

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

HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 24TH FEBRUARY 2016, 1 PM
COMMITTEE ROOM 2, THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

1. Welcome and Opening Remarks

MMcC welcomed members and thanked 'The Retailer' for supporting refreshments.

2. AGM Business and Dissolution of Parliament and CPG

AGM Business

With the dissolution of parliament, there will be no re-election of office bearers. However, current non-MSPs have expressed their commitment to continuing, following re-registration of the CPG, with Leigh Brown taking over from Sunil Varu in her new capacity as ATCM Chair Scotland. To remind the group that current office bearers are -

Convener Margaret McCulloch MSP
Deputy Convener Chic Brodie MSP
Deputy Convener Phil Prentice (STP)
Secretary Elaine Bone (STP)
Adviser Craig McLaren (RTPI)

Annual Review

MMcC reported on a busy year with meetings of the Cross Party Group having covered the following:

- 13 May 2015 - Footfall and Spend in Town Centres
- Summer Recess 2015 – MSPs in Towns campaign
- 2 September 2015 – A Celebration of Small and Rural Towns Reception with speakers, Margaret Burgess, Minister for Housing and Welfare and Abellio Scotrail.
- 4 November 2015 - The Changing Face of Scotland's Towns: *New Routes to Success*

Today's meeting saw MSPs sign the Manifesto Statement for Scotland's Towns and the Group is about to hear from presenters on the theme of 'Positive Action in our Communities and Small Towns'.

Forward Plan

If successfully re-registered, CPG office bearers will meet and report on a forward plan and dates for meetings in 2016 – 17.

It is hoped that the MSPs in Towns summer campaign and the Small and Rural Towns Reception would be repeated.

The Annual Return and Minutes of this Meeting will be filed following this meeting and placed on the parliament and STP website.

Dissolution of Parliament and CPG

A note will be included with the Minute of this meeting about CPGs at dissolution of Parliament and the process for re-registration of Cross-Party Groups following the forthcoming general Scottish Parliamentary election.

In summary, the Parliament will be dissolved effective from 00:01 hours on 24 March 2016. At this point all Cross-Party Groups will effectively cease to exist. A previously recognised Group may re-register within 90 days of the first meeting of the Parliament following the 5th May Scottish Parliamentary election. For the purposes of calculating the 90 day period, no account will be taken of any time during which the Parliament is in recess for more than 4 days.

It is proposed that the CPG Towns and Towns Centres be re-registered.

Any queries should be directed to Elaine Bone at Scotland's Towns Partnership.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting of the Cross Party Group & Matters Arising

Phil Prentice adopted the Minutes and Sunil Varu seconded the Minutes. MMcC highlighted that copies of Minutes, Annual Report and presentations are available on the Scotland's Towns Partnership website.

4. Manifesto Statement for Scotland's Towns

MMcC introduced Professor Leigh Sparks who briefly outlined the Manifesto Statement for Scotland's Towns. A copy of the Statement has been made available to members and is also online.

Due to time constraints, cross party MSPs had signed the agreement at the start of today's meeting.

5. Positive Action in our Communities and Small Towns

5.1 Communities Snapshot – Derek Rankine, Policy and Participation Manager, SURF

DR introduced the Group to SURF, a network concerned with the regeneration of disadvantaged communities in Scotland. Find out more about SURF at www.scotregen.co.uk

One of SURF's founding principles is that the intended beneficiaries of a community regeneration project should be meaningfully involved in its design and development. The current policy appetite for community led regeneration, and aspirations for greater levels of direct management of regeneration initiatives by community groups, is therefore a generally welcome development from SURF's perspective.

The current context for community led regeneration in Scotland will feature in an article by SURF in the publication, People, Place and Policy. This will be available from April on the journal's website at www.extra.shu.ac.uk/ppp-online. It is based on learning outcomes from four SURF projects - Alliance for Action research programme, a 2015 participatory budgeting exercise, the SURF Awards for Best Practice in Community Regeneration, and consultations for the SURF 2016 manifesto for community regeneration.

