolitan areas with strong working-class identities alongside reputations for learning, culture and the creative industries.

I'm looking forward to Jim's comparisons between Boston and Glasgow.

After the break we will hear from Stephen Willacy, the City Architect for Aarhus in Denmark. Denmark has been a major source of inspiration for what the Glasgow City Government wants to achieve. Stephen is currently honorary professor in Architecture and Urban Design at the University of Dundee, so brings first-hand experience his talk on Designing the Liveable City.

Closer to home, another keynote speaker is Pam Warhurst, whose Incredible Edible initiative began in Northern England now has spin-offs in the USA and Japan, has 100 groups in the UK and 600 worldwide.

The idea of a local food partnership that encourages community engagement through local growing is something I know some members of my administration are interested in developing, and it promises to be an inspirational contribution.

And from our own doorstep is Duncan MacLennan from the University of Glasgow. Duncan is another who can bring an international perspective to today's discussions, with experience in academia and government in Scotland, the US, Canada and Australia.

Duncan always has interesting things to say about housing in Glasgow and has had a major impact on the sector in the city. I'm looking forward to what he has to say.

And finally, today's session will see the launch of Glasgow's Place Commission, which will be led by our City Urbanist Brian Evans. I really don't want to steal any of Brian's thunder by trailing any of the Commission's aims, approaches and personnel. We've been stealing his lines in the seven or so months he's been in post.

Suffice to say it's a very exciting development and one which I firmly believe will build on the strides Glasgow has taken in our post-industrial renaissance and help take us to the next stage in our transition.

When the SNP was still in opposition, when we looking at the changes we would make if the city's administration, we talked about the role of a City Architect, someone who understood that physical environment in which we live is a key component to our health and wellbeing.

The role wasn't simply to be about better buildings and higher quality designs; it's was to be about the lives of citizens and ensuring the Glasgow in which they live, work, study and enjoy themselves in is a city in which we all can flourish.

It took us a while to define and refine the role – even down to getting the name right - but when we went out to find who that person would be, we still cannot believe our good fortune in Brian applying for the post. The role isn't just unique in Scottish local government. It's pioneering. And today we'll hear just why. Brian has been the key driver in bringing us here, in giving our city the profile it deserves. So thank you Brian.

So without further ado...