

Manifesto Statement for Scotland's Towns

Context: Fundamentally, Scotland is a nation of towns. Towns and villages account for **69%** of our population as well as two thirds of all our jobs and businesses. Our towns are a living legacy of our history and culture, they provide us with a sense of pride and identity, define who we are, and most importantly, town life gives us access to one another through shared spaces and experiences.

The physical appearance of our towns is often a good barometer of the health and well being of the local population; whilst some are doing well, many are under real stress. The issues faced by towns are often complex, exacerbated by their very strength, their lack of homogeneity. There is no silver bullet or straightforward single solution to fixing towns; it has to be done place by place from the ground up.



The National Review of Town Centres in June 2013 and the subsequent Town Centre Action Plan in November 2013 highlighted just how complex these issues are.

This document has been produced by Scotland's Towns Partnership as a statement rather than a manifesto, simply to ensure that all Parties can consider the economic, social and cultural importance of Scotland's Towns.

Focus: The Town Centre Action plan has provided a focus on towns and outlined a range of actions and potential solutions. We are now almost two years into the Town Centre Action Plan demonstration phase which has seen a wide range of innovative approaches being tested. We all agree that more work and resource is now needed to support these efforts and to implement the learning from these experiences, however significant progress has been made with TCAP to date.



The Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Towns and Town Centres has also provided a very helpful political forum to discuss these issues.

The current landscape for towns has improved but challenges remain. The economy is beginning to recover but ongoing structural change in retail has brought further threats as well as opportunities; decentralisation of facilities and activities remains the default position in many sectors; UK led welfare reform continues to dampen local spending power; the public sector is downsizing at a faster pace and shedding key assets; communities often still lack the capacity to take on these assets; investment is fragile and outside of prime; the property market is still dysfunctional.

Scotland's Towns Partnership (STP), formed in mid 2014 has been very active in supporting the work of the Scottish Government and the Cross Party Group. In particular, STP has been influential across all six themes within the Town Centre Action Plan, Digital Towns, Town Centre Living, Accessible Public Services, Community and Enterprising Economies and Proactive Planning. Furthermore, we have been a key promoter of the critically important town centre first principle. The success of STP and the progress being made around towns has been dependent on close partnership working with a wide range of partners and agencies supporting this agenda.



Scotland's Towns Partnership has become the national "go to" agency for towns in Scotland. Formed to provide a voice and focus for towns, and to align and amplify the work on towns across Scotland, it is a unique collaborative of capable, experienced and energetic professionals and organisations who have come together to support Scotland's towns' communities. STP has over 120 strategic members across all sectors and almost 6,000 key towns contacts across Scotland.

The key strength of Scotland's Towns Partnership has been in identifying opportunities and facilitating and developing many new relationships amongst organisations and places. We see an intensification of this work as being critical to success. Examples of this emerging work includes;

- **Information and Resources:** STP has developed a central publicly open web platform www.scotlandstowns.org with new resources including Case Studies, the Funding Finder, the Town Centre Toolkit, Understanding Scottish Places and the Place Standard.
- **Connectivity:** Linking key transportation providers to the towns and economic development agenda. Abellio, Stagecoach, First Group and Calmac are all actively engaged.
- **Digital:** Supporting pilots and bringing the potential of towns to BT and other providers, a dedicated digital fund could deliver more rapid progress.
- **Creative:** Bringing Creative Places, Museums and Galleries, WASPS and Lottery funders into projects.
- **Housing:** Linking developers, pension funds and private investors into town centre living debate.
- **Enterprise:** Working with Chambers, Business Gateway, Federation of Small Businesses, Can Do Towns and others to pilot incubation and start up.
- **Town Centre First and TCAP pilots:** Contributing via advisory groups and project activity.
- **Cross Party Group:** Influencing wider practical and political support for towns.
- **Heritage and Historic:** Building closer links with Scottish Natural Heritage, Historic Scotland and Heritage Lottery Fund to focus on towns support.
- **COSLA/SLAED/Improvement Service:** Further engagement is proposed to strength partnership and activity.
- **Cities Alliance:** Closer engagement and collaboration around evidence, research, projects.
- **Community & Social Justice:** Leading on these research areas and working with key partners such as BIDS, DTAS, A&DS, NHS, Inspiring Scotland and Resilient Scotland on a fairer Scotland.
- **Evidence:** Building Understanding Scottish Places and being the lead for new development and further research.
- **Planning:** Work with Scottish Government Planners, PAS and RTPI to improve the planning environment.
- **Environment:** Suitable green space in every town, low carbon, cleaner.
- **Tourism and Events:** Collaboration with Visit Scotland, Events Scotland and the Scottish Tourism Alliance.
- **Youth:** Ensuring young people are engaged in the development of future towns.

We are at the beginning of an exciting phase for Scotland's Towns and there are massive opportunities to make a difference place by place.

The town centre agenda is one where consensus can be reached across the political spectrum with the opportunity for all of us to work more collaboratively.

Call for Action: In recognition that Towns have a critical role in supporting Scotland's social, economic and cultural growth, we have issued the following Call for Action;

That all Parties continue to support the Town Centre Action Plan; the continuation and extension of the demonstration phase of test projects; implementation of the Town Centre First Principle; and the continuation of the Cross Party Group on Towns, and

In recognition of the progress and focus achieved by Scotland's Towns Partnership and its partners in such a short timeframe, to ensure there is a cross party commitment to continue to resource support for our towns, allowing further development and implementation.

Professor Leigh Sparks Chair, Scotland's Towns Partnership