

Cross-Party Group on Towns and Town Centres, Town Centre Living: A Catalyst for Change

Monday 18th March, 12.30 -13.30

Minutes

Present

MSPs

Meghan Gallacher MSP
Alex Kerr MSP
Roz McCall MSP

Invited guests

David Cowan	Scottish Government
Mhairi Donaghy	Scottish Futures Trust
Kimberley Guthrie	Scotland's Towns Partnership

Non-MSP Group Members

Karen Anderson	WASPS
Rob Arthur	ESS
Sue Barnard	Oban Community Council
Angela Barr	Kibble Education and Care Centre
Rekha Barry	AB+C Ltd
Hazel Benza	Landscape Institute
Raina Bergasse	Community Energy Scotland
Yvonne Birnie	Rothiemurchus and Aviemore tennis club
Dawn Black	Aberdeenshire Council
Rhona Brown	STP
Fiona Buchanan	Stirling Council
June Burnett	Moray Council
Ailsa Campbell	Crieff Community Trust
Amanda Chan	Ramboll
Ann Chirnside	
Colin Clement	Stobswell Forum SCIO
Alexander Collins	Stirling Council
Lee Craig	Public Health Scotland
Claire Daly	Sustrans Scotland
Bryan Dickson	The National Trust for Scotland
Michelle Docherty	North Ayrshire Council

Tim Dring	Aberdeenshire Council
Shona Drummond	Travelknowhow Scotland
Michael Dunn	EKOS Ltd
Ewan Eccleston	Glasgow City Council
Bridget Ennini	DLUHC
Alan Farnington	Perth & Kinross Council
Rick Finc	RFA Development Planning
Graeme Finlay	Clackmannanshire Council
Claire Finlayson	Public Health Scotland
Barry Fisher	Keep Scotland Beautiful
David Francis	Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland
Jean Frew	Stevenston Community Council
David Fryer	Torry Development Trust
Graham Galpin	Placechanger
David Gardiner	Local Recovery
Leys Geddes	Visit Moffat
Stevan Gilchrist	North Lanarkshire Council
Linda Gillespie	Development Trusts Association Scotland
Michelle Gillibrand	Forres Area Community Trust
Derek Glen	Fife Council
Jean Glennie	Ardo Christmas Trees
Des Hackett	Future Woodlands Scotland
Pearl Hamilton	Pearl's (Pet Care)
Linzi Harvey	Kirkintilloch BID
Tom Henderson	SAC
Eilidh Henderson	Page\Park Architects
Kathryn Hill	Midsteeple Quarter
Matthew Hilton	Highland Council
Julie Hogg	South of Scotland Enterprise
Nicola Hutchinson	Scotland's Towns Partnership
Tony l'Anson	Milngavie BID / One Linlithgow
Oksana Iatsiuta	Thurso Community Development Trust
Steve Johnson	Blairgowrie & Rattray Development Trust
Bob Keiller	Our Union Street
John Lancaster	Smith Scott Mullan Associates
Euan Leitch	SURF
Richard Logie	Getslocal UK Ltd
David Lonsdale	Scottish Retail Consortium
Karen Macartney	Creative Crieff
Iain Macaulay	Western Isles Council
Murdo Macdonald	Church of Scotland
Ailsa Macfarlane	BEFS
Ruairidh MacGlone	Lesmahagow Development Trust
Alex Mackenzie	North Ayrshire Council
Jamie Mackie	SGF
Heather Macnaughton	Historic Environment Scotland
Marc Macrae	Moray Council
David Main	Bathgate Community Council
Steve Malone	A&DS
Gillian Maxwell	Greenock West & Cardwell Bay Community Council

