

Minutes of Meeting 6th February 2013
Cross Party Group on Towns and Town Centres
Location: Committee Room 3, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh

Agenda Items

1. WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS – MARGARET MCCULLOCH MSP

- 1.1** Margaret McCulloch MSP (MMcC) welcomed everyone to the newly formed group and introduced herself, stating that she was overwhelmed by the response to the group as there had been full support from all parties and the subject is a hot topic that is very challenging.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1** In view of the high number of participants, it was agreed not to do introductions around the table.

3. ELECTION OF OFFICE BEARERS

- 3.1** Members voted and elected the following
- a. Convener:** Margaret McCulloch MSP
 - b. Deputy Convener:** external vice convenors Sunil Varu, ATCM and Tom Sneddon, Development Trusts Association Scotland
 - c. Secretariat:** Scotland's Towns Partnership

4. REMIT & REGISTRATION OF THE GROUP

- 4.1** The following draft remit was approved:
- ‘To analyse policy prescriptions and develop ideas and innovations. This will help Scotland’s towns and town centres through the current economic climate to emerge stronger, smarter, cleaner, healthier and greener.
- The group will discuss ways in which Scotland’s towns can work towards sustainable economic growth through greater vibrancy and vitality.
- The group will also consider how best to take forward recommendations from the town centre review and the governments regeneration strategy.’

- 4.2** MMcC stated that originally the group was to cover town centres but now it is to include towns *and* town centres. It was agreed by everyone attending that the number of meetings a year should be 6 (roughly every 2 months) and a mix of both evening and lunch time meetings so everyone would be able to attend. It was suggested that a proposal for the next meetings might be to consider the overview of town centres, as at this point the national review of town centres should then be published.

4.3 MMcC stated that possible topics for the next meeting could be: business and economic situation; how MSPs can address issues as a group; how to take forward the Town Centre Review; and an away day to a successful town to share good practice.

4.4 Alasdair Morrison from GVA and TCR Group said that on the issue of towns and town centres, it would be good to define what we mean. This is to be added to the next agenda.

5. PRESENTATION – MALCOLM FRASER, EXTERNAL ADVISORY GROUP ON THE TOWN CENTRE REVIEW

5.1 Malcolm Fraser (MF) provided a [presentation](#) and summary of the Town Centre Review Group and asked ‘What are the concerns for town centres?’

There are 5 principles

1. Deliverable, utilising existing legislation and levers;
2. Bottom-up, enabling and encouraging communities to find their own, diverse ways forward;
3. Diverse, recognising that the glory of the town is its many and varied functions;
4. Universal, working for all sizes and types of urban places.

Overarching Principle: **Finding New Narratives for Scotland’s Towns** – a changed function and dynamic for town centres, redefining and reordering relationships within a new economic framework for Scotland.

7 themes

1. Living on the high street
2. Community development
3. Accessible public services
4. A friendly planning system
5. Town Futures: Planning for change
6. Business Rates
7. Digital Towns

5.2 Questions for Malcolm Fraser

5.2.1 Ojay McDonald of ATCM mentioned business rates issue and highlighted that ATCM is on a similar Westminster group which may be of interest.

Alison Johnston MSP asked MF if he felt communities are committed to change and if MF was hopeful that Local Authorities would become more helpful in protecting the high streets?. MF replied, he thinks there’s a tipping point happening – even given the support here (at the CPG).

MF commented that he wants Local Authorities to follow money and invest in town centres. Ross Martin of CSPP commented that multi member wards mean there are more voices and interests in town centres so effectively there is ongoing political competition in local areas to make things happen. MF said we need to understand why bad decisions are still being made. Single Outcome Agreements have a lot to answer for – need to re-calibrate.

5.2.2 Tom Johntson of Colliers International stated that Scotland’s towns don’t need as many shops now which is a problem and that there is no competition in out of town malls –

it's easier for one company to change things. A large proportion of units in towns are not fit for purpose. For big development companies, it's easier to build out of town. Towns affected by internet too. It would be interesting to get a retailer here at the next meeting.

