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

**Wednesday, 10 March 2021, 13:00 – 14:30**

**Online Meeting**

1. **Welcome and Opening Remarks**

Convener, John Scott MSP welcomed all to the meeting. Attendees and Apologies are noted in Appendix 2.

1. **Approval of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cross Party Group held 9 December 2020**

The Minutes of the Meeting were accepted as a true and accurate record with no matters arising.

1. **Guest Presentations - Town Centre Action Plan 2 – Driving Forward a New Future for Scotland’s Town**

**Centres**

**Overview – Phil Prentice, Chief Officer, Scotland’s Towns Partnership and National Programme Director, Scotland’s Improvement Districts.**

PP acknowledged the work and collaboration during this last year by Business Improvement Districts, local and national governments, third and community sectors; supporting economic activity and resilience. Continuing with the ethos of helping each other out, things will get better, faster.

Support has included Towns and BIDs Resilience and Recovery Funds; Scotland Loves Local Campaign and Fund. Supporting around 250 projects across the country. Scottish Government has committed another £600,000 in the new financial year for BIDs.

The Town Centre Action Plan Expert Review Group published its report ‘A New Future for Scotland’s Town Centres’ in February 2021. Read the full report at futuretowns.scot

Requested by the Communities Secretary and led by Professor Leigh Sparks (Chair of STP), the report builds on the first TCAP review of 2014 and takes account of current economic, social and environmental factors. It was a very consultative and democratic process and offers a vision for how Scotland's town centres can play a central role in ensuring fairer, greener and healthier communities. It makes key recommendations to government and all those who work to change our towns and high streets for the better -

1. Embed towns more into national policy – planning, community empowerment, digital, community wealth building, climate. Consider how to measure success based on wellbeing and low carbon.
2. Rebalance the imbalance in the economy. Current tax funding development system requires review – non domestic rates, property taxation, VAT disadvantage, the unfairness of out of town advantage, fair digital taxation. Punish harmful activity, reward good activity.
3. Rewarding good behaviour and amplifying and expanding good practice, to show the art of the possible.

The following presentations cover the main recommendations. Presentation slides and other relevant links from the Scottish Land Commission are available on the STP website, with summary points only being recorded below.

* 1. **Embedding Towns More Firmly into Policy - Craig McLaren, Director Scotland, Ireland and English Regions, Royal Town Planning Institute**

RTPI welcomes the new report. CMcL will cover 4 aspects to take forward and build upon-

1. National Policies
2. Planning System
3. Place Base Initiatives
4. Twenty Minute Neighbourhoods
5. National Policies

* Traditional place based approach – national planning framework, designing streets, creating spaces. Needs to be pushed a bit further. NPF4 publishes in late autumn - will bring certainty to planning. It would be good to have resource attached to this as done in Ireland. It will be part of the development plan in future.
* Range of other things to recognise what towns are about – holistic to contribute to other ambitions, transport , housing , public health.

There needs to be a change in how we take things forward. Move away from one off deals, instead having a vision for a place. Act for the long term instead of short term. Planned rather than opportunistic activity and part of a bigger approach. Measure holistically, not just on the economy. Be less competitive – instead, doing as much as we can in the public interest.

1. Planning System

* Digital planning strategy (launched November 2020) can help how we organise and learn from spatial data.
* Density – settlement patterns create critical mass to support services.
* Transport – developing active travel approaches, and assess transport investments.
* Local Services – 20 minute neighbourhoods, focus living in local centres.
* Open Space Strategies – create quality environment, planning application process early input.
* Development Management - collaboration with developers for bigger picture improvements; aim for quality-based not speed-based performance outcomes and impact.

1. Place Based Initiatives

* Place principle – ensure operational and not just sentiments, also for Town Centre First – transparency required.
* Link community planning partnership and involve community in local plans - the emerging town centre plans will help with this.

1. Twenty Minute Neighbourhoods

Reference to Melbourne example shown as graphic on slide which shows how people can access all services within a twenty minute walk in their neighbourhood.

