



World Towns Agreement

A Public-Private-Social Vision for Urban Centres

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MISSION STATEMENT

We, the delegates and online participants at the World Towns Leadership Summit, support a renewed global emphasis on towns and urban districts. This is required as a means of responding effectively to a rapidly changing economic, social, and environmental context.

Today the world is faced with unprecedented challenges and opportunities. By 2030 two thirds of the world population will live in urban areas, while by 2050 15% of the world population will be over 65. These changes place new pressures on public services; social migration is happening at a scale previously unknown; and people and communities are now living with the impacts of climate change. Meanwhile, city infrastructure will struggle to cope with projected trends of urbanisation. All of this is taking place in an era of technological, communicational and social transformation.





Delivering a new emphasis on the role of towns and urban districts requires civic engagement, strategic support, and investment. However, the narrative and policy emphasis on towns and urban districts is often less well articulated than that for whole cities and city regions. This Agreement sets out our shared principles for collaboration, to exchange knowledge and take action to strengthen the town and urban district narrative globally. This new approach can deliver economic, environmental and community focused solutions.

A key part of this narrative is to recognise that towns, whilst different from cities, can also be distinct districts within cities. Further, towns - whilst increasingly drawn into the orbit of cities - can also offer unique and different aspects to urban life. Towns and urban districts matter, offering distinct elements of urban life at a scale which is often rich in local identity and deep in terms of social interaction, and developing a local sense of place within a globalised society. Towns and urban districts should be seen as *the largest scale for community, and the smallest scale for urbanity*.

However, this distinctive narrative is undervalued. All too often our towns and urban districts:

- are subsumed into wider city or regional planning, reducing the potential to advance town-sensitive solutions and opportunities;
- have local economies which are dominated by the wider city economy, weakening local economic energy and activity;
- are often remote from decision making, as they are governed at a scale which sometimes fails to serve the needs, wants and desires of local citizens.

PRINCIPLES

This Agreement has been created through an open engagement with communities and stakeholder organisations in the public, private and third sectors across the world, and through participative debate at The World Towns Leadership Summit in Edinburgh, 15-16 June 2016.

On June 16, 2016, we the organising partners and delegates to the World Towns Leadership Summit will agree to support the following four key principles to strengthen the articulation of the towns and urban districts narrative.





Principle 1: The Unique Identity of Place

1.1 Uniqueness of Place

We need to support the unique characteristics of each town and urban district, the 'DNA of place', to engage communities, businesses and institutions in driving forward their future, and to address the plural and distinctive set of challenges facing these unique places.

1.2 Place Plans

Recognising the specific characteristics of each place, we should draw up a **unique vision for that place**, drawing upon learning from around the world.

1.3 Plurality and Participation

We recognise that towns and urban districts are rapidly changing. Drawing on the insights of new citizens, cultures, businesses and institutions we must build the capacity to deal with rapid change whilst avoiding any negative impact on the character of the place. We recognise the importance of a **plurality of views** and social bridging as a key aspect of town resilience.

1.4 Multiple Pathways

We recognise that there are **multiple pathways to future success**. We accept that different towns and urban districts will adopt different strategies based on triggers for action, forms of leadership, and cultural values. We recognise that doing the 'same as usual' will not work.

Principle 2: Local Economies

2.1 Local Data

We recognise that the scale of towns and urban districts facilitates people meeting each other, sharing information, opportunities and insights. **Driving effective change needs rich local data** – conversational, experiential, quantitative – and local ways to harvest that data.

2.2 Open Sharing of Knowledge

We believe that knowledge should be owned by the many, not the few. Great towns thrive on shared knowledge and connections, within the town and between networks of towns. Towns and urban districts should find their own place in the networked economy. We need a knowledge architecture with open systems.





2.3 Sustainability

A sustainable local economy means less travel miles, promoting the use of local businesses, and keeping resources in the area etc. Circular economy opportunities in local areas are also worth embracing – where waste product being produced locally could be used as a raw material by someone else nearby, for example. Such ideas are gaining momentum worldwide.

2.4 Smart Specialisation

We recognise the opportunity of differentiation of towns and urban districts within networks, maximising comparative advantages. Focusing on the assets and strengths of a place, we can build an economy of smart specialisation around towns and regions.

Principle 3: Governance and Citizenship

3.1 Great Relationships with Blurred Boundaries

We recognise that **great towns and urban districts have great economic and social relationships**. These relationships foster collaboration, based on shared outcomes. We recognise that successful places will embrace the blurring, bridging and fusion of the traditional boundaries between public, commercial, and community sectors.

3.2 Hubs to Integrate New Cultures and Citizens

We recognise the value of, and need for our towns and urban districts to welcome new cultures and forms of citizenship. We must build and plan towns which connect rather than separate citizens. Community engagement is a key element of all schemes and is a powerful tool to raise awareness in communities about the value of cultural diversity.

3.3 Modern Governance Structures

We need inclusive, transparent and open structures that engage citizens and direct the future of towns and urban districts.

3.4 Leadership

We recognise that traditionally leadership has been about leading from the front. We no longer need traditional top-down initiatives, with the web and digital technologies increasing opportunities to engage, collaborate and co-create. We recognise that there is now great potential for new spaces and mechanisms to create thriving towns and urban districts.





Principle 4: Environments

4.1 Reducing the Environmental Footprint

We recognise **the value of environmental resources, and the responsibility for stewardship**, to enhance towns and urban districts and support future generations. We agree to reduce the environmental footprint of towns and urban districts, and manage their impact on scarce resources. In addition, there is economic benefit that can be achieved by being more considerate around resource use. Sustainability is key to maintaining an ideal local area.

4.2 Nurture Assets

We must **respect and nurture all assets**, including environmental, cultural, built, economic, social, human and technological.

4.3 Quality of experience

We recognise that the trajectory of each town and urban district is different. There are different types of place, with different functions. We agree to support the **enhancement quality of experience** for people in each type of town and urban district, informing strategies around the blend of services, amenities and design quality.

4.4 Adaptation to Climate Change

We recognise that climate change is already impacting on our towns and urban districts. Different towns are affected by the changing climate in different ways, but no one place can adapt on its own. We agree to build partnerships to take collective action to make our towns more resilient to climate change, protecting citizens from the risks it poses and making the most of opportunities it may present.

4.5 The Social Value of Place

Public places are often the platform of social structures and are charged with shared values and collective memories. Public places must be appraised to understand what they mean to local communities before any transformation is considered. New places should be planned in a way that hosts future local routines, creates collective memories, nurtures shared values and caters for both people's need for quietness and social interaction.

