

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

**HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2015, 1.00 PM**

**COMMITTEE ROOM 1, SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT**

## **AGENDA ITEMS**

### **1. Welcome and Opening Remarks**

Margaret McCulloch (MMc) welcomed the group and highlighted the good turnout.

Office bearers have been re-elected and are as follows:

Convener - Margaret McCulloch MSP

Deputy Convener - Chic Brodie MSP, Phil Prentice, Scotland's Towns Partnership.  
Sunil Varu, ATCM

Secretary - Elaine Bone, Scotland's Towns Partnership

Treasurer - Elaine Bone maintains financial records as part of role of Secretary.

Craig McLaren, RTPI Scotland and Scotland's Towns Partnership acts in adviser capacity to Convener

Last year the CPG on Towns and Towns Centres looked at the following themes:

- Community Led Towns
- Ministerial visit and Understanding Scottish Places
- Helping People Make Great Places
- Small Businesses in Towns

MMc recently announced her new role as Shadow Minister for Town Centres. The Town Centre Action Plan will now be a standing item on the Agenda with Phil Prentice, STP Chief Officer, providing an update at each meeting of the CPG.

The next meeting will be held on 13<sup>th</sup> May and will look at footfall and spend in town centres. The CPG will also launch a campaign to encourage MSP's to take a day out to work and spend time in their own town/area. In November, the CPG will hold a reception in Parliament to showcase small and rural towns, given that it is the year of food and drink, representatives will be encouraged to take a stall to promote what they do along with presenting local goods from their area.

### **2. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising**

The minutes were approved by Alistair Mitchell (AM) and seconded by Jim Metcalfe (JM).

Presentations, Papers and future dates can be found on the Scotland's Towns Partnership website, [www.scotlandstowns.org](http://www.scotlandstowns.org)

### 3. Supporting Small Businesses in our Towns

Barry McCulloch (BMc) Senior Policy Officer, FSB Scotland and Norrie Stewart (NS) Reatiler and Clarkston BID Project Manager looked at the role of small businesses in towns.

3.1 BMC has been working with town centres for eight years and thinks that they have not made enough progress. We haven't yet answered the question: why do town centres matter economically? The FSB exists to represent it's members by taking their views and lobbying on their behalf.

The bottom line is that towns need a concerted drive to push costs down for SMEs because it's too expensive. Independent businesses account for 88% of local retailing and they are important to our town centres.

Rate and rents are vast, complex and primitive – it would be useful to have a one stop shop for rates and regulations. The Small Business Bonus Scheme must continue.

How quickly can you start a business? Digital infrastructure and skills are important and in rural areas and there is often limited or no connectivity. We need to seek practical solutions to resolve this. Use empty buildings to amplify connectivity and better explore linkages with other areas. Build upon linkages that exist and stop leakages.

Base policies on uncertainty: 35% of jobs will be lost in the next two years, business base has changed for SME growth. Bricks and Mortar businesses are now relocating to homes. What does that mean for policy and the Town Centre Action Plan? What does the future of towns look like?

Town centres are too expensive for most FSB members to locate, half of all businesses are now homeworking to accommodate their lifestyle. Changing face of business is key to changing face of town centres.

#### 3.2 Discussion

JM: Businesses look to be socially minded, given the trend of homeworking, is there a change in how business is conducted?

BMc: No, but there is simply a need for towns to accept any business, to encourage a mixed market and make it easier and cheaper for this to happen.

Sunil Varu (SV): How will the rates revaluation impact SMEs? Will it be an opportunity for them?

BMc Some businesses will benefit, some won't. Push the reform of rates but there will always be areas of high rental. The revaluation is critical but SMEs don't have the required knowledge.

CB: There is a tax reform meeting next week in Parliament. How can we marry social enterprise in towns centres?

BMc: Town centres can't be fussy – they have to be accepting of all enterprise.

### 3.3 Norrie Stewart, Retailer and Clarkston BID Project Manager

How can we help SMEs thrive in towns? Multi retailers and out of town parks must be stopped. Non Domestic Rates are the assassins of the high street whilst councils look at mid to long term funding, SMEs have much shorter cycles. The Small Business Bonus Scheme must continue, particularly for SMEs.

Town centres are unique and localism will help businesses solve problems. Ambassadors and town centre champions will also support this. All stakeholders must be helped to accept change, most have lost the local post office, fish mongers, convenience shop and these have been replaced with shelves in mini supermarkets. The character and personality of our town centres has suffered and is shifting to a marketplace that provides public and private services, businesses need to adapt to the evolution of our high streets.

### 3.4 Discussion

Gordon Bell (GB): There is fragility amongst independent SMEs who often rely on a second income to sustain them. Now supporting 95 independent retailers across Scotland, The Retailer carried out survey and found that around 65% of independent businesses rely on another job or spouse with a higher income.

Craig McLaren (CMc): Barry and Norrie talked about disconnect between SMEs and their town centres. We need to look at connection between spatial and community planning to overcome this. RTPi will publish a report next month on place based community planning.

