

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

HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 14<sup>TH</sup> MAY, 2014 AT 17:30

COMMITTEE ROOM 4, SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

## AGENDA ITEMS

### 1. Welcome & Opening Remarks

- 1.1 Margaret McCulloch (MMcC) welcomed members to the meeting and thanked First Group for supporting refreshments. MMcC also congratulated Professor Leigh Sparks on his appointment as Chair of Scotland's Towns Partnership (STP).
- 1.2 MMcC proposed name cards be made available for use at the next meeting. As there were a number of new people to the Group, introductions around the room were made.

### 2. Minutes of the Last Meeting and Matters Arising

- 2.1 The Minutes were accepted by Tom Sneddon and seconded by Alastair Mitchell.
- 2.2 The Group's Annual Return has been submitted and is available on the Scottish Parliament website. A copy of the Return, along with Minutes and presentations from Group Meetings can be found on the STP website, under Policy.

### 3. Community-Led Towns: *Empowering & Enabling Communities*

3.1 MMcC introduced Ian Cooke (IC), Director of Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS). IC's presentation is available on the STP website, under Policy.

3.2 IC gave a brief introduction to DTAS - the national organisation for development trusts in Scotland. Tom Sneddon is a co founder and sits on the DTAS Board. Development trusts are community led regeneration organisations. Community led towns do not supplant local authorities.

3.3 IC went on to provide an example of Caernarfon, Wales, that has a population of approximately 10,000. In the 90s, half of the properties in the town were either vacant or for sale; it was a town with a cultural black hole. Visitors came to visit the castle and left. This started a discussion and in 1992 local people set up an independent community led organisation called Galeri Caernarfon. It is a not for profit community enterprise operating as a development trust. They create surpluses but these must be invested in the town. Their vision was that anything is possible through creative thought and sustainable action; and to realize the town's economic, social and environmental potential. The results created 50 jobs, 30 property renovations, a property portfolio worth £7m and it reversed economic blight in the town, and reinvigorated the private sector environment. They have a huge arts programme in a new development – a £7.5 m enterprise centre, containing an auditorium, enterprise units, café and art workspace. It was built on the site of derelict abattoir, which has now led on to the regeneration of a derelict dock area.

3.4 Example 2 is West Kilbride. Previously half of the retail businesses had ceased, there were vacant units and vandalism. A local group formed, established a development trust, and created a vision and plan. Although they experienced some set backs and false starts, the town still evolved to take account of these incidences. They got cash flowing; and an environment group formed to brighten the streets and gardens; and went on to purchase meadows for an orchard and wildflower garden. Confidence grew. A strong tourism base was thought to be important to the town's future so they started Craft Town destination town. Now home to studios, retail, and with the latest development being a converted church - now a café, exhibition space and community hub. The local people are now proud of their town.

3.5 Both examples reflect well, the development trust approach, and are typical of the approach to community led regeneration. Development trusts provide communities with the framework to lead but reflect local circumstances, challenges and opportunities. They are not short term, but incremental. The underlying principles are-

- Local anchor organisation. For example, development trust, housing association working through local plan.
- Holistic – not just physical, it is across physical, economic, social and environmental – all community life reflected.
- Partnership working – not top down. Partners in private, public, third sector for specific purposes.
- Commits community to be more enterprising – looking to where it generates its own trading income - still finds grants, but is not grant dependent. It takes time.
- Enterprising approach, acquisition, management of physical assets - land, buildings etc.

3.6 Why does community led regeneration work well? –

- Built around passion of local people, giving drive and sustainability to project.
- Harnessing resource of local people - tap into local knowledge, networks.
- More agile.
- Can access funding, tax reliefs and exemptions that councils may not. For example, social finance – social share issues. Examples are found at Balerno, Harlow, Mull.

3.7 DTA membership details – see presentation or go to the DTAS website [www.dtascot.org.uk](http://www.dtascot.org.uk).

3.8 Empowering and Enabling Communities – some key points as follows:

- No single blueprint – bottom up, commitment, hard work, organic.
- Communities must want to do it for themselves; can't be enforced but can stimulate, nurture, encourage, support by providing right kind of environment such as supportive policy and legislative framework. For example, recent Scottish Government discussions on Community Empowerment Bill welcomed.
- It is also about resource – not huge requirements but easy access to funding at key moments is crucial – Big Lottery Funding is good but need more for early stage development. There are support advice programmes, which is a good thing but some need refocused.
- Need cultural change; to be more enterprising – not just locally but in government - both local and national, and to convey trust in communities.