This is a means to promote the needs of towns and we need to ensure resource and support to take forward what we want.

* 1. **Dealing with the Systematic Imbalance - Shona Glenn, Head of Policy, Scottish Land Commission**

SG outlined the need to take the same circular economy approach to land. Reduce, Reuse, Recycle:

* Prioritise brownfield development.
* Disincentivise greenfield development.

Two years ago the Scottish Land Commission established the Vacant and Derelict Land Task Force, to tackle vacant and derelict land and bring back to productive use. A link to its recommendations report will be shared by STP. Highlighting some of the key recommendations of relevance to towns as follows –

* Making better use of data. Make available in a public portal, detailing what it will take to bring land and buildings into use. The IT, data and expertise exist – just required now to create the platform; which wouldn’t take much resource.
* Land as part of the circular economy. Prioritise the smaller places and as part of the solution, empowering communities to bring back into use. SLC is working with DTAS to assess what the barriers are to communities to do so and how this nature of activity can be scaled up.
* Supporting Delivery through funding. Absent landlord inactivity frustrations. Compulsory sales order would give the council power to sell at auction, allowing the market value to reveal itself. How this might work is on the SLC website.
* Stopping the flow of new vacant and derelict sites. Use tax system around land use and reuse. Preventing sites from becoming derelict in the first place. SLC expert advisory group is looking at this area and welcomes input.
* Tackling the legacy. Green infrastructure investment programme has been agreed by Scottish Government. Details of the fund will be announced soon, with first tranche available from April. So recommend people begin to consider projects now.
  1. **Showing how it can be done – Donald Gillies, Director of Place, South Ayrshire Council**

Ayr town centre faced challenges, and in 2018 consulted on the future of the town, returning substantial feedback which has been used to shape the town centre action plan.

4 key initiatives – covering 4 strategic zones across the town:

1. Drive more residential use. Built into local development plan.
2. Repurposing space to repurpose commercial with a blend of community purpose.
3. Public realm and way finding. Refresh of town centre - working with Sustrans to improve and make more attractive and improve way finding.
4. Events. Coordinate in a joined-up way and brand. Covid has impacted but it will be reintroduced in due course. The shore front events will link to the town and vice versa to bring connectivity and maximise benefits of footfall.

DG showed a graphic of the 4 zones –

Zone 1 Burns Statue Square – clearing landscape for regeneration.

Zone 2 Retail – not to exclude other areas but it will be a focus area.

Zone 3 Leisure and recreation. Cinema development and modern retail and leisure centre.

Zone 4 Culture and heritage. Projects include, Ayr Grammar (primary school, archives and community purpose), Town Hall Museum, Riverside Heritage Trail and events space opening up Ayr to the River, Carnegie Library Heritage, the Grain Exchange – a multi-use space for inclusion of e.g. pop up markets.

1. **Discussion**

T Fitzpatrick: Will the 20 minute neighbourhood translate in scale and town centre priorities?

PP: It is not a new concept but there is a renewed focus driven by covid and climate. Ambition for people to work, have services, within 20 minute walk. Rural areas would use the nearest local place and all services should be based there.

CMcL: Echo PP comments. Important to not to focus on the 20 minutes and that it’s purpose being for what you need on a daily basis without using a car. It is applicable across a wide range of settings. Including public services – highlighting the importance of the town centre first principle.

M Currie: Housing developers are building on greenspace – is there any incentive for converting existing town centre buildings for regeneration?

PP: Yes, there will be - driven by climate and covid, and to make use of existing space and 20 minute neighbourhood ethos. We will be looking at a range of policy and mechanisms to focus priority on existing base for residential use.

SG: Must incentivise where regeneration takes place through tax. Empowering planners to be more directive on what is built and where.

CMcL: Important to balance incentives with regulatory and encourage developers to change what they build and where. DG added that as profit making businesses, it’s important to incentivise a range of measures for developers.

‘Helen’ – How can there be balance in NPF4 for long term and respond to immediate demands of covid?

