

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CROSS PARTY GROUP ON TOWNS AND TOWN CENTRES

Wednesday, 10 March 2021, 13:00 – 14:30

Online Meeting

1. Welcome and Opening Remarks

Convener, John Scott MSP welcomed all to the meeting. Attendees and Apologies are noted in Appendix 2.

2. Approval of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cross Party Group held 9 December 2020

The Minutes of the Meeting were accepted as a true and accurate record with no matters arising.

3. Guest Presentations - Town Centre Action Plan 2 – Driving Forward a New Future for Scotland's Town Centres

Overview – Phil Prentice, Chief Officer, Scotland's Towns Partnership and National Programme Director, Scotland's Improvement Districts.

PP acknowledged the work and collaboration during this last year by Business Improvement Districts, local and national governments, third and community sectors; supporting economic activity and resilience. Continuing with the ethos of helping each other out, things will get better, faster.

Support has included Towns and BIDs Resilience and Recovery Funds; Scotland Loves Local Campaign and Fund. Supporting around 250 projects across the country. Scottish Government has committed another £600,000 in the new financial year for BIDs.

The Town Centre Action Plan Expert Review Group published its report 'A New Future for Scotland's Town Centres' in February 2021. Read the full report at futuretowns.scot

Requested by the Communities Secretary and led by Professor Leigh Sparks (Chair of STP), the report builds on the first TCAP review of 2014 and takes account of current economic, social and environmental factors. It was a very consultative and democratic process and offers a vision for how Scotland's town centres can play a central role in ensuring fairer, greener and healthier communities. It makes key recommendations to government and all those who work to change our towns and high streets for the better -

1. Embed towns more into national policy – planning, community empowerment, digital, community wealth building, climate. Consider how to measure success based on wellbeing and low carbon.
2. Rebalance the imbalance in the economy. Current tax funding development system requires review – non domestic rates, property taxation, VAT disadvantage, the unfairness of out of town advantage, fair digital taxation. Punish harmful activity, reward good activity.
3. Rewarding good behaviour and amplifying and expanding good practice, to show the art of the possible.

The following presentations cover the main recommendations. Presentation slides and other relevant links from the Scottish Land Commission are available on the STP website, with summary points only being recorded below.

3.1 Embedding Towns More Firmly into Policy - Craig McLaren, Director Scotland, Ireland and English Regions, Royal Town Planning Institute

RTPI welcomes the new report. CMCL will cover 4 aspects to take forward and build upon-

1. National Policies
2. Planning System
3. Place Base Initiatives
4. Twenty Minute Neighbourhoods

1. National Policies

- Traditional place based approach – national planning framework, designing streets, creating spaces. Needs to be pushed a bit further. NPF4 publishes in late autumn - will bring certainty to planning. It would be good to have resource attached to this as done in Ireland. It will be part of the development plan in future.
- Range of other things to recognise what towns are about – holistic to contribute to other ambitions, transport , housing , public health.

There needs to be a change in how we take things forward. Move away from one off deals, instead having a vision for a place. Act for the long term instead of short term. Planned rather than opportunistic activity and part of a bigger approach. Measure holistically, not just on the economy. Be less competitive – instead, doing as much as we can in the public interest.

2. Planning System

- Digital planning strategy (launched November 2020) can help how we organise and learn from spatial data.
- Density – settlement patterns create critical mass to support services.
- Transport – developing active travel approaches, and assess transport investments.
- Local Services – 20 minute neighbourhoods, focus living in local centres.
- Open Space Strategies – create quality environment, planning application process early input.
- Development Management - collaboration with developers for bigger picture improvements; aim for quality-based not speed-based performance outcomes and impact.

3. Place Based Initiatives

- Place principle – ensure operational and not just sentiments, also for Town Centre First – transparency required.
- Link community planning partnership and involve community in local plans - the emerging town centre plans will help with this.

4. Twenty Minute Neighbourhoods

Reference to Melbourne example shown as graphic on slide which shows how people can access all services within a twenty minute walk in their neighbourhood.

This is a means to promote the needs of towns and we need to ensure resource and support to take forward what we want.

3.2 Dealing with the Systematic Imbalance - Shona Glenn, Head of Policy, Scottish Land Commission

SG outlined the need to take the same circular economy approach to land. Reduce, Reuse, Recycle:

- Prioritise brownfield development.
- Disincentivise greenfield development.