3.9 MMcC thanked IC and welcomed Chick Brodie MSP to the meeting.

#### 4. Community-Led Towns: **2.Connecting Communities**

4.1 Extending apologies from Kevin Belfield, MMcC introduced John Scott (JS), Network Manager for Scotland East, First UK Bus. JS updated the Group on First UK Bus action on connecting communities. Key points as follows -

- Building networks.
- Timetable revisions.
- First covers Scotland wide through their companies.
- First connects people and place – to social and leisure and to employment and business.
- They are contributing to protecting services as not everyone has access to a car, especially in rural areas – there are a lot of small towns and communities in Scotland, where public transport is essential.
- JS acknowledged the value of the Cross Party Group saying it is good to be involved and up to date on what is happening in towns and high streets.
- First is always actively developing interventions to encourage people to use public transport to visit their own and neighbouring towns. For example, fare promotions, leaflet drops which feature activities and services in their area, not just their own nearest town. JS circulated an example leaflet.
- The information is not aimed at tourists but local people.
- As a public transport operator, First is very much involved in the community and connecting people.

4.2 MMcC thanked JS and introduced Colin Munro (CM), CEO of Miconex. Some key points made by CM follow. However, please see CM's full presentation on the STP website, under Policy.

- Miconex - connecting local people and visitors with town, through an evolving model of digital communications that works. Important to listen to towns and evolve.
- For a host of reasons, consumers are not using towns and we want them to use towns more; spend more.
- What are Miconex doing? All the technical 'stuff' but the additionality comes with digital marketing, business engagement and consumer marketing.
- Technology – the Miconex platform allows businesses to enter content on a central platform, then that is transmitted.
- Promotion and administrator use – use push notifications, geo fenced notifications, social media and email alerts. From 7 am til 10 pm, 7days per week, Miconex check content; establish the best way to get businesses' message out; do social media tagging. They put human intellect into technology.
- Marketing – there are a suite of marketing materials to establish the brand. For example –beer mats. Online presence; develop corporate partnerships such as First.
- Give people reasons to use a town - First and miconex together offer physical and virtual connection to town. Also work with entertainment providers, shopping centres who all have desire to get people to town.
- Engagement resource. It is challenging to get people to engage, especially those new to digital communications. Important to find a way of promoting all businesses in town, to ensure fresh content for the consumer. Deploying a digital ambassador in towns has been effective. They find out what those businesses are doing - armed with a tablet,

they feed that info back to the content managers. Currently working with STP and BIDs Scotland to develop further roll out across Scotland's towns.

- The focus is MiScotland, but breaks down to local mi areas.
- mi town/mi region – this is relevant to government, council and local events such as the Ryder Cup. One message from businesses hits all these spaces.
- There are marketing opportunities - enables whole town proposition, builds a growing asset, encourages collaboration, sits on top of broadband infrastructure, encourages the use of digital, creates local jobs, forms part of a national infrastructure, allowing all towns to be promoted at a national level. For example Mi Ayr promotes Ayr, Ayr Racecourse, the theatre.
- Barriers and issues: Lack of budget (synergies at a national scale would help); complexity of project; lack of understanding about the required elements (getting an app/web isn't just it – need all the other elements described to make it work).

4.3 MMcC thanked CM and welcomed Rod Campbell MSP to the meeting.

## 5. Discussion

5.1 MMcC invited Group discussion.

5.2 MMcC asked Falkirk BID for some feedback on the benefits of Mi Falkirk. Alastair Mitchell (AM) explained that it launched a year ago, with a huge influx of businesses keen to be part of it. However, trying to encourage businesses to concentrate on it and keep content fresh, is challenging - they need help from AM or CM. AM is going to appoint a digital ambassador. There are 200 businesses on the app, with 300 offers showing. The BID pays for it, and the council will be adding a tourism element. A loyalty scheme will shortly be added, taking the app to another level. CM added that there is a whole road map of development that can happen. Miconex and Leigh Sparks have won a government competition to develop as part of that, a loyalty element. CM was grateful to Falkirk BID for allowing them to go on the journey with them, helping to develop and evolve the project. Loyalty is the next key development.

