

Cross-Party Group on Towns and Town Centres

Wednesday 20th September 2023, 11.45 -12.45

Minutes

Present

MSPs

Meghan Gallacher MSP

Invited guests

Anthea Coulter, CTSI

Kimberley Guthrie, Scotland's Towns Partnership

Tom Warren, Dunoon Community Development Trust

Douglas Westwater, Community Enterprise

Non-MSP Group Members

David Adams McGilp, VisitScotland

Carol Anderson, TSB

Grant Baxter, Clackmannanshire Council

Elaine Bone, Scotland's Towns Partnership

Johanna Boyd, Planning Aid Scotland (PAS)

Diane Brown, Alloa First

Hollie Bruce, Scotland's Towns Partnership

Mhairi Dickson, Angus Council

Michael Dunn, EKOS Ltd

Hew Edgar, Registers of Scotland

Lisa Edwards, Shopappy

Lucy Harding, Nairn BID

Michael Heanue, M Worldwide

Tom Henderson, SAC

Linda Hendry, SURF - Scotlands Regeneration Forum

Nicola Hutchinson, Scotland's Towns Partnership

Tanya Jones , Maggie Chapman MSP

Shabnam Komai-koma, North Ayrshire Council

Heather Macnaughton, Historic Environment Scotland

Debbie McLean, Scottish Borders Council

Caroline Mitchell, Scotland's Towns Partnership

Eleanor Monks, All About Barrhead/I Love Clarkston

Suzanne Rhind, Aberdeenshire Council

Chris Ringland, Evangelical Alliance Scotland
Ruth, Rodger, Smith Scott Mullan Associates
Douglas Scott, individual
Tom Sneddon, Carluke Development Trust
Christine Stewart, Smith Scott Mullan Associates
Naomi Sweeney, Scottish Borders Council
Malcolm Thomas-Harley, Hamilton Our Town
Lesley Walker, Angus Council
Anna Watkiss, Argyll and Bute Council
John Weir, Isle of Bute BID
Cheryl Williamson, South Lanarkshire Council

Apologies

Maggie Chapman MSP
Katy Clark MSP
Prof Leigh Sparks, University of Stirling
Bill Pagen, Cupar Development Trust
James Trolland, Sustainable Drumchapel
Nick Wright, Nick Wright Planning

Agenda item 1

Welcome and Opening Remarks– Meghan Gallacher MSP

Convener Meghan Gallacher MSP welcomed all to the meeting and noted MSP attendance and apologies. She noted the excellent activity that took place across Scotland during Scotland Loves Local Week, supporting local businesses, town centres, and the High Street. She then noted that the meeting would focus on the topic of “enterprising communities” in Scotland’s towns.

Agenda item 2

Minute of last meeting and Matters Arising – Meghan Gallacher MSP, Convener
Minutes accepted. Proposed by T. Sneddon. and seconded by N. Hutchinson. There were no matters arising.

Agenda item 3

Proposal of election for office bearers - Meghan Gallacher MSP and Kimberley Guthrie, Interim Chief Officer, Scotland’s Towns Partnership

Unfortunately the meeting was not quorate with required MSP members and was subsequently approved online per addendum to the minute.

Meghan Gallacher reported on AGM business to those in attendance. She confirmed that an annual report will be submitted to the Scottish Parliament, outlining the

activities undertaken. This will be available to the wider group upon submission. AGM business was then ended with a request for participants to share any topics they wish to be covered by the CPG, to the Scotland's Towns Secretariat: Alison Jones or Elaine Bone at Scotland's Towns Partnership.

Agenda item 4

Overview: Kimberley Guthrie, Interim Chief Officer, Scotland's Towns Partnership

Enterprising Communities are a force for good in our local areas, whether that's in addressing the issues around vacant and empty properties and land or meeting the demand for local events and services. Locally based partnerships come together to generate economic growth, through jobs, employment, skills, and resources – ultimately improving the places where they're based.

Scotland's Towns Partnership's research forums and best-practice case studies demonstrate the importance of collaboration. The pandemic, cost of living crisis, and tough economic forecast mean that society needs a reset and refocus to build more enterprising communities, particularly in achieving wider objectives and future proofing towns.

Speakers today will give us first hand experience of turning ideas into reality and how these exemplars have turned out in practice.

Agenda item 5

Turning Ideas into Reality - Douglas Westwater, CEO, Community Enterprise

Community Enterprise is a support organisation for the community sector, serving charities and social enterprises. Douglas is also Chair of Social Enterprise Scotland, so his presentation draws on his experience from both roles.

New Lanark was one of the earlier projects that people in Scotland remember, in terms of a business that immediately delivered social impact. This started to formalise a model for use by communities looking to take on responsibility for enterprising responses to issues within their communities. Associated changes to land reform and the community empowerment act gave people more power to act on that. As a result of the above, the move towards social enterprise has been stronger as time goes on and communities become more empowered. This in turn then brings funds into the local economy as profits from successful enterprises are reinvested into the community and back into assets.