BMc: Community Planning as it is today is not about the community and it is not spoken about enough which results in priorities being different to reality.

## **4. Town Centre Action Plan Update**

### 4.1 See Appendix 1

### 4.2 Discussion

Malcolm Fraser (MF) congratulated the progress that STP is making and commended it's positivity.

MMc highlighted that collaborative working is key and thanked all involved.

BMc: How do we create a level playing field for SMEs and independent businesses?

Phil Prentice (PP): It's a new world, we need to embrace how SMEs can influence town centres. Try demonstration projects and move towards community empowerment. It is positive for collaboration and there is a good energy at present.

Tom Johnston (TJ): Discounters, home bargain retailers pose threat to our town centres.

PP: It is up to entrepreneurs and town centre businesses to capture growth. There is a resurgence of business, driven by affluence and poverty. Town Centre First Principle holds no consent for out of town – it should no longer be offered.

MMc reminded the group to invite MSP's to their towns to work and spend time in for a day and offered to go along to her own town centre. An invite template will be distributed in due course. STP Tea Party on 13<sup>th</sup> with Julian Dobson precedes the next CPG meeting.

MMc closed by stating that it was good to see new faces and encouraged them to return.

## APPENDIX 1 – TOWN CENTRE ACTION PLAN UPDATE



### Cross Party Group on Towns, 25<sup>th</sup> Feb 2015 – TCAP Progress Update

The TCAP is the cross party response to the national review of towns, it has an emphasis on people, enterprise and place and provides us with clear recommendations and a raft of potential approaches to ensure our towns are vibrant place.

It is clear that many of the solutions outlined in the Review and Action Plan were not intended for the Scottish Government to undertake directly but rather that this would stimulate an enabling framework to encourage actions from the wider public, private and community sector.

STP was established to become the national “GO TO” body for towns and to build such partnerships and collaborations and I’m pleased to announce that our new national towns portal is almost complete and that very shortly we will have a central repository for toolkits, policy, research and practical advice as well as showcasing good news and best practice.

Theme	Activity and Progress
Town Centre First Principle/ Proactive Planning	<p>The Scottish Government Cabinet and COSLA Leaders agreed the Town Centre First Principle in July 2014 and we have seen some great examples such as Falkirk, East Renfrewshire, East Ayrshire and West Dunbartonshire.</p> <p>STP in collaboration with RTPI, SURF and HOPS have agreed to run a national Scotland’s Best Town (S,M,L) competition to underpin the importance of principle and to celebrate and to showcase and learn from the towns that embrace it.</p> <p>STP, RTPI and Iain Scott also plan to roll out some entrepreneurial planning events in the near future to further embed the principle.</p> <p>Discussions are also underway between STP and SG to see if a couple of demonstration towns can be identified where the TCFP can be the main plank or driver of a wider town economic regeneration plan for the town</p> <p>Scottish Towns Centre MasterPlanning Toolkit to go live on STP Portal in April</p>
Town Centre Living	<p>Mrs Burgess announced the £4m Town Centre Empty Homes Fund in February. The fund will be open for bids in March.</p>

	<p>SG continue to fund Empty Homes Partnership that aims to bring empty homes back into use. This includes town centre properties.</p> <p>Local Housing Strategy guidance strengthened to encourage local authorities to consider the role of town centres as residential communities.</p> <p>Social housing benchmarks as part of the Affordable Housing Supply programme have been increased and flexibility is permitted to consider priority sites above benchmark. This enables complex and more expensive developments, such as those in town centres, to be considered.</p> <p>Actions to encourage more housing in town centres included in the soon to be launched Joint Housing Delivery Plan for Scotland.</p>
<p>Vibrant Local Economies</p>	<p>The Understanding Scottish Places toolkit is to be launched on the new STP Web Portal in April, providing towns with much more relevant economic performance data as well as dependency and typology information.</p> <p>STP, BIDs, SG, Can Do, FSB, DTAS, Scottish Chambers, Business Gateway are currently scoping out an Enterprise Towns Summit to look at the various issues which impact on business and enterprise in towns – rates, business support, more entrepreneurial planning approaches etc</p> <p>When Community Empowerment Bill receives Assent it will open up town centre investment zones and local discretionary rates schemes</p> <p>Small Business Bonus Scheme is maintained and the effectiveness of BRIS is continuing to be monitored / terms negotiated</p> <p>Fresh Start (50% relief for 12 months) extended from unoccupied shops and offices to include pubs, hotels and restaurants but uptake remain slow so we are looking at ways to promote wider recognition of the scheme through SLAED, FSB, Business Gateway and Scottish Chambers etc</p> <p>The Can Do Towns Innovation Challenge has now assisted 15 towns through the current scheme- Cambuslang/Rutherglen Bike Town project led by Community trust, others include Embrace Elgin and support to Falkirk to cross market the Kelpies and Wheel with the town itself.</p> <p>BIDs now have 31 live projects and 20 in development with a target of 150 bids across Scotland by 2020. Now starting to develop tourism and theme bids – eg food and drink and pan local authority</p> <p>STP now actively supporting SLAED in its work around people, business and place</p> <p>Joint working between Scottish Government, the enterprise agencies and Business Gateway to strengthen the message on available town centre business support.</p>