DR touched on some of these learning outcomes;

Scale: The impressive scale that community groups are now able to confidently operate at. Community managed projects may be traditionally associated with modest interventions such as community gardens. But major capital assets such as office buildings, harbours, housing stock, cinemas, museums and wind farms can all be found under community ownership and management, as can a wide variety of services from health and education to employability and business support.

Some of these projects, such as Ullapool Harbour Trust, Oban Phoenix Cinema, Orkney Micro Renewables and Helmsdale Development Trust's housing programme, have been highlighted in the SURF Awards in recognition of their success in not only managing major local assets effectively, but for also providing a basis for a range of wider regeneration activities.

Supportive Environment: The growth of this trend is testament to the supportive environment that has been created for community groups and social enterprises that are looking to deliver local regeneration activities. Parliamentary legislation such as the Community Empowerment Act and dedicated funding mechanisms such as the Big Lottery's Growing Community Assets and the Scottish Government's Strengthening Communities Programmes are complemented by a wide range of public and third sector players. They are all keen to work together to support the capacity and development of community groups and the projects and assets they aspire to manage in a restricted financial climate. While even some of the most successful SURF Award winning community managed projects are not able to count on stable and secure long-term funding, there is a positive development in the growing number of options available in grant and loan funding providers.

Geographic Development: Another current theme is geographic development. Many of the most high-profile examples of community led regeneration are in the Highlands & Islands, but there are a number of efforts underway to encourage its growth in the central belt, and to align this growth with other policy priorities such as tackling deprivation and regenerating town centres. For example, SURF is working with Resilient Scotland, the Scottish Community Development Centre and others to help improve the ability of community groups and social enterprises in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods to deliver positive social and economic impacts.

DR was also a funding panel assessor for the Scottish Government's Town Centre Communities Capital Fund, which recently gave £1.7m to 20 community groups that will be managing physical regeneration projects in town centres including Irvine, Greenock and Lanark.

Later this year, Scotland's Community Planning Partnerships will develop and deliver locality plans, seeing them working closely with community groups to deliver targeted regeneration interventions in some of their most economically challenged areas.

DR made available copies of SURF's 2016 regeneration manifesto which can also be viewed on their website.

5.2 Small Towns Snapshot – Douglas Scott, Scottish Small Towns Group

(Refer to slides for further information)

DS gave the background to the Small Towns Group (STG). It aims to prioritise policy and support for small towns. It is now 10 years old and part of Scotland's Towns Partnership.

Small towns are important; they are part of the cultural and historic identity of Scotland. Thirty percent of Scotland's population live in small towns. The 2002 Cities Review recognised that with 40% of employment within the then 5 cities, 60% is in the towns outwith cities, including in small towns. DS outlined the role and type of small towns.

DS cited the STG's publications and a range of meetings and groups it has been involved with.

DS highlighted the following 'asks' on behalf of small towns, many of which have been addressed in the STP Manifesto Statement:

- Small Towns Funding Instrument
- Town Centre Development Zone
- Support for Community Development Trusts etc.
- Community Animateurs
- Specialist Retail Support – Succession Planning etc.
- Information Resources – Best Practice etc.
- Benchmarking
- Awards
- Training

DS summarised the challenges facing small towns:

- Economic – vulnerability to 'disproportionate' impact of business closures and increasing costs of goods, services and energy
- Accessibility of towns to wider economic opportunities, and mobility of the population
- Move to low carbon economy
- Public expenditure reductions
- Digital Connectivity – broadband/mobile phone coverage
- Many town centres experience declining 'footfall', impact of structural changes in retailing.
- Deterioration of Buildings, impact on 'morale' of community
- Social Issues – poverty issues
- Out-migration of young people combined with an ageing population, especially small towns outside commuting zones

And the opportunities:

- Building on strong sense of place – maximise energies – people, communities and businesses (strong networks in many small towns)
- 'Assets' based approach to economic development (people, communities, businesses, land, connections) - 'Unique selling points'/niches
- Maximising complementarities between towns in local/regional economy
- Maximising potential of heritage, cultural, leisure and arts
- Liveability – 'Holistic Sustainability solutions' – 'smart towns'
- Locality based 'prevention' measures