The first example Douglas provided was Midsteeples Quarter. A community benefit society, Midsteeples Quarter now owns a number of assets in Dumfries Town Centre, and is regenerating them into housing, co-working, and creative spaces, transforming that section of the town centre. Douglas urged attendees to read further into the work being done at Midsteeples Quarter.

The second example mentioned was the Fraser Centre in East Lothian. An area of high relative deprivation, there was a large number of vacant premises in the town centre. The asset that was passed to the community was originally a 1920s cinema that was being rented by a local Church. It now runs as a full commercial cinema, with a café, and event space that hosts community events, conferences, and health and wellbeing classes, employability training. It's now a multi-use space that provides services to the wider community. Through its success it has also brought additional investment into the town centre.

The third example is the Grassmarket Community Project in Edinburgh City Centre. This was, in recent years, a church hall that was largely used as a soup kitchen and for homelessness outreach. It has since been redeveloped into a community and events space. The space runs workshops, welcomes tourists, and provides services to the community. The cafe wasn't initially implemented, to be sensitive to local businesses. After it was decided a café was required, the project was developed in consultation with the local community and the Business Improvement District.

The fourth example is Inverkeithing Town House which is due to open in Spring 2024. This project is part of the HES Heritage in Place Programme in partnership with the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The derelict historic building in the town centre is to be reopened as a heritage centre, a stopping place for those on the Coastal Path, and a centre for community, art, and culture. The centre will also host a community cinema.

The fifth example mentioned is an upcoming development at Annan Harbour. This project will take derelict land just outside of the town centre and invest 12 million pounds to transform it into a more desirable area on the water, where tourists can visit. It will also raise awareness of the town's history as a sea-faring port.

Douglas then outlined a number of upcoming considerations for communities across Scotland. There is a sizeable closure programme coming over the next few years in various local authorities. This will see the closure of swimming pools, libraries, theatres, and community centres, as well as a large number of buildings run by religious groups. This also presents an opportunity for these assets, once empty, to be used by social enterprise for the benefit of communities.

Douglas also highlighted that in terms of ministerial portfolios, social enterprise has been moved from third sector, into the wellbeing economy. This will cause complications for many, but the focus on Community Wealth Building should enable more enterprises in Scotland. Other considerations include fair work, equality, diversity, inclusions, and the just transition to Net Zero.

Douglas then shared an ecosystem map that can help communities navigate the support available to take on assets within the town centre. This can be found at www.sesupportmap.scot.

Agenda item 6

Dunoon Case Study: Collaborating for Success - Tom Warren, Chair, Dunoon Community Development Trust

Whilst Dunoon isn't an island, it has the qualities of one, given its remote nature and distance from other towns on the Scottish mainland. It is easily reachable by ferry, and this is the preferred mode of transport for many in the town. Because of this and the fact that it's the only large town on the peninsula, there is still a well-defined town centre, with a mixture of family businesses and high street retailers.

In 2012 a report completed by the Scottish Rural College listed Dunoon alongside Campbelltown as the most vulnerable rural towns in Scotland. A local steering group was created which led to the formation of Dunoon Community Development Trust in 2021, formed during the difficult pandemic period.

The Trust has received funding as of March 2023, from the Scottish Government's Investing in Communities as well as the National Lottery's community fund. This funding has enabled the Trust to get on a solid footing until March 2026, with a number of development workers and volunteers in post.

Whilst Dunoon Community Development Trust doesn't yet have ownership of any physical assets, it does manage a range of digital assets and groups that benefit the community. These include coworking meetups, food growing projects, the Dunoon Forward App for walkers and cyclists, and the Dunoon Bothy Project which provides information and the social history of Dunoon to visitors.

Tom then went on to provide a case study of the Trust working with a local community interest company, *People of Place*, who have established a coworking space in the town. This partnership has been key in terms of building a bank of skillsets available to the trust, ensuring local procurement for many of the digital projects. The Trust are also working alongside *People of Place* to carry out a feasibility study of putting in place a beach hut for visitor use. This brought about a range of community events and workshops, bringing in a variety of groups together to discuss a range of topics, including water quality, tourism, and climate change. The beach huts are in progress and, once in place, will become a useful feature for tourists and local people alike.

Dunoon has a rich history of tourism. Dunoon Pier is a heritage building that's become a focus for driving tourism and benefiting the community in the future. The Trust are working with the local BID, Argyll & Bute Council, STP, and other partners to create a destination where people want to live and visit.

The Dunoon Forward project is a local app that brings together local history, wayfinding, as well as local events and business details.

Agenda item 7

Clackmannanshire Third Sector Interface provides all the support for social enterprises, charities, and third sector organisations across Clackmannanshire. In the area there are a range of venues, including the Alloa Tower, Castle Campbell, the Japanese Garden, and the Cochrane Hall.