<p>Enterprising Communities</p>	<p>DTAS to work on Town Centre Asset Audit pilot – Cabinet Secretary to announce support for DTAS to roll out this pilot. The new Asset Funding Pots will give development trusts the chance to conduct surveys, work with stakeholders and consult with the public on the best ways to rejuvenate their town centres.</p> <p>Community Empowerment Bill June 15</p> <p>Sustainable Towns, Historic/Heritage and Cultural Toolkits being developed across wide partnerships and STP has been engaging closely with Big Lottery, DTAS, Firstport, Resilient Scotland and Inspiring Scotland re support for communities in towns</p>
<p>Accessible Public Services</p>	<p>Community Empowerment Bill re CPP service provision</p> <p>The Public sector Finance Manual was revised late 2014 to include considerations around the town centre first planning principle</p> <p>NHS Scottish Property Transaction Handbook A revision to the overview section of the handbook will be published in early 2015. This links to the update already published in the Scottish Public Finance Manual.</p> <p>NPF3 underlines significance of towns and STP is leading partnership work with small and rural towns network to bring them under STP umbrella and to secure resource for some pilot projects. initially in D&amp;G and borders through SOSA and then up north and west</p>
<p>Digital Towns</p>	<p>Scoping workshops held early Feb and SG now working up potential demos STP running two digital workshops – Dundee and Edinburgh Collabotation with Future City team at Glasgow re USP phase 2</p>

Philip Prentice  
Chief Officer, Scotland's Towns Partnership  
25<sup>th</sup> February 2015

**APPENDIX 2 – AGENDA FOR CROSS PARTY GROUP ON TOWNS AND TOWN CENTRES MEETING HELD WEDNESDAY 25<sup>th</sup> February 2015**

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

1 pm – 2.30 pm, Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2015  
Committee Room 1, Scottish Parliament

***‘The Changing Face of Scotland’s Towns’***

**Agenda**

- 12:45 Meet in Parliament reception area
- 13:00 Welcome and Opening Remarks – Margaret McCulloch MSP, Convener
- 13:05 AGM Business
- 13:20 Minutes of Previous Meeting of the Cross Party Group & Matters Arising – Margaret McCulloch MSP, Convener

Supporting Small Businesses in our Towns

- 13:30 Barry McCulloch, Senior Policy Officer, FSB Scotland
- 13:40 Norrie Stewart, Retailer and Clarkston BID Project Manager

Town Centre Action Plan Update

- 13:50 Phil Prentice, Chief Officer, Scotland’s Towns Partnership
- 14:00 Discussion
- 14:15 Any Other Competent Business & Date of Next Meeting
- 14:30 Close of Meeting



## **APPENDIX 3 – APOLOGIES RECEIVED AND LIST OF ATTENDEES**

### **CROSS PARTY GROUP ON TOWNS AND TOWN CENTRES WEDNESDAY, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2015 AT 13:00 COMMITTEE ROOM 1, SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT**

#### **APOLOGIES AND LIST OF ATTENDEES**

##### **APOLOGIES**

Scott Davidson  
Ian Davison Porter, BIDs Scotland  
Andy Godfrey, Boots Alliance  
Eric Guthrie, Tactran  
Ross Martin, SCDI  
Ian McLelland, East Kilbride Shopping Centre  
Alexander Nicoll, ATCM  
Nairn Pearson, West Lothian Council  
Peter Quinn, Keep Scotland Beautiful  
Tom Reid, Falkirk Council  
Professor Leigh Sparks, University of Stirling  
Karen Whitefield, USDAW  
Jane Wood, Scottish Business in the Community

##### **ATTENDEES**

Margaret McCulloch MSP (Convenor)  
Chic Brodie, MSP  
Margaret McDougall MSP  
Elaine Murray MSP

Jane Atterton, SRUC  
Gordon Bell, The Retailer  
Elaine Bone, EDAS  
Callum Chomczuk, Pagoda PR  
Vivien Collie, St Andrews BID  
Joseph Fagan, Scottish Parliament  
Ian Fowell, Scottish Small Towns Group  
Elaine Gorman, Scottish Business in the Community  
Tom Johnston, Colliers International  
Stephen Leckie, Crieff Hydro  
Rebecca Mather, Scotland's Towns Partnership  
Geoff McCartney, Miconex  
Ojay McDonald, ATCM  
Craig McLaren, RTPI  
Jim Metcalfe, Carnegie UK Trust  
Nikola Miller, RTPI  
Alistair Mitchell, Falkirk Delivers

Flick Monk, CSPP  
Penny Morriss, Living Streets  
Carole Noble, Keep Scotland Beautiful  
Phil Prentice, Scotland's Towns Partnership  
Tom Sneddon, DTAS  
Eddie Thomson, William Hill  
Ralitsa Vasilovska, William Hill  
Sunil Varu, Paisley First BID