

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

**HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 12<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2013 AT 13:00**

**LOCATION: COMMITTEE ROOM 2, SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT**

## **AGENDA ITEMS**

### **1. WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS**

1.1 Margaret McCulloch (MMcC) welcomed members to the meeting and thanked Business Improvement Districts Scotland for supporting lunch. Those present introduced themselves.

MMmC explained that in accordance with CPG regulations, that although proceeding with the meeting, it is not official until the required quorum of MSPs are present.

### **2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING & MATTERS ARISING**

2.1 The Minutes were agreed by Ian Davison Porter and seconded by Alastair Mitchell.

### **3. INTRODUCTION TO THEME: 'TOWN CENTRE PERFORMANCE – RESILIENCE & OPPORTUNITIES' – ROSS MARTIN, CENTRE FOR SCOTTISH PUBLIC POLICY**

3.1 Ross Martin (RM) observed the difference in language being used in Scotland, compared with that of other parts of the UK or the highest profile work of Portas which talks of the High Street, rather than towns or town centres. Towns in Scotland have a particular role function and the emotional attachment people have to towns is strong, with over 50% of our population living in Scottish towns. Those towns come in all shapes and sizes and character; and some of the work Scotland's Towns Partnership (STP) is beginning to look at, is to identify what those characters are, how those towns are characterised to the outside world – Chris (Wade) may refer to this town typology in his presentation but the main focus will be benchmarking. Comparing and contrasting how towns perform is key.

3.2 Chris' work on 'Benchmarking+' with STP and East Renfrewshire Council is an attempt to look at the core but also the particular characteristics of our towns. Our towns are an expression of the way the country and relationship of its people, determines the character of a town. Including considerations on the independence question and what shape Scotland might be — and what people believe to be the best route to that best offering. The particular Scottish characteristics of towns enable people and place to interact and develop who they are – people have a strong identity and link with their town.

3.3 Towns are important to MSPs because of constituency and political interest, and we are about to go through an intense political period – with the independence referendum, then Scottish, UK and local elections. In each of those democratic opportunities, there is the opportunity to shape the way people think and to develop policy on towns. The Town

Centre Review publication is anticipated at the end of June. It will help to shape some of that discussion.

Note: Two further MSPs arrived at this point in the Meeting, making the Meeting official from this point forward.

#### **4. PRESENTATION ON 'BENCHMARKING+' BY CHRIS WADE, ACTION FOR MARKET TOWNS.**

4.1 Please contact the [Secretary](#) for a copy of the presentation.

4.2 'Benchmarking+' approach reflects some of the things coming out of the Scotland's Towns Review.

4.3 AMT has experience across the UK and is working together with Scotland's Towns Partnership in Scotland.

4.4 Key points on the slides highlighted by Chris Wade (CW) include -

- Just like the variety of cakes associated with towns, town ingredients and type vary!
- Why measure and monitor – what gets measured, gets done! Although only an indicator and not a replacement for other strategies and policies, it can help to understand your town, track it and benchmark against others.
- 'Benchmarking+' can be done as a consultation and sustained through a simple system towns can use themselves. With a little guidance, towns can opt to just use the do-it-yourself option from the outset.
- Typology research is being discussed with Stirling University. The character of the population in the town varies, and knowing this helps you to compare with other towns and there is work to be done in Scotland on this.
- The process uses detailed and digestible data.
- It can serve to highlight the vitality of a town.
- Interesting observation, referencing the Wordle, which illustrates words use across Scottish policy documents – differs to those that came up with Portas in England.
- The pilot in Barrhead draws on dimensions such as cultural, community, built heritage, economic diversity, leadership and delivery. CW was unable to go into full detail regarding this pilot as the outcome is to be shared locally first. Barrhead selected due to it having undergone extensive change and investment.
- Interestingly, there is disparity between business perceptions of something being a problem versus reality of actual user feedback – e.g. car parking.
- A broad range of core indicators are used, combined with the enhanced 'Benchmarking+' second element; adding additional depth, helping to capture the full flavour of Scotland's towns.

4.5 CW will hold a surgery session with STP to give anyone interested in doing so, the opportunity to suggest other enhance indicators or to clarify anything about the system. Details from the CPG Secretariat. There will be a dissemination and launch of Benchmarking+ in Scotland late autumn.

4.6 RM thanked CW and commenting on the importance of getting that understanding of your town, comparing and contrasting with others, even within a region, the identification of

typology and looking at some work done elsewhere but imprinting Scottish characteristics such as cultural, built heritage, and local leadership is key. There has to be a conversation about that wider shape and nature of towns. We don't have 'anytown' in Scotland so treatment must be addressed as such; identifying the differing circumstances and shaping public policy in that way.

4.7 Chic Brodie MSP left a question with the group following his earlier involvement in the Economy, Energy & Tourism Committee which was looking at regulatory reform. In terms of supermarkets, how is real economic growth encourage, rather than displacement?