Michelle McCormack	Public Health Scotland
David McCubbin	Discover Cullen
Dorothy McDonald	Isle of Bute BID
Katey McKay	Angus Council
Michael McKernan	East Renfrewshire Council
John McLaughlin	New River
Debbie McLean	Scottish Borders Council
Mel Millar	Falkirk Council
Emma Miller	Living Lerwick
Andy Moseley	Scottish Empty Homes Partnership
Deborah Murray	Byres Road & Lanes BID
Brenda Murray	Perth & Kinross Council
Frances Murray	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
John Murray	Murray Retail Ltd
George Murray	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Peter Noad	Scottish Enterprise
Sharon O'Rourke	Giffnock Village BID
Jacob O'Sullivan	Museums Galleries Scotland
Stefanie Paterson	Falkirk Delivers
Nairn Pearson	West Lothian Council
Jonny Pickering	Glasgow City Council
Antonia Pompa	Discover Lanark
Carolyn Powell	Huntly Development Trust
Suzanne Rhind	Aberdeenshire Council
Grant Riley	North Lanarkshire Council
Chris Ringland	Evangelical Alliance Scotland
Derek Ritchie	We Are Inverurie Ltd
S Roberts	Scottish Borders Council
Euan Roger	New River
Sam Ross	The Melting Pot
David Rushton	MERZ
Maria Rybaczewska	University of Stirling
Laura Scott-Simmons	BSS
Pat Scrutton	Intergenerational National Network
Alistair Shaw	Community Action Blackburn
Stefano Smith	Stefano Smith Planning
Jayne Smith	HA Scotland
Tom Sneddon	Carlisle Development Trust
Lynne Spence	Community Council
Lynn Sproat	NHS Ayrshire & Arran
Pauline Stafford	West Lothian Council
Chris Story	Message Matters
Kirsteen Sullivan	West Lothian Council
HanneThijs	
LouiseThompson	Myfolks Ltd
Joe Traynor	Scottish Civic Trust
Lorraine Tulloch	Greenspace Scotland
Draeyk van der Horn	Moray Council
Michael Vickers	Linlithgow Community Council
Patricia Walker	Runway Boutique & Tom Dick and Harry Menswear

Jane Warcup
Malcolm Warr
Sonya Warren
Richard Webb
John Whitelaw
Jim Whyteside
Paul Zochowski

Scottish Borders Council
CNU Scot
Moray Council
MILL Architects Limited
Lenzie CDT
National Trust for Scotland
East Lothian Council

Apologies

Katy Clark MSP
Douglas Lumsden MSP
Leigh Sparks, University of Stirling
James Trolland, Sustainable Drumchapel

Agenda item 1

Welcome and Opening Remarks– Meghan Gallacher MSP

Convener Meghan Gallacher MSP welcomed all to the meeting.

Agenda item 2

Minute of the last meeting held 4th December and Matters Arising – Meghan Gallacher MSP, Convener

Minute of the last meeting accepted. Proposed by Nicola Hutchinson and seconded by Nairn Pearson. There were no matters arising.

Agenda item 3

The Convener introduced the topic - *A New Approach to Local*. A joint presentation updating on how far Scotland has come on its journey to revitalise our towns and embrace localism. Noting last week's Debate Night from Dumfries, the issue of town regeneration featured heavily.

Kimberley Guthrie, Chief Officer, Scotland's Towns Partnership

Putting Localism First

Putting localism first is the foundation on which to build fair and sustainable communities, adding value, creating better places to live, work and visit. For example,

- Reimagining our communities and giving confidence to invest – East Ayrshire's Halo Innovation Park and CentreStage.
- Built environment improvements - Dumfries Mid Steeple Quarter.
- Better green spaces – Front Green Lawn, Lochgilphead.

- Greater connectivity and sustainable travel – McGill’s electric buses and night time buses supporting Glasgow’s evening economy.

Greener, stronger, fairer and more sustainable practice is evident across many new ways of doing business. STP and ZeroWaste Scotland are developing a toolkit to support bottom up working.

Community Support

Communities play an invaluable role, unlocking potential. Scotland Loves Local programme and gift card scheme is key in locking money in locally. Our survey indicates that,

- 85% of Scots shoppers agree it’s vital to support businesses on their local high street.
- 77% agree that choosing local keeps money local for longer, improving quality of work and life.
- 75% of businesses say they buy from and sell to other local businesses. A good example of a circular economy.
- 9 in 10 say it’s vital to them that people choose local.
- Three quarters of people say choosing local reduces unnecessary journeys - responding to the climate crisis.

The Scotland Loves Local programme and campaign has gathered huge momentum over the last 3 to 4 years, helping to change behaviours, mindset, and really brought out the need to support local places. Local jobs, local living, and general usage. All which leads to a more sustainable future for our towns and places.

Reimagining our Towns and Places

The town centre first principle – a consistent approach to reimagine and refocus attention on towns, town centres and places.