Two years ago the Scottish Land Commission established the Vacant and Derelict Land Task Force, to tackle vacant and derelict land and bring back to productive use. A link to its recommendations report will be shared by STP. Highlighting some of the key recommendations of relevance to towns as follows –

- Making better use of data. Make available in a public portal, detailing what it will take to bring land and buildings into use. The IT, data and expertise exist – just required now to create the platform; which wouldn't take much resource.
- Land as part of the circular economy. Prioritise the smaller places and as part of the solution, empowering communities to bring back into use. SLC is working with DTAS to assess what the barriers are to communities to do so and how this nature of activity can be scaled up.
- Supporting Delivery through funding. Absent landlord inactivity frustrations. Compulsory sales order would give the council power to sell at auction, allowing the market value to reveal itself. How this might work is on the SLC website.
- Stopping the flow of new vacant and derelict sites. Use tax system around land use and reuse. Preventing sites from becoming derelict in the first place. SLC expert advisory group is looking at this area and welcomes input.
- Tackling the legacy. Green infrastructure investment programme has been agreed by Scottish Government. Details of the fund will be announced soon, with first tranche available from April. So recommend people begin to consider projects now.

3.3 Showing how it can be done – Donald Gillies, Director of Place, South Ayrshire Council

Ayr town centre faced challenges, and in 2018 consulted on the future of the town, returning substantial feedback which has been used to shape the town centre action plan.

4 key initiatives – covering 4 strategic zones across the town:

1. Drive more residential use. Built into local development plan.
2. Repurposing space to repurpose commercial with a blend of community purpose.
3. Public realm and way finding. Refresh of town centre - working with Sustrans to improve and make more attractive and improve way finding.
4. Events. Coordinate in a joined-up way and brand. Covid has impacted but it will be reintroduced in due course. The shore front events will link to the town and vice versa to bring connectivity and maximise benefits of footfall.

DG showed a graphic of the 4 zones –

Zone 1 Burns Statue Square – clearing landscape for regeneration.

Zone 2 Retail – not to exclude other areas but it will be a focus area.

Zone 3 Leisure and recreation. Cinema development and modern retail and leisure centre.

Zone 4 Culture and heritage. Projects include, Ayr Grammar (primary school, archives and community purpose), Town Hall Museum, Riverside Heritage Trail and events space opening up Ayr to the River, Carnegie Library Heritage, the Grain Exchange – a multi-use space for inclusion of e.g. pop up markets.

4. Discussion

T Fitzpatrick: Will the 20 minute neighbourhood translate in scale and town centre priorities?

PP: It is not a new concept but there is a renewed focus driven by covid and climate. Ambition for people to work, have services, within 20 minute walk. Rural areas would use the nearest local place and all services should be based there.

CMcL: Echo PP comments. Important to not to focus on the 20 minutes and that it's purpose being for what you need on a daily basis without using a car. It is applicable across a wide range of settings. Including public services – highlighting the importance of the town centre first principle.

M Currie: Housing developers are building on greenspace – is there any incentive for converting existing town centre buildings for regeneration?

PP: Yes, there will be - driven by climate and covid, and to make use of existing space and 20 minute neighbourhood ethos. We will be looking at a range of policy and mechanisms to focus priority on existing base for residential use.

SG: Must incentivise where regeneration takes place through tax. Empowering planners to be more directive on what is built and where.

CMcL: Important to balance incentives with regulatory and encourage developers to change what they build and where. DG added that as profit making businesses, it's important to incentivise a range of measures for developers.

'Helen' – How can there be balance in NPF4 for long term and respond to immediate demands of covid?

CMcL – The long term vision is important. From there it has to work back to account for steps to take to get to that vision. It should have a key milestones and ambitions delivery plan. Published and transparent, reported on and adapted to align with any set of circumstances.

J Scott MSP: Climate change and sea level rise is a concern - is it being considered long term?

CMcL: SEPA has been doing a lot of work on that and how that can be adapted into the policy and action framework.

A Russell: What is the view on his opinion of robustly protecting common good land?

SG: Difficult to comment on land use that should be decided by community. Common good land law was formed in 1491. So, there should be an update of this. It needs to be retained where possible for community use but community should decide. DG added that it has protections inbuilt already.

M Fraser: Will the River Walkway be opened?

DG: This is subject to review of drainage system and different land levels. Although it is a desirable ambition.