## **5. PRESENTATION ON 'INDEPENDENTS' DAY' BY DAVID STEWART REPRESENTING THE NATIONAL SKILLS ACADEMY FOR RETAIL**

5.1 RM introduced David Stewart (DS) who will next look at where retail will fit and how it shapes interaction between people and place, through the 'Independents' Day' campaign.

5.2 Please contact the [Secretary](#) for a copy of the presentation. Taking place on 4<sup>th</sup> July, the campaign aims to provide one possible solution to the apathy that might be felt in some local areas by independents. NSA has a great deal of resource and tools that make it easy for people to take part - it's a low cost option for increasing footfall interest and raising awareness. The campaign promotes independents across the UK, with over 100 towns taking part; 12 in Scotland. In addition to its UK wide supporters, the campaign is supported in Scotland by Scotland's Towns Partnership. NSA is not prescriptive about what a town does to raise profile on the day – a group of towns may take a joint approach or build a week of activities around the day. It strives to bring the community together, focusing on the diversity of businesses, raising profile and engaging with the public on something that is more than a single retail offering.

5.3 Posters were circulated to those present. There is further information on how to get involved, the support provided, and to order or download promotional materials and media packs at [www.retailindie.com](http://www.retailindie.com). Email [indieday@nsaforretail.com](mailto:indieday@nsaforretail.com) to share what's happened in your town or to find out what happened ahead of next year's campaign. The group watched a short film by NSA featuring people who participated.

5.4 RM highlighted the importance of publicity, profile, being innovative e.g. towns collaborating to compete and independent retailers working together.

## **6. DISCUSSION**

6.1 Commenting on heritage and identity of towns, David Stewart views towns becoming more thematic as a real opportunity for towns to look to their heritage or develop something new. Providing the example of the East Neuk, Gordon Bell (GB) described the locally driven initiative to develop localised jobs and circulate money within the local economy. In relation to the built heritage and cultural diversity, RM highlighted a growing sense of local leadership emerging from within the community. Daniel McKendry (DMcK) added that Neilston (East Renfrewshire) is a good example of the community leading; having developed a community charter focused on heritage and cultural heritage and converting that to reflect modern use or interest. CW mentioned Settle Community Hydro electric scheme in Yorkshire as a good example - [www.settlehydro.org.uk](http://www.settlehydro.org.uk). DMcK added that

Clarkston BID has developed Cycle Saturdays – cycle in, get a discount in shops. These can be one offs as well as ongoing themes.

6.2 In response to Barry McCulloch (BMcC), CW explained that indicators must be kept simple and the system looked at business use by use class and not public spend. The Vulnerability Index looks at public spend. CW agreed with BMcC in that data is only as good as what it is used for. CW has examples of where the exercise has helped towns to view themselves differently or to tackle an issue such as car parking.

6.3 Alexander Nicoll focused on the issue CW raised around perception versus reality. Good communications are important and often provide the answer. AN also commented on how we enfranchise wider collaborations e.g. crowdfunding, which ATCM is exploring for the community rather than business. CW didn't want to let parking dominate benchmarking and agrees with AN around good communications; quoting an example in one town where non-users of the town perceived car parking as an issue. However regular town users said the opposite was true. It was then a simple case of communicating to non-users where the parking was! Sharing the example of the community-owned store, GB agrees that very often perception is wrong; communication of the facts and promoting the benefits is key. DMcK commented that with reducing local authority budgets, where in the past money spent on things perceived to be a big issue; small interventions are now developed that often make a big difference. East Renfrewshire Council feels the 'Benchmarking+' is therefore money well spent to see the reality of the town, rather than perceptions. Alastair Mitchell added that when the Falkirk BID was prioritising activities, hundreds of customer and business surveys were undertaken. Businesses perceived car parking as a major problem; whereas customers didn't even register concern when asked about its availability or cost. The BID is now working on a viable approach with the Council. DS commented that often car parking isn't linked to take people to town services.

6.4 Dan Smith picked up on Chic Brodie's earlier question - how do we get planners to think more about economic growth rather than displacement? Is the issue poor leadership or inadequate policy? Should there be a policy enforcing leaders to ensure town centres grow? RM encouraged a response from retailer, Alliance Boots, whose Vicky Ferrier commented that Boots is different as it is wider than just retail, and seeks to serve its community with a pharmacy and optician services – it needs to be in towns to be connected to people. CW highlighted the large supermarkets' stock line around their creation of 300 jobs but there is no evidence on jobs then lost from the town, the quality of jobs created and the wider economic impact. There are now examples where investment isn't happening in towns for fear of planning permission being given for out of town stores. Ian McLelland emphasised that there are no good quality impact studies that prove that an out of town store will impact on the town, although we know from experience that it does. Raymond Boyle believes that policy is where the issue lies, and lack of coordination between economic development and planning departments on encouraging developments into town. Scottish Government must do something to ensure councils look at a bigger policy to make these two departments work together. Andy Kennedy suggested a duty to promote economic growth would be helpful but in defining what that constitutes, could result in an outcome that employment out of town is optimal route. Addressing variability of service at local level, BMcC commented on the introduction of a stable duty through the Regulatory Reform Bill; which is to be integrated into activity across all local authorities. The Bill aims to address, in one area, the inconsistent interpretation and implementation of local regulation. Karen Whitefield of USDAW, with reference to comments around large retailers, wished to

add that from a trade union perspective, a big retailer doesn't make them a bad retailer or employer.