Information small towns need to assess is:

- Retailing data and longitudinal studies of retailing impact

- Socio-economic status of towns – SAC vulnerability study is pointing the way
- Benchmarking – small towns performance
- Physical condition surveys of towns
- Comprehensive coverage of development and regeneration initiatives – best practice

Suggested approaches to support small towns are:

- 'Whole Town' Plan
- Town Centre Development Zone – (Based on Master Plan)
- Community Planning approach – (leadership, stakeholder approach, vision, 'action plan' and 'community development (animateur) support for towns)
- 'Health Check'
- Vision for Towns
- Realistic and practical rolling Action Plan – updated annually

How might we best resource development in small towns? –

- Local 'community planning' approach
- Coordinated cross-sector approach - budgeting and partnership processes and making the most of strategic investments
- Greater creative and innovative interaction between the public sector, communities and businesses
- Influencing Location Decisions on University/College accommodation, housing, health facilities etc.
- Making use of external funding
- The reuse of public buildings or the benefit of towns
- The public sector buying sites and redeveloping them
- Encouraging more involvement by Housing Associations (RSLs) and Social Enterprises.
- **Physical Asset based approaches to the regeneration of revenue** – depends on strength of local economy
- **Town based Community Development Trusts** using revenue streams from profitable assets
- **Business Improvement Districts** – scale issues and strength of business community
- **Urban Regeneration Companies** – highly targeted approach
- **Small Towns Funding 'Pump Priming' Instrument** - success of Town Centre Regeneration Fund

DS outlined the STG's future priorities -

- Small Towns Benchmarking
- Small Towns and Single Outcome Agreements/Community Planning
- Strategic and Local Development Planning and Small Towns
- Community Capacity Building and Small Towns
- Small Towns in City Regions
- Capacity/Expertise and Financing of Regeneration for Small Towns
- Small Towns and Rural Development
- Proposed Conference on the role of place on the margins of City Regions

5.3 Communities Engagement – Gary Follis and Ursula Servis, Association of British Bookmakers (ABB)

(Refer to slides for further information)

GF outlined the role of ABB which represents over 80% of the high street betting industry with members including William Hill, Ladbrokes, Coral, Paddy Power and Scotbet, as well as 100 smaller, often family run independent bookmakers, 10% of which are based in Scotland.

All members work to the high standards set out in the ABB's Responsible Gambling Code. ABB is keen to work in partnership with policymakers to devise policies that help address problem gambling whilst enabling the vast majority of recreational gamblers to enjoy their hobby.

The industry is proud to be part of the communities, supporting the high street with 1,000 shops sustaining 5,000 jobs – although there is a move to online also. £110 million paid in tax per year including £11,000 per year in business rates per shop. The profile of staff is 52% female and 27% aged between 18 and 24.

Ursula Servis explained that many firms are involved in local community sports sponsorships, e.g. support for Renfrew Juniors and the Uddingston Anvil Football Club; have matched funding for local staff charitable fundraising initiatives; and offered financial and staff resource support for city specific initiatives, for example, supporting Starter Packs Partnership in Glasgow, working with Spina Bifida (Northeast), Northstar Community Football Club and Instant Neighbour in Aberdeen.

Many of the bigger names in the industry support major sporting events and offer charitable funds, including support for the Scottish Premier League, Ayr Gold Cup, Musselburgh Sprint Cup, Silver Bell Trophy, Hamilton and Ladbrokes Charitable Trust -contributed over £7 million to good causes since 2003, and William Hill Foundation is the official partner with Crimestoppers and actively involved in the Safer Neighbourhoods Scheme.

MMcC mentioned visiting bookmakers during the MSPs in Towns campaign. It overcame her preconceptions – there were a high level of women working flexible hours, and she was also conscious that some men find it harder to integrate and this is a place for socialising. US added that they do tackle people betting who can't afford it, and set limit/self-exclusion for some who should not bet – there is a strict responsible gambling code adhered to.

