

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

HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 1st OCTOBER, 2014 AT 1pm

COMMITTEE ROOM 1, SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Welcome & Opening Remarks

1.1 Margaret McCulloch (MMcC) welcomed members to the meeting and thanked Scotland's Towns Partnership for supporting refreshments. MMcC then welcomed Minister for Local Government and Planning, Derek Mackay MSP to present an update of progress and constraints of the Town Centre Action Plan.

2. Derek Mackay MSP, Minister for Local Government and Planning

2.1 DM suggested that the value of attending the CPG for him is not only to inform and update but to hear from group members. The economy is recovering but we still have to be cautious; there are still geographical and sectorial differences.

2.2 The economy is stronger than it was a year ago, around when the Town Centre Action Plan was launched. DM to reconvene with the external advisory group and there will be an update from Scottish Government soon.

2.3 DM announced that STP has been granted, over two years, £186,000 by the Scottish Government as a developmental project to strengthen it as the 'go-to' body for towns in Scotland. DM believes that partnerships are key to regeneration of town centres across Scotland. An example of successful partnerships are BIDs (Business Improvement Districts) which should be encouraged by local authorities and see increase in the number of BIDs across the country.

2.4 DM highlighted the Town Centre First Principle which accompanied the Town Centre Action Plan. Confirming that many local authorities had actively carried out activities with the Town Centre First Principle (TCF) at the forefront of their decisions and identifying that East Renfrewshire, West Dunbartonshire and East Ayrshire were Town Centre First Councils. There should be a sequential approach, not just for retail but all footfall generating activities. Retail and other footfall creating activities should be led locally with the Town Centre First Principle in mind. Greater emphasis on sustainable economic development.

2.5 We need to continue to set conditions for our town centres to grow and thrive – digitally connected, active transport, accessible. Every council should aspire to being a Town Centre First Council, leading to strong local partnerships and local solutions. STP, government and other fora all want to support and ensure strong local on-ground partnerships and the best way is through councils adopting TCF.

2.6 DM invited members to ask questions.

2.7 MMcC welcomed Margaret McDougall MSP to the meeting. MMcC shared an example of her local South Lanarkshire Council, talking up their towns and town centres. Identifying that policy information and the importance of town centres has trickled down

to local authority areas. MMcC welcomed Daniel McKendry's comments on East Renfrewshire's adoption of TCF approach.

- 2.8 Malcolm Fraser (MF) congratulated DM on the progress being made in town centres and highlighted that the Town Centre First Principle is a huge credit to him. MF was pleased to see ongoing conversations with External Advisory Group but there are some issues which should be raised. One being the five year supply rule which can adversely affect the good that has been carried out in town centres. The second issue is that brown fields are too expensive for development. A land value tax would help alleviate this – we need waivers; encouraging the market to build where we want it to build.
- 2.9 DM stated that he would reconvene with the external advisory group to discuss the above. There are very specific difficulties and it is hard to influence commercial trends. Land value tax will be considered after the Land Review group have met. Paul Wheelhouse MSP is set to release a Land Reform Bill; there will be a local tax relief scheme. An idea may be to reduce the cost of refurbishment which would benefit areas such as Edinburgh. DM stated that he will try to use a variety of levers to help the development of town centres and property re-use. An ongoing challenge from Local Authorities is that they can be protective around a particular piece of land or building. A planning tax is not attractive. However, the Business Rates Incentivisation Scheme (BRIS) has been revised. Local authorities should go beyond effective land sites and encourage housing growth.
- 2.10 Sunil Varu (SV) asked how and where DM proposed the £186,000 grant for STP would be spent.
- 2.11 DM: There are conditions of the grant that will be discussed later today with STP. There are many organisations that work to improve our town but there is not a single representative body for Scotland's towns. This grant does not aim to replace the work of civil servants but act to consolidate STP's offering as the go-to body. There is a limited pot for demonstration projects - however, there are still some funds available. DM suggested that if members in the room have an innovative and transformational idea or project them to come forward to discuss.
- 2.12 Craig McLaren (CMcL), commended the Town Centre First Principle. He asked, what the key is to its successful delivery and how will it be monitored?
- 2.13 DM: it is down to local authorities to ensure delivery. There are two devices that can be used to monitor. Planning applications, health checks and sequential approach. We encourage all councils to be Town Centre First councils, it is all about encouraging opportunity and empowerment at local level. The Cabinet approved the Town Centre First Principle so it is also their responsibility to ensure town centres are considered in the decision making process. There is often conflict between economic development and the Town Centre First Principle but it is about finding the balance. DM stated that if we can have investment then it should be going into the town centre.
- 2.14 Alastair Mitchell (AM) reminded delegates that during the last meeting of the CPG, he had discussed how Falkirk Delivers (Business Improvement District) had been lobbying Falkirk Council to remain in the town centre. This lobbying was successful and the council will remain in Falkirk centre.
- 2.15 DM welcomed this news.
- 2.16 MMcC, suggested some of the members may not be fully apprised of the Community Empowerment Bill and its relevance to towns.
- 2.17 DM: The Community Empowerment Bill is a key driver to empower communities and ensure their voices are heard. There are new rights and responsibilities for communities. It will empower geographical communities and communities of interest