J West: Dunbarton's abandoned buildings are having a negative impact on town. What can be done to prevent this and support community?

SG: There are new rights to buy. The Compulsory Sales Order mentioned earlier would be a solution if enacted by Scottish Government.

5. Any Other Competent Business and Date of Next Meeting

There was no other business. John Scott MSP thanked the speakers and Phil Prentice and the STP team. Mr Scott highlighted the high number in attendance and this being a consideration for the future of meetings being online.

Date of Next Meeting: Due to the election, the group will be dissolved and is required to re-register. Details will be announced thereafter.

Appendix 1

The Cross Party Group on Towns and Town Centres

13:00 – 14:30, Wednesday 10th March 2021

Online Meeting

AGENDA

- 13:00 Welcome and Opening Remarks – John Scott MSP, Convener
- 13:05 Minutes of the Meeting of the Cross Party Group held 9th December, 2020
- 13:10 Matters Arising from the Minutes

Town Centre Action Plan 2: Driving Forward a New Future for Scotland's Town Centres

- 13:15 Overview: Phil Prentice, Chief Officer, Scotland's Towns Partnership shares an overview of the key aspects of the Town Centre Action Plan Expert Review Group's report.
- 13:30 Embedding Towns more Firmly into Policy: Craig McLaren, Director, Scotland, Ireland and English Regions, Royal Town Planning Institute
- 13:40 Dealing with the Systemic Imbalance: Shona Glenn, Head of Policy, Scottish Land Commission
- 13:50 Showing How it Can Be Done: Donald Gillies, Director of Place, South Ayrshire Council
- 14:00 Discussion
- 14:20 Any Other Competent Business
- 14:30 Close of Meeting

Note: At its meeting on 28 January 2021, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee agreed that, in line with previous sessions, all CPGs will cease to exist at midnight on 24 March 2021. Groups which exist in this session will have an opportunity to re-register after the election.

Appendix 2

Due to online nature of the meeting, every effort has been made to capture those in attendance for the majority of the meeting.

Attendees

Bill	Anderson	Carlisle Development Trust
Karen	Anderson	Hirta
Alan	Anthony	360 Architecture
Ed	Archer	
John	Archibald	South Lanarkshire Council
Rob	Arthur	The Big Picture
Carl	Baker	Collective Architecture
Don	Balsillie	
Grant	Baxter	Clackmannanshire Council
Stuart	Baxter	East Lothian Council
Dawn	Black	Dawn Black Photography
Muriel	Bone	
Sarah	Boyack	MSP
Joanne	Boyle	Scottish Government
Sophie	Bridger	Eden Project
Chic	Brodie	
Garry	Burnett	Aberdeen Inspired
Cllr Alistair	Cameron	Fife Council
Cllr Ian	Cameron	Fife Council
Ailsa	Campbell	
Ann	Campbell	SURF
Duncan	Clelland	South Ayrshire Council
Tom	Conn	West Lothian Council
Chris	Cook	ISRS
Sam	Crawford	Enterprising Bathgate
Gemma	Cruikshank	Embrace Elgin BID
Malcolm	Currie	Strathesk
Justine	Daly	Strategic Investment Board
Kevin	Deighan	Clacksfirst
John	Doig	
Veronica	Donnelly	Azets
Carey	Doyle	Community Land Scotland
David	Dunlop	
Victoria	Eccles	South Lanarkshire Council
Ewan	Eccleston	Glasgow City Council
Geraldine	El Masrou	Motherwell Shopping Centre
Giles	Etherington	Brand Satellite
Jeanette	Ferguson	
Tony	Fitzpatrick	
Doug	Flett	
Ian	Fowell	
Bill	Fraser	Pollockshields
Malcolm	Fraser	