5.4 Thriving Small Towns – Phil Prentice, Chief Officer, Scotland's Towns Partnership

Unfortunately Giann Celino, Chair of Giffnock Village BID Chair was unable to be present but Phil Prentice gave a short introduction before members viewed the Giffnock Village BID film which can be viewed on the Scotland's Towns Partnership website.

PP was involved in establishing the Giffnock Village BID, which is located in a small community - wealthier, close knit, older, also muslim and jewish community. The BID wanted to develop a unique identity around its offering. They secured Wholefoods as the first outlet outside London. With the recession, there was still a need to make the place better, and the BID did this. It was branded Giffnock Village; styled on New York's Greenwich Village idea of a lifestyle destination. However, as it competes with Glasgow it had to reconnect with its local community. The BID made that happen.

The film shows a car rally illustrating how the BID has brought the businesses and community together; helping to gel together people and place; promote footfall and helps remind people about the importance of small towns. Small businesses is the backbone of economic recovery.

PP urged towns not to be complacent just because an area is affluent, there is still competition. What was fragile becomes solid. This BID in particular has pitched what it does perfectly – it knits together and has linked with Rouken Glen Park and the light festival with an associated 'dine out' offering. There are only 90 business, with the BID levy totalling £40k but this can still benefit an area like this a great deal.

6. Discussion

David Lonsdale, Scottish Retail Consortium (SRC) sought views on local rates discretionary relief. ABB said that business rates are a challenge and one of the reasons cited as to why some of their member businesses close down.

Douglas Scott said it remains to be seen to what extent councils will bring this forward. Councils have done a lot to improve the town centre environment but it is a difficult time for local government to take action.

Alexander Nicoll, ATCM, mentioned that ATCM and SRC are calling for a complete business rates review. The proposed policy is a palliative development; it will cause further pressure on local government resources.

In response to Denis Rodwell, ABB don't have figures on move from high street to online and it varies between companies. Some of the large firms have presence on both. For small independents it is virtually impossible to go online. However with high street costs increasing and the increasing cost of rights to watch racing live, online becomes more popular. Some trade more profitably now by solely being online.

Tom Johnston, Colliers stressed that there needs to be a realignment of landlord expectations on rent, over and above a rates review.

MMcC thanked all speakers and members for their contribution.

7. Town Centre Action Plan Update

Phil Prentice, Chief Officer, Scotland's Towns Partnership updated on the agreement by Scottish Government and COSLA on the two year on report summarising activity in the two year period following the Town Centre Action Plan launch. It is credit to Scottish Government to undertake the town centre review and launch of town centre action plan, which as a cross departmental focus, brings different partnerships together. The Cross Party Group has been excellent in bringing these organisations together too. The six key themes are still valid. For example, a digital strategy will launch pre summer; town centre living – derisking and involving private sector; communities – with development trusts, enabling communities; proactive planning – positive moves to change planning system, simplified planning zones, taking away complexity and costs; accessibility of public services – health, council and other services are a key offer of our town – it all adds to the mix and offer. The report covers all six themes and the guiding principle, Town Centre First. There has been good material progress. On the subject of rates, hopefully there will be positive action on that in the future – it is down to others around the table to lobby on this.

The report can be found on the Scottish Government website.

8. Any Other Competent Business

8.1 Gordon Bell of The Retailer offered an observation – when a grant is not fully subscribed to, it can be perceived as a failure – however, the Retailer work with those who have taken up grants and it's made a huge difference. What is needed is a voice to share the positives - BIDs are good and can become that voice. Despite good work, if there is no voice, bad news creeps into press for example commenting on a grant system being a waste of time. The good news that there has been 30% growth in businesses needs to get out there.