5.2.3 Mike Smeed from Boots North Office commented that the internet will force shoppers in one of 2 ways and that we shouldn't view it as a black light on retail, but an opportunity..

5.2.4 Barry McCulloch of Federation of Small Businesses asked MF if he had thought about a Town Centre Regeneration Fund 2 – without cash, how can deliverability happen? MF replied that the Town Centre Review group are trying to focus efforts on a bottom up approach enabling community groups and entrepreneurs to draw on a micro fund.

5.2.5 Bill Walker MSP for Dunfermline emphasised that council decisions are financially driven. Towns can't rely on being retail driven – they have to have a different offering.

5.2.6 Representative of the office of Roseanna Cunningham MSP asked, how do we get round the competition between community groups? MF suggested that what is sometimes required is a good communicator as part of the reason is that groups are fighting over so little cash.

5.2.7 Danny McKendry from East Renfrewshire Council (ERC) suggested, in relation to point 5.2.6, that if councils are attempting to be less risk averse, there are opportunities to partner in business led initiatives. They can create their own longer-term charter. Good examples of this are ERC's work with Renaissance Towns and Business Improvement Districts. MF agreed.

6. VIDEO VIGNETTES – IAIN SCOTT, SCOTPRENEUR

6.1 Iain Scott explained his [video vignettes](#) (due to technical difficulties, view the vignettes via this link). IS commented on the social reporting technique he used which asks people to talk, uninterrupted, about what they care about most in their town. He has also done these for Business Improvement Districts.

IS remarked that where you have a large gathering of people and an open space it is a seedbed for innovation and change. Interestingly, Brisbane is the second city to appoint a digital director. Towns must use the opportunity of the internet.

7. FURTHER REMARKS – ROSS MARTIN, SCOTLAND'S TOWNS PARTNERSHIP

7.1 RM explained that Scotland's Towns Partnership was created to be a unified voice, to represent a range of interests – public, private, third sector, communities. How do we excite and get all groups to use towns? This is part of STP's role. STP welcomes the formation of the CPG.

7.2 RM asked each member of the Cross Party Group to give one word that they felt described what Scotland's towns meant to them. The following are just some of the many words people mentioned but STP intends to create an online Word Cloud with explanations of why members chose their words
Place, Places for People, Meeting places, Access to services, People

7.3 RM stressed the importance of people and places. He summarised by saying that towns have been left out as city areas and rural areas have been given attention by the government and left the group with the question, should the group aim to address one big issue or many?

8. FINAL REMARKS

8.1 MMcC mentioned that she is aware of good work in her town and encouraged everyone to share similar stories from their towns. Elaine Bone, Scotland's Towns Partnership highlighted that one of the key purposes of the STP is to be a hub for sharing of news, information and case studies and welcomed people's stories for inclusion on the STP website. EB also flagged up that the Scotland's Towns Conference takes place on Friday 22 November in Inverness. MMcC summarised by thanking our contributors and everyone for attending, stating that the date of the next meeting had not been decided yet but that it will be in roughly two months' time.

Appendix 1.

Proposed Cross Party Group on Town Centres

6:00pm, Wednesday 6 February 2013
Committee Room 3, Scottish Parliament

Margaret McCulloch would like to remind Members of the initial meeting of the proposed CPG on Town Centres.

To confirm your attendance please e-mail margaret.mcculloch.msp@scottish.parliament.uk

Visitors should arrive at the Main Entrance and report to Reception.
Please note the agenda has been amended.

Agenda

- 1) Welcome & Opening Remarks – Margaret McCulloch MSP
- 2) Introduction
- 3) Election of Office Bearers (a) Convener (b) Deputy Convener (c) Secretariat
- 4) Remit & Registration of the Group
- 5) Presentation – Malcolm Fraser, External Advisory Group to the Town Centre Review
- 6) Video Vignettes – Iain Scott, Scotpreneur
- 7) Further Remarks – Ross Martin, Scotland's Towns Partnership