CMcL – The long term vision is important. From there it has to work back to account for steps to take to get to that vision. It should have a key milestones and ambitions delivery plan. Published and transparent, reported on and adapted to align with any set of circumstances.

J Scott MSP: Climate change and sea level rise is a concern - is it being considered long term?

CMcL: SEPA has been doing a lot of work on that and how that can be adapted into the policy and action framework.

A Russell: What is the view on his opinion of robustly protecting common good land?

SG: Difficult to comment on land use that should be decided by community. Common good land law was formed in 1491. So, there should be an update of this. It needs to be retained where possible for community use but community should decide. DG added that it has protections inbuilt already.

M Fraser: Will the River Walkway be opened?

DG: This is subject to review of drainage system and different land levels. Although it is a desirable ambition.

J West: Dunbarton’s abandoned buildings are having a negative impact on town. What can be done to prevent this and support community?

SG: There are new rights to buy. The Compulsory Sales Order mentioned earlier would be a solution if enacted by Scottish Government.

1. **Any Other Competent Business and Date of Next Meeting**

There was no other business. John Scott MSP thanked the speakers and Phil Prentice and the STP team. Mr Scott highlighted the high number in attendance and this being a consideration for the future of meetings being online.

**Date of Next Meeting:** Due to the election, the group will be dissolved and is required to re-register. Details will be announced thereafter.

**Appendix 1**

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

13:00 – 14:30, Wednesday 10th March 2021

**Online Meeting**

**AGENDA**

13:00 Welcome and Opening Remarks – John Scott MSP, Convener

13:05 Minutes of the Meeting of the Cross Party Group held 9th December, 2020

13:10 Matters Arising from the Minutes

**Town Centre Action Plan 2: Driving Forward a New Future for Scotland’s Town**

**Centres**

13:15 Overview: Phil Prentice, Chief Officer, Scotland’s Towns Partnership shares an overview of the key aspects of the Town Centre Action Plan Expert Review Group’s report.

13:30 Embedding Towns more Firmly into Policy: Craig McLaren, Director, Scotland, Ireland and English Regions, Royal Town Planning Institute

13:40 Dealing with the Systemic Imbalance: Shona Glenn, Head of Policy, Scottish Land

Commission

13:50 Showing How it Can Be Done: Donald Gillies, Director of Place, South Ayrshire Council

14:00 Discussion

14:20 Any Other Competent Business

14:30 Close of Meeting

Note: At its meeting on 28 January 2021, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee agreed that, in line with previous sessions, all CPGs will cease to exist at midnight on 24 March 2021. Groups which exist in this session will have an opportunity to re-register after the election.