8.2 PP highlighted that the first ever World Towns Leadership Summit takes place, 15 – 16 June in Edinburgh. It is a global conversation with leaders from across the world and will result in the World Towns Agreement, A Public-Private-Social Vision for Urban Centres. The Summit is a collaboration organised by STP, ATCM, BIDS and the International Downtown Association (IDA). It is a once in a lifetime opportunity to learn from our peers around the globe.

8.3 Leigh Sparks commented on the genuine enthusiasm to improve our towns and critical to that is this Cross Party Group. Leigh led Group members in thanking MMcC for her hard work, enthusiasm, drive and commitment in the role as convener. MMcC in turned thanked parliamentary officer, Joe Fagan, office bearers and all members who participated.

APPENDIX 1 – RECORD OF 24TH FEBRUARY 2016 AGENDA

Cross Party Group on Towns and Town Centres Incorporating the Third Annual General Meeting

13:00 – 14.30 Wednesday 24th February 2016

Committee Room 1, Scottish Parliament

Agenda

- 12:45 Meet in Parliament reception area
- 13:00 Welcome and Opening Remarks – Margaret McCulloch MSP, Convener
- 13:05 AGM Business and the CPG and the Dissolution of Parliament
- 13:15 Minutes of Previous Meeting of the Cross Party Group & Matters
Arising – Margaret McCulloch MSP, Convener

Manifesto Statement for Scotland's Towns

- 13:20 Professor Leigh Sparks, Chair, Scotland's Towns Partnership
- 13:25 Cross Party MSPs Signing of Manifesto Statement and Photocall

Positive Action in our Communities and Small Towns

- 13:40 Communities Snapshot – Derek Rankine, Policy and Participation Manager, SURF
- 13:45 Small Towns Snapshot – Douglas Scott, Scottish Small Towns Group
- 13:50 Communities Engagement – Malcolm George, CEO, Association of British Bookmakers

- 14:00 Thriving Small Towns – Giann Celino, Chair of Giffnock Village BID Chair presents the Giffnock Village BID film
- 14:10 Discussion

Town Centre Action Plan Update

- 14:20 Phil Prentice, Chief Officer, Scotland's Towns Partnership
- 14:25 Any Other Competent Business
- 14:30 Close of Meeting

APPENDIX 2 – ATTENDANCE AT CPG ON 24TH FEBRUARY 2016

CROSS PARTY GROUP ON TOWNS AND TOWN CENTRES

WEDNESDAY, 24TH FEBRUARY 2016 AT 13:00

COMMITTEE ROOM 2, SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

APOLOGIES AND LIST OF ATTENDEES

APOLOGIES

Jackie Baillie MSP

Ian Davison Porter, BIDs Scotland

Eric Guthrie, Tactran

Ian McLelland, East Kilbride Shopping Centre

Catharine Anderson, Vouch for That

Giann Celino, Giffnock Village BID

Malcolm George, ABB

Stephen Leckie, Crieff Hydro

ATTENDEES

Convener: Margaret McCulloch MSP

Alison Johnstone MSP

Willie Rennie MSP

John Scott MSP

Jamie Baker, East Lothian Council

Gordon Bell, The Retailer Group

Elaine Bone, EDAS/STP

Leigh Brown, ATCM

Vivien Collie

Gary Follis, ABB

Ian Fowell

Rona Gibb, Paths for All

David Grove, Fife Council
Donald Jackman, KSD Group
Tom Johnston, Retail Scotland
Sally Hall, McMaster Media
Donald Jackman, KSD Group
David Lonsdale, Scottish Retail Consortium
Ross Martin, SCDI
Rebecca Mather, STP
Jacqueline McArthur, Falkirk Council
Ojay McDonald, ATCM
Julie McLachlan, SCDI
Craig McLaren, RTPI
Nikola Miller, RTPI
Alexander Nicoll, Intu/ATCM
Caragh Nimmo, DLA Piper
Carole Noble, Keep Scotland Beautiful
Phil Prentice, STP
Derek Rankine, SURF
Dennis Rodwell
Douglas Scott, Scottish Small Towns Group
Ursula Servis, ABB
Professor Leigh Sparks
James Trolland
Sunil Varu