5.3 Chick Brodie MSP (CB) commented that CM's presentation was good, and a great example of communication. CB went on to say that it is important that a town tells its story and asked how a town does that in a way that interests people. CM responded saying that they provide searchable information, so it is easy to find out what's there, but agrees there's a lot more going on in towns than just offers on lunch. So their ambassadors are out taking photos and engaging with businesses. Using Ayr as an example, CM explained that the businesses tell the town's story - the more businesses connect, the more the picture expands and influences where people visit and spend their money.

5.4 MMcC comments on the ease of the information appearing as soon as you arrive in a new town. Alastair Mitchell added that it's also about have presence across social media channels - Facebook, website, emails.

5.5 Leigh Sparks (LS) – with the different geographical levels, the businesses in a place tells you something about a place. However, the tourism information adds a layer. At Scotland level it will pick up branding messages about place. CM added that the tourism aspect comes top down from Mi Scotland; complemented by a bottom up resource on what's happening, where to go, eat and shop. When tourists get to the town, they benefit from the micro level info.

5.6 LS remarked that the loyalty aspect of the project that he and CM are working on is a very exciting development.

5.7 MMcC complimented the use of ambassadors to help businesses with keeping up to date with fresh content; businesses are short on time and may not have the right skills.

5.8 Alastair Mitchell stressed that even if a business doesn't run offers, it can still promote what it does; citing the example of the Dundee pub - desperate to be on the app but it had no offers, so their message was we don't do offers but we're a good pub!

5.9 David Lonsdale, asked if there are competitors talking to towns/councils – are there concerns around identity. CM replied saying there is nobody building the scale and ambition of what Miconex is doing, providing the 4 elements – it has to be about more than just technology. Taking Aberdeenshire as an example, the Council is trialing Peterhead first, then rolling out to other towns and building up to Aberdeenshire. It will be easier when Miconex reaches a point where a local authority adopts across the whole area first. The growing evidence is now helping to promote the idea.

5.10 Joe Fagan asked if First uses an app and also raised issue of lack of WiFi connection in places. John Scott confirmed that they are in early stages of development but they are partnering with Miconex, and coupling that with an advert on the leaflets they're circulating. They intend to integrate Miconex app links with the First app.

5.11 MMcC confirmed that she has been working with First Bus in East Kilbride, to run a special weekday fare to bring people into town, and on back of ticket the retailers promote their offers. Reaffirming that First Bus is open to helping to promote First Bus and town centres.

5.12 John Lee asked Ian Cooke (IC) what role local authorities play in development trusts – enablers or inhibitors? IC said that the experience across Scotland in general, is that a development trust can often be perceived as a threat or challenge to local authorities. However, once you get past that initial perception, local authorities appreciate that the development trust can bring help and partnership.

## **6. Any Other Competent Business and Date of Next Meeting**

6.1 Alastair Mitchell asked if there was any progress regarding the Town Centre First policy, citing the Falkirk example where they are lobbying the council to stay in the town centre. MMcC and Joe Fagan (JF) have submitted a written question to the Minister, asking if a definition of the Town Centre First policy had been established. To date there had been no reply. JF restated the CPG's scrutiny role in ensuring the action plan's progress. MMcC proposed and agreed to invite the Minister to a future CPG meeting. Leigh Sparks referenced a report in Wales calling for TCF and the importance of getting the definition right. Alasdair Morrison added that the whole idea of speaking to the Minister is that TCF will tie in with planning policy released in June. Alasdair Morrison echoed Leigh Sparks' point - if we don't move forward we'll be left behind.

6.2 David Sutton (DS) commented that the development trust case for NHS buildings conversion is positive. DS added that in trying to get supermarkets into town centres, it is challenging in planning terms to know what defines the town centre. MMcC asked if anyone had an example of town centre housing conversion. DS said North Lanarkshire Council do but complex. Like development trusts, it is great if all goes well but if it goes badly wrong then you need that emergency support.

6.3 Sunil Varu – in response to Alastair Mitchell, TCF policy issue is with COSLA. As CPG Convener, MMcC to follow up TCF definition on behalf of CPG.

