

# **Minutes of the Meeting of the Cross Party Group on Towns and Town Centres**

**Held on Wednesday, 17<sup>th</sup> April at 13:00**

**Location: Committee Room 2, Scottish Parliament**

## **AGENDA ITEMS**

### **1. WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS – MARGARET MCCULLOCH MSP**

1.1 Margaret McCulloch MSP (MMcC) welcomed everyone and thanked Boots for sponsoring the lunch.

1.2 MMcC confirmed that the CPG has been officially approved by the Standards Committee.

1.3 All apologies received will be recorded. Iain Scott is unable to attend. Iain's digital vignettes can be viewed at [www.scotpreneur.org.uk](http://www.scotpreneur.org.uk)  
Apologies from MMcC who must leave early due to mandatory Parliamentary business. Deputy Convener, Graeme Dey (GD), will then chair the meeting.

### **2. MINUTES OF INITIAL MEETING**

2.1 Correction to the Minutes: G Dey is Deputy Convener. Andy Kennedy proposed the Minutes and Bill Walker MSP seconded.

### **3. MATTERS ARISING**

3.1 There were no matters arising from the Minutes of the last Meeting.

### **4. PRESENTATION – SCOTTISH RETAIL CONSORTIUM**

4.1 MMcC introduced David Martin (DM) of the Scottish Retail Consortium.

4.2 A copy of the presentation, '21<sup>st</sup> Century High Streets' can be found [here](#). DM referred to the British Retail Consortium's publication, '21<sup>st</sup> Century High Streets – What Next for Britain's High Streets?' A copy can be found [here](#).

4.3 Taking the Group through the presentation, some of the key points highlighted by DM were as follows:

- The retail sector is one of most important in Scotland; and a major employer - on par with tourism.
- Consumer confidence is at an all time low with Scotland showing less confidence than the rest of the UK.

- Footfall down. If you break down footfall in UK regions, there are regions that are as bad as Scotland.
- Scotland's retail sales have lagged behind the UK for the last two years, although mainly driven by SE England and London.
- There is falling demand for properties, rising costs, and reduction in new stores opening.
- The key challenges are perceived as being internet shopping and supermarkets. (Although, it is our supermarkets who make a five percent reduction in the cost of the household shopping basket.)
- Chain stores on the high street are in decline.
- The UK is the second largest market in the world for online sales, and growing.

#### 4.4 Key messages –

- High streets will continue to be impacted by the growth of multi-channel, out of town and regional centres.
- The way high street policy is viewed has been changed by the economic downturn but structural changes have been evident for many years.
- The challenges high streets face are structural not cyclical and policy makers must not assume a return to previous economic models.
- Retail is only part of the answer for high street viability and needs to be complemented by a range of leisure, social and cultural activities.
- High streets need to be effectively managed, carefully planned and have a clear vision for future development.

#### 4.5 Priorities for SCR are:

- Supportive regulatory and fiscal regimes - especially business rates - still a more radical review required. The health tax added to already increasing rates.
- A unique sense of place – high streets need to make themselves different.
- An attractive public realm.
- Planning – a swift, efficient planning system for locally driven solutions.
- Accessibility – parking has to be an attractor; not a revenue-raiser, e.g. in Chester, footfall increased by 20 per cent after removing charges after 3pm.
- Safety and security.

## **5. PRESENTATION – EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL**

5.1 The next presentation was presented by Phil Prentice (PP), Economic Development & Regeneration Manager, East Renfrewshire Council, on 'Local Solutions' and can be viewed [here](#).

5.2 Three approaches adopted in East Renfrewshire towns were illustrated as

follows, with common thread being community-led approach:

- Master plan approach – investment led
- A community led Charter for Change
- Business Improvement District - Business-led for a better town centre that the whole community can be proud of.

5.3 Some key points about Barrhead master plan:

- Put in £20m public sector funding - levered £100m private sector funding.
- Housing can bring people.
- Brought in Asda but with a resilience fund inbuilt so the small businesses don't go out of business.
- Brought public sector, SDS, JCP, sports, business gateway and chamber, into one building in town.
- New school builds - 25% of contract put through local business.
- 1200 new homes, new park, better sports, M77 a key driver in accessibility.