including asset ownership/lease/use of public sector assets. Abandoned and neglected assets can now be requested for asset transfer.

- 2.18 MMcC cited the example of Paisley where the council looked to take over a derelict building but it was too expensive.
- 2.19 DM: Parliament has agreed that where dangerous and derelict buildings are, local councils can carry out improvement work and the Bill will be included in the title of the property. The state can intervene but also the community has the right to buy.
- 2.20 MMcC: how can we encourage local authorities to look at change of use for these buildings?
- 2.21 DM: Proposing flexible, “simplified planning zones”; if you have change of use permission, you won’t need to go through the whole planning process. There is currently a pilot taking place in East Renfrewshire. Town charette pilot will benefit some. Local authorities should also recognise the pace of change within communities. There is a lot of budget pressure for Local Authorities but there are good examples of local authorities that do actively adhere to the Town Centre First Principle.
- 2.22 DM: Government is currently reviewing ‘use classes order’, to give strength to councils to deal with pay day lender retailers and betting shops on the high street. Pay day lender retailers will not be entitled to rates relief under new changes. DM emphasised that we need to take time to get things like this right. DM welcomes CPG members’ support in a call to Westminster for more powers around this issue.
- 2.23 MF stated that it is very positive to see ideas coming from Government. With regards to the Community Empowerment Bill, councils do not pay VAT but community groups do. Working together, perhaps councils can be incentivised so that if they build in town, they get rate relief.
- 2.24 DM will continue lobbying Westminster re VAT and pushing the Town Centre First Principle. A Town Centre First council need not spend money if being Town Centre First orientated, it can be a statement of commitment. Some are branding themselves as Town Centre First councils, for example West Dunbartonshire and East Ayrshire. The most effective local authorities will be those who align planning, regulatory and economic development functions.
- 2.25 Tom Johnston (TJ): In 2017 there will be new regulations for energy efficient buildings. There is concern over new owners not meeting regulations and ruining building.
- 2.26 DM: There are European electives which we must adhere to, for example Climate Change legislation. Domestic properties – much harder to deliver in a cost effective way. We need to encourage innovation, but ensure we have the right balance and be reasonable and flexible.
- 2.27 MMcC thanked DM for taking part in today’s CPG.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting and Matters Arising

- 3.1 The Minutes were accepted by AM and seconded by Leigh Sparks (LS).

4. Understanding Scottish Places – Project Update

Jim Metcalfe, Head of Practice and Development, Carnegie UK Trust and Professor Leigh Sparks, University of Stirling.