In recent years there have been a number of community asset transfers in the area, which falls under CTSIs remit. To prepare for this, five years ago CTSI undertook training in the Place Standard Tool, to inform future strategy. This was used in relation to Alloa Town Centre, as a way to measure the difference and change over a period of time.

A new housing development that was a partnership between the local council and Kingdom Housing Association, called Primrose Place, was designed and built for older people, and those with disabilities and illnesses. Bringing people into the town centre, closer to local amenities.

Lots of the work in Alloa Town Centre was informed by consultation with local businesses and communities, using the place standard tool. Some of the concerns raised were safety, care and maintenance, working economy, and social inclusion. These were then tackled in a variety of ways.

Examples include, the Alloa in Bloom Group which encourages volunteers from different communities to come together and play an active role in keeping the town centre green and beautiful; in turn making it a more attractive place to spend time and visit. And in regards to safety, the local BID invested money into CCTV cameras for the town centre.

The local facilities had been shut down in previous years, but the building held a central location and presented a real opportunity to benefit the community, for example an active travel hub. CTSI developed a plan for how the building could be used and what it could look like. A variety of funds, through the local council, contributed to repurposing the building into a local hub that would promote health, active travel, local businesses, tourism, and heritage as well as decorating outdoor areas with murals and street art for the community to enjoy.

With the Council unable to run a managed public facility, plans then had to be made for the hub to become financially self-sustainable. Ideas include, e-bikes, tour provision, meeting rooms and event space, and a gift and tourist shop. To raise financial reserves to secure the future of the Hub, including covering rental costs to the local council, Clackmannanshire's first Community Benefit Society was set up, where local people could buy community shares to support the business. It means local people were invested in this benefit for the community.

The Community Benefit Society has over 100 shareholders already and they aim to share up to 2,500 shares in total. The Hub is also home to the Clackmannanshire Tapestry which was created by a group of local volunteers. The space now has a well-used meeting room which is very popular, a toilet, and hosts a range of family events which is bringing families and footfall back into the town centre. It is also home to a *Made in Clacks* shop, featuring the best of local produce and products.

The Hub has since won a number of awards, including *Improving Scotland's Places* SURF Award, the *Stirling Architects Award*, and was nominated for the *Scottish Thistle Award* for Celebrating Thriving Communities.

Agenda item 8

Discussion

The Convener put questions out to attendees.

J. Weir remarked on the Alloa Hub and congratulated the team for its success. He particularly commended the forward-planning to ensure the asset would be self-sustainable, protecting it from difficult economic circumstances in the future. J. Weir then asked T. Warren and D. Westwater what sort of stress tests were being applied to projects in Dunoon, to ensure the future of investments made now through grant funding.

A. Coulter commented that it is indeed difficult, particularly in an economy like that we have currently, so focus needs to be given to recruiting volunteers, and to drumming up reserves for the future.

D. Westwater answered that longevity and sustainability are built into everything Community Enterprise are doing, that's a key focus of work being done with project teams across Scotland. He said the first priority is to build in business opportunities to projects.

D. Westwater also highlighted that some projects are based within challenging areas and difficult market conditions; places that the private sector have abandoned. And as such, it might not be possible to ensure full sustainability for the future, and that's OK.

A question was put forward in the session's chat: Is there anything specific that either Douglas or Anthea think should come out of the review of the Community Empowerment Act 2015 in relation to supporting communities.

T. Warren commented that they're yet to make use of the Act, but others in the area have done on a relatively small scale.

Agenda item 9

Close of meeting. The convener thanked attendees and guest speakers for their valuable input.

The meeting closed with a note that the date for the next meeting is still to be agreed and put a call to membership for any potential topics they would like to see addressed in future sessions, sent to alison@scotlandstowns.org.

Addendum

The following online ballot took place on 15th October.

- Sharon Dowe MSP proposed the nominations outlined below 15th October.
- Claire Baker MSP seconded the nominations 16th October.

Dear Member

Cross Party Group on Towns and Town Centres – Email Ballot on New Office Bearers Appointments

We contact you in our capacity as Secretariat for the Cross Party Group on Towns and Town Centres, of which you are recorded as being a member.

In order to meet the Code of Conduct for the Cross Party Group on Towns and Town Centres, we are required to hold an email ballot to elect office bearers. As an MSP member of this Cross Party Group, we are seeking one MSP member nomination and one MSP member seconding the nomination by email response please.

Nominations required are for:

1. Meghan Gallacher MSP, Convener
2. Katy Clark MSP, Deputy Convener
3. Call for another volunteer Deputy Convener from those include in this email circular. Followed by their nomination and seconding.
4. Confirmation of re-election of Scotland's Towns Partnership as secretariat and treasurer of the Group.

The structure will then be agreed upon by office bearers, but it is anticipated that this Group is co-convened by at least two office bearers from above noted.

We would appreciate responses by COB Tuesday, 17th October.

With many thanks.

Kind regards,

Elaine

Elaine Bone

Scotland's Towns Partnership

Office: 0131 510 1586| Mobile: 07801 354591

Email: elaine@scotlandstowns.org