5.4 Some key points on the Charter for Change in Neilston:

- Neilston given ownership in partnership with local groups.
- They have a town charter but with DTA as anchor/driver.
- They have created a sustainable environment – for example, development of wind farm and Clydesdale bank refurbishment to create an enterprise hub.

5.5 Some key points about I Love Clarkson Business Improvement District (BID):

- Encourages businesses to take ownership.
- Annual levy income only £300k but creative approach to the BID has leveraged in other funding.
- The BID has managed to reconnect the town with its local community.
- Believe the future lies with BIDs, and now looking to develop BIDs in Giffnock, Barrhead, and sector BIDs for food and rural.

## **6. TEST TOWNS – CARNEGIE UK**

6.1 Jim Metcalfe (JM) of Carnegie UK was invited to share information on its TestTown competition, which “harnesses the enterprising minds of young innovators to recreate high streets and town centres for future use. TestTown will give young people the chance to design what their high streets can become and then trial their ideas and innovations on a real high street in 2013.” Shortlisting

takes place in May, with the TestTown finals scheduled for the end of June. JM encouraged the Group to share news of the competition and its ongoing progress. Full details [here](#)

## **7. DISCUSSION ON PRESENTATIONS**

7.1 Ross Martin, Centre for Scottish Public Policy: Re SRC point on profile changing nature of spend, does the statistical evidence presented, give the whole picture? Is there enriched data available that would capture and focus on people's use of towns, rather than spend?

SRC confirmed that evidence is all consumer-driven, as that is what the retail sector reacts to.

7.2 G Dey suggested that the large supermarkets are killing small businesses. D Martin responded, saying there is a move by supermarkets to open smaller stores.

7.3 P Prentice commented that there is not one fixed solution. East Renfrewshire is developing a toolkit with Scotland's Towns Partnership, to measure success across a range of indicators to provide an enriched benchmarking evaluation, available for roll out. Town centres should become more social, and offer something different.

7.4 J Metcalfe highlighted that our towns don't look like or have what the next generation want from them.

7.5 Ian Davison Porter, Business Improvement Districts Scotland, believes that reliable and consistent data must be used; with a better breakdown, as SE England and London figures skew the UK figures.

7.6 Bill Walker MSP stated that we must embrace digital with the John Lewis model a leading example of the multi-channel approach.

7.7 Gordon Bell, The Retailer made some key observations. The figures provided by SRC are averages – there is a massive difference between towns, cities, regions. Towns don't yet fully appreciate how different it's going to be. The successful small to medium sized chains will reduce in number on the high street in towns and move into malls. Landlords are a block. Regarding supermarkets - what hurts is the stray into the independent's territory.

7.8 G Dey posed whether the greater decline in spend in Scotland is due in part to the extent of rural areas, and issues around accessibility and increasing petrol costs.

7.9 D Martin confirmed that the breakdown for the rest of England is available.

These are averages and in some cases things are much worse; hence importance to get the right tax breaks for retailers. Regarding G Dey's point around rural economies, it is considered that the decline is more about consumer confidence.

7.10 G Dey stated that we must ensure we spread the message about shopping local. Use it or lose it!

7.11 D Martin emphasised that retailers must embrace digital.

7.12 Joseph Fagan, Scottish Parliament, suggested bus companies could market destinations; offer discounted fares; joining up transport with town centres. He reflected on the interesting examples of how East Renfrewshire has helped to change local perceptions and ownership of town. J Fagan posed the question, how do people deal with vacant property?

7.13 J Metcalfe agreed that train and bus stations say nothing about our towns; links should be made with Network Rail and Scotrail.

7.14 G Dey mentioned that FSB is doing work with local shops to improve customer care.

7.15 R Martin emphasised that someone needs to take control of town centres - the market has failed and one thing Scotland's Towns Partnership hopes will be an outcome of the Towns Review, is support for that capacity in towns.