- Understanding the needs of customers/communities.
- Encouraging people to shop locally.
- Providing and sustaining employment.
- Supporting other local businesses.
- Being a voice driving positive change.
- Helping to reinvigorate, reimagine and repurpose places.

These are key in delivering a local proposition fit for future. Collaboration and community can achieve so much.

Making a Difference

- Town centre living – pivotal to our future, making more of unused/vacant spaces to deliver for all. Bringing people into place long term and ensuring local economic prosperity.

- Co-working – holds greater potential in reimagining underused spaces and buildings. Bringing a community together and encouraging footfall in towns and places using facilities and services, contributing to a vibrant place.

Mhairi Donaghy, Associate Director - Place, Housing & Economic Investment at Scottish Futures Trust and, Scotland's Towns Partnership Board Member

How Town Centre Living Can Support Local.

Scottish Futures Trust, STP, Architecture and Design Scotland and Land Commission have been working together on the Town Centre Living agenda. Building on the Town Centre Action Plan, the 'More Homes at the Heart of Great Places' report was produced.

Scotland has a strong supportive policy landscape. Perhaps moreso than other parts of the UK. There are many interconnected issues and barriers.

A series of good practice project examples were drawn from different types and sized places across Scotland. Over 100 projects were analysed and sets out,

- Tenure mix - mostly rented.
- Who's doing town centre living developments - roughly split equally between the housing associations, councils and private developers.
- The market - mostly social and affordable homes. Half are new build and half redevelopment of existing buildings.
- Unsurprisingly, most developments are in towns and town centres where most people live. There weren't as many city neighbourhood developments as anticipated. The types of homes being delivered are mostly flats which impacts on the demographic makeup and the balance in our towns.

Although not a complete list of all projects delivered or being delivered, it's a large enough sample to get a good representation of what's happening just now in terms of delivery across Scotland.

The report was well received when published about a year ago, receiving a great deal of press attention and many people got in touch to ask for more details and to find out how they could embed town centre living as part of their approach to improving their place. In response to this, a series of themed roadshows have been taking place presenting more detail and sharing projects that respond to the localism agenda by addressing needs and opportunities, as follows.

1. Perth – Repurposing Buildings

- 6 projects repurposing empty and underused assets.
- Often heritage buildings and spaces above shops that were completely empty or underused, so really good use of space.

2. Paisley – Attracting Investment

- 4 different projects that have attracted private sector investment.

- A redevelopment of large retail and commercial buildings.
- Relocated leisure facility, made way for family housing.

3. *Online – Rural and Island Places*

An online session enabled rural and island communities to get involved.

- 3 different projects focused on the impact that small housing developments can have in small places. A small number of homes in a place like Whithorn has a huge impact on the resilience of that place.

4. *Inverness – Strategic Placemaking*

The focus was on places adopting a strategic placemaking approach.

- 6 projects embedding town centre living as a key element of a wider strategic approach.

Falkirk – Regeneration

- 5 projects with a regeneration focus, demonstrating how town centre living projects can be the starting point to create positive change and attract other activity and investment into places.

The roadshows have helped people learn how to adopt town centre living as a catalyst for change in their place. But also, they have helped the partners to learn much more about why different types of approaches work in different types of places and what needs to be put in place alongside the housing offer.

The next step will be to review roadshow feedback and report on findings but some key messages are,

- Town centre living is an opportunity to move beyond affordable housing and embed a much wider definition of affordable living. Taking into account the cost, time and effort of accessing day to day needs such as education, work, shops, health and leisure, etc.
- There are lots of empty and underused spaces in our town centres, particularly above shops, most of which could be relatively easily repurposed to create new homes. This not only tackles the housing crisis but also helps with the climate crisis by reusing existing buildings – embedded carbon, rather than building new.
- Creating the right conditions for people to want to live in town centres. To get the best outcome, attracting private developer interest, places need to be attractive, safe and welcoming. Lighting, streetscape, activity, good transport connections - walking or cycling, bus and rail, and have education and health services nearby. So all of the things associated with localism and a 20 minute neighbourhood.
- Partnership and collaboration – public, community and third sectors have a huge role to play, not only in supporting the right housing but creating the right

conditions for town centre living. Working with housing associations and private developers to track investment. Investors will react to opportunities offering good value, largely driven by financial value. But also, a host of other factors, including long term commitment to partnership working, surety in what developers asked to commit to in the community and risk. Where these other factors can be brought into play, development opportunities become more attractive investment opportunities.