## **7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

7.1 STP is liaising with East Renfrewshire and Renfrewshire Councils regarding the CPG Study Visit which is to take place during the week commencing 15<sup>th</sup> July. Final information will be circulated to all Group members shortly.

7.2 MMcC recommended watching a BBC2 programme about Enniskillen, broadcast on 11 June.

## **8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

8.1 The next meeting will be held on 11<sup>th</sup> September, from 6 pm to 8 pm.

## **Cross Party Group on Towns and Town Centres**

1:00pm, Wednesday 12 June 2013  
Committee Room 2, Scottish Parliament

***Lunch kindly supported by Business Improvement Districts Scotland***

### **Agenda**

#### **Theme: Town Centre Performance - Resilience & Opportunities**

1. Lunch (1 pm – 1.30 pm)
2. Convener, Margaret McCulloch MSP (1.30 pm – 1.40 pm):
  - i. Welcome & Opening Remarks
  - ii. Minutes of last meeting
  - iii. Matters arising
3. Introduction to Theme: Ross Martin, Policy Director, Centre for Scottish Public Policy (1.40 pm – 1.45 pm)
4. Presentation – Chris Wade, Chief Executive, Action for Market Towns (1.45 pm – 2 pm)
5. Presentation – National Skills Academy for Retail (2 pm – 2.10 pm)
6. Discussion (2.10 pm - 2.30 pm)
7. Any Other Business (2.30 pm – 2.40 pm)
8. Date of Next Meeting – 11 September (6 pm – 8 pm)

## **APPENDIX 2 – APOLOGIES AND LIST OF ATTENDEES:**

### **Apologies**

Jackie Baillie MSP  
Maggie M. Broadley, Craft Town Scotland  
Vivien Collie, Vivid Ideas and Solutions  
Leigh Brown, Perth & Kinross Council  
Alex Bottrill, Sustrans  
Kerry Burgess-Ayala, National Skills Academy for Retail  
Andrew Dixon, Town Centre Review Group  
Tracy Duggan, National Skills Academy for Retail  
Laura Forster, Centre for Scottish Public Policy  
Malcolm Fraser, Malcolm Fraser Architects  
Eric Guthrie, TACTRAN  
Colin Howden, Transform Scotland  
Stephen Leckie, Crieff Hydro  
Robert Livingston, Hi-Arts  
Willie Miller, Willie Miller Urban Design  
Maggie Mitchell, Dunfermline Delivers  
Fiona Moriarty, Scottish Retail Consortium  
Brian Patterson, East Dunbartonshire Council  
Phil Prentice, East Renfrewshire Council  
Dennis Rodwell, Dennis Rodwell Architecture & Planning  
Iain Scott, scotpreneur  
Heather Sim, Space Unlimited  
Professor Leigh Sparks, Stirling University  
Bill Walker MSP  
Nick Wright, Nick Wright Planning

### **Attendees**

Margaret McCulloch MSP (Convener)  
Graeme Dey MSP (Deputy Convener)  
Kevin Belfield, First UK Bus  
Gordon Bell, The Retailer  
Elaine Bone, Scotland's Towns Partnership (Secretary) & Economic Development Association Scotland  
Raymond Boyle, New Consensus Communications  
Chic Brodie MSP  
Callum Chomczuk, Pagoda PR, representing Alliance Boots  
Garry Clark, Scottish Chambers of Commerce  
Scott Davidson, Halcrow  
Ian Davison Porter, Business Improvement Districts Scotland  
Annabelle Ewing MSP  
Joseph Fagan, Scottish Parliament  
Vicky Ferrier, Alliance Boots  
Ian Fowell, Scottish Small Towns Group  
Andy Kennedy, Stirling Council  
Ross Martin, Centre for Scottish Public Policy & Scotland's Towns Partnership  
Jim MacDonald, Architecture + Design Scotland  
Barry McCulloch, FSB Scotland

Ojay McDonald, Association of Town & City Management  
Daniel McKendry, East Renfrewshire Council  
Craig McLaren, RTPi  
Ian McLelland, East Kilbride Shopping Centre  
Hugh McMahon, Paisley BID  
Jim Metcalfe, Carnegie UK Trust  
Nikola Miller, RTPi  
Alastair Mitchell, Falkirk Delivers  
Alexander Nicoll, Association of Town & City Management  
Paul Rounce, GVA  
Douglas Scott, Scottish Borders Council  
Dan Smith, Motherwell Town Centre  
Tom Sneddon, Development Trusts Association Scotland (External Deputy Convener)  
David Stewart, Highland Retail Academy (representing National Skills Academy for Retail)  
Sunil Varu, Association of Town & City Management Scotland Network (External Deputy Convener)  
Chris Wade, Action for Market Towns  
Karen Whitefield, USDAW  
Ross Williams, Pagoda PR (representing Alliance Boots)