7.16 Ojay McDonald, ATCM, agreed with R Martin and went on to say that the business rate is a significant problem with those businesses who rely on property to do business.

7.17 Andy Kennedy, Stirling Council, commented that the Towns Review discusses a number of the elements raised today around landlords, vacant property, the evidence base and data availability.

7.18 Tom Sneddon, DTA Scotland, would echo R Martin's remarks about local solutions and building resilience. We need a resource to be a long term glue to hold the town together.

7.19 I Davison Porter invited the Group to view the BIDs Scotland-commissioned vacancy report by Ryden, available from [Elaine Bone](#). There are also very good examples of BIDs addressing the issue of vacant property in Clarkson, Falkirk, Dunfermline and Inverness. A final point on supermarkets - in 2007 FSB did a post implementation evaluation of a new Tesco development in Lerwick which demonstrated the negative impact on the local independents.

## **8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

8.1 I Davison Porter encouraged the Group to support the Appeal by Alloa Town Centre BID, to save their local post office which is under threat of being relocated into a large business. This will have a social and economic impact on the town centre.

8.2 The holding of a meeting over summer involving a visit to a town will be considered.

## **APPENDIX 1 – AGENDA**

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

1:00pm, Wednesday 17 April 2013

Committee Room 2, Scottish Parliament

#### **Agenda**

1. Welcome & Opening Remarks – Margaret McCulloch MSP
2. Minutes of initial meeting
3. Matters arising
4. Presentation – East Renfrewshire Council
5. Presentation – Scottish Retail Consortium
6. Test Towns – Carnegie UK
7. Video Vignettes – Iain Scott, Scotpreneur

## **APPENDIX 2 – APOLOGIES & LIST OF ATTENDEES**

### **APOLOGIES:**

Jackie Baillie MSP

Kevin Belfield, First Group

Liz Cameron, Scottish Chambers of Commerce

Tracy Duggan, NSA for Retail

Annabelle Ewing MSP

Malcolm Fraser, Malcolm Fraser Architects

Keith Geddes, Pagoda PR

Alison Johnstone MSP

Tom Johnston, Colliers

Stephen Leckie, Crieff Hydro  
Robert Livingston, Hi Arts  
Margaret McDougall MSP  
Michael McMahon MSP  
Siobhan McMahon MSP  
Fiona Moriarty, Scottish Retail Consortium  
Alasdair Morrison, GVA  
Elaine Murray MSP  
Carole Noble, Keep Scotland Beautiful  
Brian Patterson, East Dunbartonshire Council  
Dennis Rodwell  
Iain Scott, scotpreneur  
Dan Smith  
Leigh Sparks, University of Stirling

**ATTENDEES:**

Convener: Margaret McCulloch MSP (departed early)  
Deputy Convener: Graeme Dey MSP  
Gordon Bell, The Retailer Ltd  
Elaine Bone, Scotland's Towns Partnership/Economic Development Association  
Scotland  
Chic Brodie MSP  
Callum Chomczuk, Pagoda PR (on behalf of Boots)  
Garry Clark, Scottish Chambers of Commerce  
Sheena Cleland, Scottish Parliament  
Viv Collie, Vivid Ideas & Solutions

Ian Davison Porter, BIDs Scotland

Joseph Fagan, Scottish Parliament

Vicky Ferrier, Boots

Keith Irving, Living Streets

Andy Kennedy, Stirling Council

David Martin, Scottish Retail Consortium

Ross Martin, Centre for Scottish Public Policy/Scotland's Towns Partnership

Ojay McDonald, ATCM

Jim Metcalfe, Carnegie UK

Alastair Mitchell, Falkirk Delivers

Maggie Mitchell, Dunfermline Delivers BID

Ben Murray, Blackwood Environmental

Phil Prentice, East Renfrewshire Council

Mike Smeed, Boots

Tom Sneddon, Development Trusts Association Scotland

David Stewart, Highland Retail Academy representing NSA for Retail

Iain Thom, Green Group

Sunil Varu, ATCM (Scotland)

Bill Walker MSP

Ross Williams, Pagoda PR (on behalf of Boots)