- Understanding the benefits – town centre living isn't just about housing. When making decisions about what and where to invest time, money, effort, we need to understand the full range of impacts and benefits that projects have. Town centre living delivers a range of positive catalytic effects, around economic resilience for businesses, health and wellbeing for people, reduced carbon for the environment and many more. So it's about the role that town centre living can play in creating better conditions to live, work and visit.

Returning to localism, town centre living is an important part of the mix. Housing brings people, people bring activity, with activity places feel more safe and secure. Animated places are more attractive. Efficiency for local living uses less resources through reuse of existing buildings and people are less car dependent. Spend – fundamental for businesses to thrive. Resilience – with busy services, more likely to be sustained.

David Cowan, Head of Regeneration, Architecture and Place Unit at Scottish Government.

DC shared a recap of progress:

2011 – Achieving a Sustainable Future: Regeneration Strategy

2013 – Town Centre Action Plan (later refreshed 2022). Focus on repurposing towns.

2014 – Town Centre First Principle, Regeneration Capital Grant Fund, Empowering Communities Programme, Strengthening Communities Programme

2019 – Place Principle

2021 – Place Based Investment Programme

Outwith DC's team, the focus is on influencing wider policy:

Town Centre First Principle(2014) – Government, local authorities, wider public sector, businesses and communities putting the health of town centres at the heart of decision making.

Local living and 20 minute Neighbourhoods (2023)– one way to support local living and aims to provide access to the majority of daily needs within a 20 minute walk, wheel or cycle.

Policy Context

Scottish Government missions of equality, opportunity and community, support what is being done and national policy framework has embedded much of place work e.g. NPF4, Housing to 2040, National Strategy for Economic Transformation and many more.

The Place Principle

Adopted by Scottish Government and CoSLA in 2019 as a basis for collaborative working. Partners take a more joined up, participative approach when making decisions about services, land and buildings in a place, enabling better outcomes for everyone with increased opportunities for people, business, communities, with opportunities to shape the physical, social and economic future of places where people live and work.

Place Based Investment Programme (2020)

- The PBIP is designed to make the Place Principle real.
- It is designed to make sure that all place based investments are relevant to the place in which they are made, how their contribution will help deliver the changes needed, and how local communities shape their future.
- And it provides a mechanism for coordinating and streamlining the delivery of place-based programmes across SG portfolios and leverage other mainstream budgets, insuring investment in the right place.
- The programme aims accelerate our ambitions for place, 20-minute neighbourhoods, town centre action, community led regeneration and community wealth building.
- COSLA and Council Leaders have agreed that their allocation will also contribute to net zero, wellbeing and inclusive economic development, tackling inequality and disadvantage, and community involvement and ownership.

DC referenced Our Place a website which devoted to promoting the benefits of place and place-based working. It has information, tools, resources and case studies to help support the development of places and services that improve our health, our prosperity, our quality of life and protect our environment.

DC highlighted the recent Town Centre Living Roadshows, which stemmed from an action agreed by the Town Centre Forum in September last year.

With COSLA and STP, SG established the Town Centre Forum in February 2023 to help drive and support the delivery of short and long term town centre actions, share good practice, and understand opportunities and challenges in this work. The Forum is co-chaired by the Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning – Joe FitzPatrick MSP – and the COSLA Environment and Economy Spokesperson – Councillor Gail Macgregor.

At the meeting of the forum last year the group focussed on town centre living and agreed that STP and Scottish Futures Trust should run a series of workshops to explore successes and challenges. The discussion from the workshops will be

captured and presented back to the Town Centre Forum which is meeting towards the end of April.

What next?

- Build on the ambition for Living Well Locally.
- Build on the ambitions set out in TCAP and NPF4.
- Continue to embed the 20 minute neighbourhood concept and continue to support Scotland Loves Local
- And to do so collaboratively with local government and local communities.
- To support that we want to do more to learn from each other. Focus on the conditions for success, learn how places have overcome barriers and started to transform their town centres.
- Learn from the Place Based investment Programme, from 10 years of RCGF investment. And learn from communities and local authorities.
- Learn from the Place Demonstrators in Caithness, Oban, Portree and Rothesay and Town Centre Living roadshows.
- And more importantly share that learning.
- We will work with partners to understand the opportunities for attracting investment – from whatever source.