**Appendix 2**

Due to online nature of the meeting, every effort has been made to capture those in attendance for the majority of the meeting.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Attendees** |  |  |  |  |
| Bill | Anderson | Carluke Development Trust |  |  |
| Karen | Anderson | Hirta |  |  |
| Alan | Anthony | 360 Architecture |  |  |
| Ed | Archer |  |  |  |
| John | Archibald | South Lanarkshire Council |  |  |
| Rob | Arthur | The Big Picture |  |  |
| Carl | Baker | Collective Architecture |  |  |
| Don | Balsillie |  |  |  |
| Grant | Baxter | Clackmannanshire Council |  |  |
| Stuart | Baxter | East Lothian Council |  |  |
| Dawn | Black | Dawn Black Photography |  |  |
| Muriel | Bone |  |  |  |
| Sarah | Boyack | MSP |  |  |
| Joanne | Boyle | Scottish Government |  |  |
| Sophie | Bridger | Eden Project |  |  |
| Chic | Brodie |  |  |  |
| Garry | Burnett | Aberdeen Inspired |  |  |
| Cllr Alistair | Cameron | Fife Council |  |  |
| Cllr Ian | Cameron | Fife Council |  |  |
| Ailsa | Campbell |  |  |  |
| Ann | Campbell | SURF |  |  |
| Duncan | Clelland | South Ayrshire Council |  |  |
| Tom | Conn | West Lothian Council |  |  |
| Chris | Cook | ISRS |  |  |
| Sam | Crawford | Enterprising Bathgate |  |  |
| Gemma | Cruickshank | Embrace Elgin BID |  |  |
| Malcolm | Currie | Strathesk |  |  |
| Justine | Daly | Strategic Investment Board |  |  |
| Kevin | Deighan | Clacksfirst |  |  |
| John | Doig |  |  |  |
| Veronica | Donnelly | Azets |  |  |
| Carey | Doyle | Community Land Scotland |  |  |
| David | Dunlop |  |  |  |
| Victoria | Eccles | South Lanarkshire Council |  |  |
| Ewan | Eccleston | Glasgow City Council |  |  |
| Geraldine | El Masrour | Motherwell Shopping Centre |  |  |
| Giles | Etherington | Brand Satellite |  |  |
| Jeanette | Ferguson |  |  |  |
| Tony | Fitzpatrick |  |  |  |
| Doug | Flett |  |  |  |
| Ian | Fowell |  |  |  |
| Bill | Fraser | Pollockshields |  |  |
| Malcolm | Fraser |  |  |  |
| Emma | Fyvie | Clackmannanshire Council |  |  |
| David | Gear | East Dunbartonshire Council |  |  |
| Leys | Geddes |  |  |  |
| Rona | Gibb | Paths for All |  |  |
| Donald | Gillies | South Ayrshire Council |  |  |
| Brian | Gilligan |  |  |  |
| Ian | Gilzean | Scottish Government |  |  |
| Shona | Glenn | Scottish Land Commission |  |  |
| Suzy | Goodsir | Greener Kirkcaldy |  |  |
| Neil | Grant | SBRC |  |  |
| David | Greer | North Lanarkshire Council |  |  |
| Anne | Grove | Scottish Government |  |  |
| David | Grove | Fife Council |  |  |
| Pedro | Guimaraes |  |  |  |
| Kimberley | Guthrie | Scotland's Towns Partnership |  |  |
| Andrew | Haley | Paul Hogarth |  |  |
| Rachael | Hamilton | MSP |  |  |
| Lucy | Harding | Nairn Connects |  |  |
| Derek | Harper |  |  |  |
| Bill | Harvey | Scotland's Improvement Districts | |  |
| Matthew | Hilton | Highland Council |  |  |
| Michael | Hitchon |  |  |  |
| John | Howie | Public Health Scotland |  |  |
| Pamela | Humphries | North Lanarkshire Council |  |  |
| Peter | Hynes |  |  |  |
| Tony | I'Anson |  |  |  |
| Steve | Johnson | Procom |  |  |
| Leigh | Johnston | Scottish Government |  |  |
| Alison | Jones | Scotland's Towns Partnership |  |  |
| Susan | Jones |  |  |  |
| David | Kellock |  |  |  |
| Gary | Kerr | Paisley Community Trust |  |  |
| Alistair | Kyle | East Dunbartonshire Council |  |  |
| Jane | Lamont | Beith Trust |  |  |
| Davina | Lavery | West Dunbartonshire Council |  |  |
| Thom | Ledingham | North Ayrshire Council |  |  |
| John | Lee | Scottish Grocers Federation |  |  |
| Colin | Love | South Ayrshire Council |  |  |
| Genna | Lugue | Argyll and Bute Council |  |  |