- 4.1 Jim Metcalfe (JM), tabled a leaflet and introduced a piece of work being carried out at the moment called Understanding Scottish Places (USP). A demonstration project stemming from the Town Centre Action Plan, it is a data tool managed by a consortium and

funded by the Scottish Government and Carnegie, looking at economic and social challenges. It will provide a new typology of towns (not a ranking system) to help us to think about which we are like; and to inform on how town communities relate to each other and how we move and use our towns through dependency mapping. There is a need to know more about our towns and this will help to inform better decisions about planning and policy.

4.2 Leigh Sparks (LS) went on to describe the benchmarking element of the tool which covers basic typology using the census data and other pre-existing data. The consortium will look at 479 towns across Scotland. CLES then take other national data sets on community, social connectivity measures and match against descriptors. The data will allow practitioners to see which town is most similar to theirs and learn about the similarities and differences of each. 'Benchmarking plus' brings qualitative data and what we provide will be exemplars. There are tensions in it – in consultations with councils, it is creating a wish list of data we don't have. Some of it we can address; some doesn't exist. The side benefit is that we can see where data gaps are. The tool will be launched along with the STP website.

4.3 MMcC, invited delegates to ask questions.

4.4 CMcL: How does USP tie in with the Master Planning Toolkit?

4.5 LS: There should be a draft of the Master Planning Toolkit available over the next two weeks. When that has been released we can see how they fit but we are confident they will fit well together.

4.6 JM: The tool is free, will not be exclusive, anyone can use it.

4.7 MMc thanked JM and LS and invited Phil Prentice (PP) to update delegates on Scotland's Towns Week.

4.8 PP: Scotland's Towns Week runs from 17 – 23 November 2014 with Scotland's Towns Conference being the cornerstone event of the week on 19 November. The conference is open to all those with an interest or responsibility for towns in Scotland. There will be a wide range of speakers, drop-ins and facilitated tables. PP encouraged members to attend and highlighted opportunities for sponsoring and exhibiting.

4.9 MMcC asked members if they had sponsored or taken part in the event previously and what benefits they saw from being at the conference previously.

4.10 Maggie Mitchell (MM): The conference acts as a forum for greater understanding of activity taking place across Scotland. It is beneficial for knowledge transfer and networking.

4.11 Daniel McKendry (DMc) recommends attending the conference, having been in previous years DM highlighted it is the biggest event for towns in Scotland and it covers all interests. It is a great opportunity for networking, hearing from a wide range of people and making contacts for the future.

5. Open Discussion Forum

5.1 Dave Sutton (DS): Given health service mindset change; police stations and courts going from town centres, DS hopes government mindful in backing up what they say on towns. Town centres are still struggling with vacant properties. It is not just about funding but about bridging the gap. Care must be taken in encouraging community take over – council need to step in at times.

5.2 The Group agreed with MMcC's suggestion of submitting specific questions to the Minister ahead of CPG attendance in future.

5.3 MF commented that DS' point is well made in relation to police and justice service moving out of towns. Community planning partnerships are said to be key but they do not consult the community. Town centres deliver across services which includes the justice system. MF hopes that at some point in the future we can look at this again.

5.4 MMcC suggested we invite Police Scotland, NHS and other organisations to the next CPG. If members have any other suggestions please email Elaine Bone. IDP mentioned post office and banks.

5.5 CMcL asked who would monitor the Town Centre First Principle.

5.6 Andy Kennedy (AK) referred to TCRF applications.

5.6 MMcC proposed writing to thank the Minister for attending and put to him the Group's further questions and points, copying in Susan Brown.

6. Any Other Competent Business and Date of Next Meeting

6.1 There is an updated date for the next meeting which will be 10th December 2014, Committee Room 6, 5.30pm – 7.30pm. Meetings thereafter will be as follows:

25th February, Committee Room 1, 1pm – 2.30pm (AGM)

13th May 2014, Committee Room 4, 6pm – 8pm

6.2 Joe Fagan (JF): The office bearers met earlier this year to discuss themes for discussion. The next meeting will look at the evening economy and town centre safety. BIDs were cited as having good examples.