Underpinning all this is the need for our towns, neighbourhoods and villages to have shared long-term visions and plans for their places. Plans which are developed collaboratively with involvement from all the community.

Place plans should direct decision making about that place, should shape public services and should direct investment to be relevant for that place.

So, we will be working with partners to explore what more we can be doing collectively to encourage more towns and communities to develop their own plans.

Agenda item 4

Discussion

The Convener thanked presenters for their contributions and went on to say that she often sees councils developing innovative and transformative ideas but making those plans come to fruition is challenging for all and how do we reach that end goal of thriving town centres. Referencing NPF4, it will be interesting to see the impact of legislation.

A member of the group asked about whether there has been successful international investment for our towns and are there lessons learned.

MD responded, having recently spoken at the ATCM conference focussed on housing, where she shared Scotland's good practice and knowledge. MD highlighted that across Europe, people live in town centres including families. One of the key differences is they have the infrastructure-transport, education, health, good quality

outdoor spaces which is critical to attracting people. Creating the right conditions for people to have a good quality of life is key.

DC added that perhaps in Europe they didn't allow their town centres to erode as much with out of town shopping, so the infrastructure is already there. Whereas in Scotland we have a long way to go in that respect. There are also some good examples in England where they have a bit more scale, in attracting private investors, which is more challenging in Scotland's generally smaller towns.

John Murray, Murray Retail raised the need for clear leadership. DC agreed that strong leadership is vital and will take this point away from today's meeting. DC highlighted SG's strong leadership around the Town Centre Action Plan and embedding in NPF4. Moving from there to consistent delivery is challenging, although there is a willingness. SG work with CoSLA to ensure collaboration with local government – delivery at local level is key.

Jim Whyteside highlighted the need to ensure sufficient vocational skills to retrofit old housing stock if we are to reuse buildings versus new build, supporting climate goals.

Steve Johnson asked if there is any action being taken to prevent out of town developments. KG stressed that driving footfall in our towns is not just about retail. However, the Town Centre Action Plan does focus on Town Centre First and imposing certain conditions to prevent out of town developments. We must look at retail as only part of the mix that brings a more holistic approach to town developments. MD added that when NPF4 begins to embed, we should see this make a difference on out-of-town developments.

David Main asked how can the private sector advance the cause of localism? KG agreed the private sector is a key enabler, not just as an employer, but in what they look to do in their communities and local places. The Scotland Loves Local (SLL) programme helps bring that to life. For example, through investing in the SLL card scheme for local spend. There is also an opportunity for co-investment in our places be that buildings, green spaces or other developments.

Malcolm raised that the Kuwait sovereign wealth fund has changed its UK policy to focus on regional development. DC will take this point to SG's inward investment team. The challenge being that in Scotland the return on investment doesn't generally match expectations.

What stage is SG's review and relaxation on renovating listed and conservation area buildings, particularly with regard to insulation and heating, which seems to be a barrier to reuse. DC confirmed that empty property relief will end shortly, with the aim to incentivise activity. There is a strong focus on upgrading and reusing empty buildings. DC added that the First Minister has written to the UK Government on the VAT position.

KG highlighted the Scotland Loves Local programme, particularly the gift card, which is accepted in thousands of businesses, with millions going into local economies. The scheme is now digitised and it is important to recognise its alignment with the

campaign, and encouraging people to love local and to use the gift card. Love Local Week will return from 26 August. Last year we saw over 60 MSPs visiting their local places. We then hold our awards, followed by the Scotland's Towns conference in November.

Agenda item 5

Any Other Competent Business and Date of Next Meeting.

Malcolm Warr raised consideration being given to transport hubs. DC highlighted the target to reduce car miles by 20%, with increased powers for low emission zones. DC will raise with transport colleagues but highlighted that local circumstances need to be taken into account. MD referenced the town centre living report, with transport being one of the issues highlighted. We need to come back to localism, and what the appropriate response is in each place. The Convener highlighted the rail hub investment in Motherwell centre but this nature of investment need to be widespread.

The date of the next meeting is Monday 10th June, 12:30 – 13:30. (Later amended to Tuesday 10th September due to General Election)

Agenda item 6

Close of meeting. The Convener thanked attendees and guest speakers for their valuable input.

The meeting closed.