| Ali | Macdonald | Public Health Scotland |  |  |
| David | MacDougall |  |  |  |
| Ian | Macgregor |  |  |  |
| David | Main |  |  |  |
| John | Mason |  |  |  |
| Laura | Mccormack | Booksellers |  |  |
| Shona | McCoy | Dumfries and Galloway Council | |  |
| John | McCrone | Perth and Kinross Council |  |  |
| David | McCubbin |  |  |  |
| Claire | McDade |  |  |  |
| David | McKay |  |  |  |
| Katey | McKay | Angus Council |  |  |
| Craig | McLaren | RTPI |  |  |
| Debbie | McLean | Scottish Borders Council |  |  |
| Paul | McLennan | East Lothian Council |  |  |
| Stuart | McMillan | Renfrewshire Council |  |  |
| Barbara | McNaughton | East Ayrshire Council |  |  |
| Audrey | Michie | Aberdeenshire Council |  |  |
| Hannah | Moore | Visit West End BID |  |  |
| Caroline | Morrison | South Ayrshire Council |  |  |
| Caitlin | Murray | Cornwall Council |  |  |
| Deborah | Murray | Visit West End BID |  |  |
| Andrew | Ormston | Drew Wylie |  |  |
| Bill | Pagan |  |  |  |
| John | Park |  |  |  |
| Lorna | Pearce | Argyll and Bute Council |  |  |
| Nairn | Pearson | West Lothian Council |  |  |
| Ro | Pengelly | ScotSectorlink |  |  |
| Kathie | Pollard | Scottish Land Commission |  |  |
| Phil | Prentice | Scotland's Towns Partnership |  |  |
| Carole | Racionzer | Linlithgow Community Development Trust | |  |
| Peter | Ranson | Historic Environment Scotland |  |  |
| Grant | Riley | North Lanarkshire Council |  |  |
| Steven | Robb | Historic Environment Scotland |  |  |
| Debbie | Robertson | Aberdeenshire Council |  |  |
| Brian | Robertson-Fern | Brag Enterprises |  |  |
| Ewan | Robertston | Scotland's Towns Partnership |  |  |
| Dennis | Rodwell | Architects |  |  |
| Iain | Ross | South Lanarkshire Council |  |  |
| Andrew | Russell |  |  |  |
| Sylvia | Russell |  |  |  |
| Maria | Rybaczewska | University of Stirling |  |  |
| Harry | Scott | Scottish Borders Council |  |  |
| John | Scott | MSP |  |  |
| Norman | Sharp |  |  |  |
| Helen | Skimming | Stantec |  |  |
| Denzil | Skinner |  |  |  |
| Ewan | Smith | Aberdeenshire Council |  |  |
| Roddy | Smith | Essential Edinburgh |  |  |
| Lizzi | Smyth | Fife Council |  |  |
| Tom | Sneddon | DTAS |  |  |
| Douglas | Sparks |  |  |  |
| Leigh | Sparks | University of Stirling |  |  |
| Andrew | Spence | BID4Oban |  |  |
| Ian | Stephen | SBRC |  |  |
| Chris | Story | Message Matters |  |  |
| Douglas | Strachan | One Dalkeith |  |  |
| Alyson | Taylor |  |  |  |
| Malcolm | Thomas-Harley | Hamilton BID |  |  |
| Frances | Tonner | East Renfrewshire Council |  |  |
| George | Turnbull | Scottish Borders Council |  |  |
| John | Turner |  |  |  |
| Sunil | Varu | Fife Council |  |  |
| Innes | Walker | Aberdeen Inspired |  |  |
| Scott | Walker | Clackmannanshire Council |  |  |
| Daibhidh | Wallace |  |  |  |
| Anne Marie | Wardlaw |  |  |  |
| Sonya | Warren |  |  |  |
| Tom | Warren | Collective Architecture |  |  |
| Anna | Watkiss | Argyll and Bute Council |  |  |
| Adrian | Watson | Aberdeen Inspired |  |  |
| Neil | Watson | Renfrewshire Council |  |  |
| Douglas | Watt | Galashiels Heartland |  |  |
| Alan | Webster | Highland Council |  |  |
| Jade | West |  |  |  |
| Lawrie | West |  |  |  |
| Valerie | Whyte |  |  |  |
| Derek | Wilson | Argyll and Bute Council |  |  |
| Jo | Winterbottom | West Dunbartonshire Council |  |  |
| Lindsay | Wood | A Heart for Duns |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Apologies** | Neil | Barnes | Linlithgow Community Development Trust | |
|  | Neil | Bibby | MSP |  |
|  | Gillian | Martin | MSP |  |
|  | Brenda | Murray | Perth and Kinross Council | |
|  | Stephen | Horsburgh | East Dunbartonshire Council | |