Appendix 1 – Agenda for Meeting held on 1st October 2014

Cross Party Group on Towns and Town Centres

1 pm – 2.30 pm, Wednesday 1st October 2014

Committee Room 1, Scottish Parliament

Agenda

Refreshments provided

12:55 Assemble for prompt 13:00 start

13:00 Welcome – Margaret McCulloch MSP, Convener

Derek Mackay MSP, Minister for Local Government & Planning

13:15 Minutes of Previous Meeting & Matters Arising – Margaret McCulloch MSP, Convener

13:20 Understanding Scottish Places - Project Update

Jim Metcalfe, Head of Practice & Development, Carnegie UK Trust

Professor Leigh Sparks, Head of the Graduate Business School & Professor of Retail Studies, University of Stirling

13:40 Open Discussion Forum

Covering *Understanding Scottish Places* project, Town Centre Action Plan & Other town matters

14:00 Any Other Competent Business & Date of Next Meeting

14:10 Close of Meeting

(14:10 – 14:30 Filming for Scotland's Towns Week)

Appendix 2 – Attendance list for meeting held on 1st October 2014

CROSS PARTY GROUP ON TOWNS AND TOWN CENTRES WEDNESDAY, 1ST OCTOBER 2014 AT 13:00 COMMITTEE ROOM 1, SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

APOLOGIES AND LIST OF ATTENDEES

APOLOGIES

Clare Adamson MSP
Ewan Anderson, 7N Architects
Lisa Blyth, 7N Architects
Maggie Broadley, Craft Town Scotland
Leigh Brown, Perth & Kinross Council
Iain Cavanagh, Boots UK
Callum Chomczuk, Pagoda PR
Viv Collie
Annabelle Ewing MSP
Robert Ferguson, Scottish Disability Equality Forum
Ian Fowell, Small Towns Association
Janice Gray, Paths for All
Eric Guthrie, Tactran
John Lee, Scottish Grocers Federation
David Lonsdale, Scottish Retail Consortium
Colin Munro, Mi Conex
Alexander Nicoll, ATCM
Carole Noble, Keep Scotland Beautiful
Brian Patterson, East Dunbartonshire Council
Pete Reid, Falkirk Council
Beria Rodwell
Dennis Rodwell, Dennis Rodwell Architecture and Planning
Tom Sneddon, Development Trusts Association Scotland
Nick Wright, Nick Wright Planning

ATTENDEES

Margaret McCulloch MSP (Convener)
Elaine Bone, Scotland's Towns Partnership and Economic Development Association
Scotland
Georgina Bowyer, Carnegie UK Trust
Susan Brown, Scottish Government
Garry Clark, Scottish Chambers of Commerce
Peter Craig, Poundland, for Scottish Retail Consortium
Scott Davidson, CH2M Hill
Ian Davison Porter, BIDs Scotland
Hew Edgar, RICS
Joe Fagan, Scottish Parliament
Malcolm Fraser, Malcolm Fraser Architects
Cecilia Fredriksson, for the University of Stirling
Julia Frost, PAS (Planning Aid for Scotland)
Keith Geddes, Pagoda PR representing Alliance Boots

Sile Hayes, RTPI Scotland
Tom Johnston, Colliers International
Andy Kennedy, Stirling Council
Rebecca Mather, Scotland's Towns Partnership
Margaret McDougall MSP
Daniel McKendry, East Renfrewshire Council
Craig McLaren, RTPI Scotland
Ashleigh McLennan, SCDI
Jim Metcalfe, Carnegie UK Trust
Nikola Miller, RTPI Scotland
Alastair Mitchell, Falkirk Delivers
Maggie Mitchell, Dunfermline Delivers
Flick Monk, Centre for Scottish Public Policy
Penny Morriss, Living Streets
Phil Prentice, East Renfrewshire Council
Professor Leigh Sparks, University of Stirling
Dave Sutton, North Lanarkshire Council
Sunil Varu, ATCM Scotland
Iain Wilson, First ScotRail
Jane Wood, Scottish Business in the Community

Videographer – Alan McMaster