Emma	Fyvie	Clackmannanshire Council
David	Gear	East Dunbartonshire Council
Leys	Geddes	
Rona	Gibb	Paths for All
Donald	Gillies	South Ayrshire Council
Brian	Gilligan	
Ian	Gilzean	Scottish Government
Shona	Glenn	Scottish Land Commission
Suzy	Goodsir	Greener Kirkcaldy
Neil	Grant	SBRC
David	Greer	North Lanarkshire Council
Anne	Grove	Scottish Government
David	Grove	Fife Council
Pedro	Guimaraes	
		Scotland's Towns
Kimberley	Guthrie	Partnership
Andrew	Haley	Paul Hogarth
Rachael	Hamilton	MSP
Lucy	Harding	Nairn Connects
Derek	Harper	
Bill	Harvey	Scotland's Improvement Districts
Matthew	Hilton	Highland Council
Michael	Hitchon	
John	Howie	Public Health Scotland
Pamela	Humphries	North Lanarkshire Council
Peter	Hynes	
Tony	I'Anson	
Steve	Johnson	Procom
Leigh	Johnston	Scottish Government
		Scotland's Towns
Alison	Jones	Partnership
Susan	Jones	
David	Kellock	
Gary	Kerr	Paisley Community Trust
Alistair	Kyle	East Dunbartonshire Council
Jane	Lamont	Beith Trust
		West Dunbartonshire
Davina	Lavery	Council
Thom	Ledingham	North Ayrshire Council
John	Lee	Scottish Grocers Federation
Colin	Love	South Ayrshire Council
Genna	Lugue	Argyll and Bute Council
Ali	Macdonald	Public Health Scotland
David	MacDougall	
Ian	Macgregor	
David	Main	
John	Mason	
Laura	Mccormack	Booksellers
Shona	McCoy	Dumfries and Galloway Council
John	McCrone	Perth and Kinross Council

David	McCubbin	
Claire	McDade	
David	McKay	
Katey	McKay	Angus Council
Craig	McLaren	RTPI
Debbie	McLean	Scottish Borders Council
Paul	McLennan	East Lothian Council
Stuart	McMillan	Renfrewshire Council
Barbara	McNaughton	East Ayrshire Council
Audrey	Michie	Aberdeenshire Council
Hannah	Moore	Visit West End BID
Caroline	Morrison	South Ayrshire Council
Caitlin	Murray	Cornwall Council
Deborah	Murray	Visit West End BID
Andrew	Ormston	Drew Wylie
Bill	Pagan	
John	Park	
Lorna	Pearce	Argyll and Bute Council
Nairn	Pearson	West Lothian Council
Ro	Pengelly	ScotSectorlink
Kathie	Pollard	Scottish Land Commission
		Scotland's Towns
Phil	Prentice	Partnership
Carole	Racionzer	Linlithgow Community Development Trust
		Historic Environment
Peter	Ranson	Scotland
Grant	Riley	North Lanarkshire Council
		Historic Environment
Steven	Robb	Scotland
Debbie	Robertson	Aberdeenshire Council
Brian	Robertson-Fern	Brag Enterprises
		Scotland's Towns
Ewan	Robertston	Partnership
Dennis	Rodwell	Architects
Iain	Ross	South Lanarkshire Council
Andrew	Russell	
Sylvia	Russell	
Maria	Rybczewska	University of Stirling
Harry	Scott	Scottish Borders Council
John	Scott	MSP
Norman	Sharp	
Helen	Skimming	Stantec
Denzil	Skinner	
Ewan	Smith	Aberdeenshire Council
Roddy	Smith	Essential Edinburgh
Lizzi	Smyth	Fife Council
Tom	Sneddon	DTAS
Douglas	Sparks	
Leigh	Sparks	University of Stirling
Andrew	Spence	BID4Oban

Ian	Stephen	SBRC
Chris	Story	Message Matters
Douglas	Strachan	One Dalkeith
Alyson	Taylor	
Malcolm	Thomas-Harley	Hamilton BID
Frances	Tonner	East Renfrewshire Council
George	Turnbull	Scottish Borders Council
John	Turner	
Sunil	Varu	Fife Council
Innes	Walker	Aberdeen Inspired
Scott	Walker	Clackmannanshire Council
Daibhidh	Wallace	
Anne Marie	Wardlaw	
Sonya	Warren	
Tom	Warren	Collective Architecture
Anna	Watkiss	Argyll and Bute Council
Adrian	Watson	Aberdeen Inspired
Neil	Watson	Renfrewshire Council
Douglas	Watt	Galashiels Heartland
Alan	Webster	Highland Council
Jade	West	
Lawrie	West	
Valerie	Whyte	
Derek	Wilson	Argyll and Bute Council
		West Dunbartonshire
Jo	Winterbottom	Council
Lindsay	Wood	A Heart for Duns

Apologies

Neil	Barnes	Linlithgow Community Development
Neil	Bibby	Trust
Gillian	Martin	MSP
Brenda	Murray	MSP
Stephen	Horsburgh	Perth and Kinross Council
		East Dunbartonshire Council