6.4 MMcC announced that relevant to today's community discussions, STP is collaborating with SCDC to consult through a survey and an event on 'Towns and Community Development and Engagement'. Look at a range of issues, barriers, and support required. If STP and SCDC find there is a clear agenda and real interest in pursuing specific issues further they will jointly seek to address this in a practical approach. More details can be found in the Hub area (Events) of STP website.

6.5 MMcC reminded members that it's their Cross Party Group and encouraged their ideas for future meetings.

6.6 The ATCM Summer School takes place in Dundee, 25 – 27 June.

6.7 The Date of Next Meeting is to be confirmed.

## **APPENDIX 1 – AGENDA FOR CROSS PARTY GROUP ON TOWNS AND TOWN CENTRES MEETING HELD WEDNESDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2014**

- 17:30 Refreshments - kindly supported by First Bus
- 17:40 Welcome & Opening Remarks – Margaret McCulloch MSP, Convener
- 17:45 Minutes of previous meeting & Matters arising

### **Discussion on Community-Led Towns**

#### **Empowering & Enabling Communities**

- 1750 Overview & Examples of How to Achieve Community-Led Towns  
Ian Cooke, Director, Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS)

#### **Connecting Communities**

- 1810 John Scott, Network Manager for Scotland East, First UK Bus
- 1820 Colin Munro, CEO, Miconex
- 1830 Discussion
- 1850 AOCB & Date of Next Meeting (to be confirmed)
- 1900 Close of Meeting

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

### **APOLOGIES**

Ewan Anderson, 7N Architects  
Kevin Belfield, First UK Bus  
Lisa Blyth, 7N Architects  
Maggie Broadley, Craft Town Scotland  
Sheena Cleland, Scottish Parliament  
Annabelle Ewing MSP  
Julia Frost, Planning Aid for Scotland  
Keith Irving, Living Streets  
Stephen Leckie, Scottish Tourism Alliance  
Euan Leitch, Built Environment Forum Scotland  
Barry McCulloch, FSB Scotland  
Craig McLaren, RTPi Scotland  
Ian McLelland, East Kilbride Centre  
Rurighd McMeddes, Planning Democracy  
Pete Reid, Falkirk Council  
Beria Rodwell  
Dennis Rodwell, Dennis Rodwell Architecture and Planning  
David Stewart, Highland Retail Academy  
James Trolland  
Karen Whitefield, USDAW  
David Wood, Planning Aid for Scotland  
Jane Wood, Scottish Business in the Community  
Nick Wright, Nick Wright Planning

### **ATTENDEES**

Margaret McCulloch MSP (Convener)  
Graeme Dey MSP (Deputy Convener)  
Elaine Bone, Scotland's Towns Partnership and Economic Development Association  
Scotland  
Viv Collie, Vivid Ideas and Solutions  
Ian Cooke, Development Trusts Association Scotland  
Ian Davison Porter, BIDs Scotland  
Joe Fagan, Scottish Parliament  
Ian Fowell, Small Towns Association  
Keith Geddes, Pagoda PR  
Andy Godfrey, Alliance Boots  
Janice Gray, Paths for All  
David Grove, Fife Council  
Roddy Jamieson, 6274 Public Art  
Andy Kennedy, Stirling Council  
John Lee, Scottish Grocers Federation  
David Lonsdale, Scottish Retail Consortium  
Rebecca Mather, Scotland's Towns Partnership  
Phil Matthews, Transform Scotland  
Alastair Mitchell, Falkirk Delivers  
Maggie Mitchell, Dunfermline Delivers



Flick Monk, Centre for Scottish Public Policy  
Alasdair Morrison, GVA James Barr  
Colin Munro, Mi Conex  
Nairn Pearson, West Lothian Council  
Phil Prentice, East Renfrewshire Council  
Gordon Reid, Carlogie Ltd  
Matt Ronan, Scottish Business Resilience Centre  
Douglas Scott, Scottish Borders Council  
John Scott, First UK Bus  
Lindsey Sibbald, City of Edinburgh Council  
Tom Sneddon, Development Trusts Association Scotland  
Leigh Sparks, University of Stirling and Scotland's Towns Partnership  
David Sutton, North Lanarkshire Council  
Sunil Varu, ATCM Scotland