

Cross-Party Group on Towns and Town Centres

Wednesday 8th December, 12:45-13:45

Minutes

Present

MSPs

Neil Bibby MSP
Siobhian Brown MSP
Willie Coffey MSP
Fiona Hyslop MSP
Gillian Martin MSP
Paul McLennan MSP

Invited guests

Phil Prentice, Chief Officer, Scotland's Towns Partnership
Karen Dick, Head of Place, Partnerships and Communities, Creative Scotland
Robert Livingston, Director, Regional Screen Scotland
David Paton, Associate Director, Crawford Architecture and Founder, Designer and Chair of Montrose Playhouse Project

Non-MSP Group Members

Kresanna Aigner, Findhorn Bay Arts
Peter Allan, Go Golspie Development Trust
Ed Archer
Lauren Arthur, Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland
Joanne Boyle, Scottish Government
Diane Brown, Alloa BID
Dawn Cadwell, East Ayrshire Council
Sarah Cameron, SENScot
Chris Churms, Dumfries and Galloway Council
Neil Crooks, Fife Council
Jamie Cumming, North Property Advisers
Ewan Eccleston, Glasgow City Council
Claire English, WASP Studios
Hayley Flanagan, North Berwick Business Association
Alex Fleming, 4 The Benefit of All
Doug Flett, Scottish City & Community Networks
John Forbes, Communities Housing Trust

David Francis, Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland
Malcolm Fraser, Fraser Livingstone Architects Ltd
Rona Gibb, Paths for All
Pamela Grant, Scottish Futures Trust
Diane Gray, Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland
Eva Groeneveld
Kimberley Guthrie, Scotland's Towns Partnership
Claire Hallybone, Argyll and Bute Council
Bill Harvey, Scotland's Improvement Districts
David Henderson, Development Trust Association Scotland
Stephen Horsburgh, East Dunbartonshire Council
Madelene Hunt, Bo'ness Community Council
Brian Johnson, Crawick Multiverse
Hazel Johnson, Built Environment Forum Scotland
Gary Kerr, Paisley Trust
Fiona Knight, Barmulloch Community Development Company
Rebecca Livesey-Wright, RIG Arts
David Lonsdale, Scottish Retail Consortium
David MacDougall
Rebecca Madgin, University of Glasgow
David Main, Bathgate Community Council
John Mauchline, Creative Crieff
Gillian Maxwell, Greenock West & Cardwell Bay Community Council
Katey McKay, Angus Council
Fiona McLaren, Angus Council
Duncan McLean, Kirkwall BID
Fiona McLean, Stirling Council
Barbara McNaughton, East Ayrshire Council
Diane Milne, Dundee City Council
Cherie Morgan, Play Scotland
Gregory Newman, Royal Burgh of St Andrews Community Council
Ruth Noble, Outside the Box
Martin Patrick, Midlothian Council
Carolyn Powell, Huntly Development Trust
Colin Proctor, Scottish Futures Trust
Derek Rankine, SURF
Pete Reid, Falkirk Council
Grant Riley, North Lanarkshire Council
Angus Roberts
Sanne Roberts, Scottish Borders Council
Colin Ross, Colin Ross:Workshop
Maria Rybaczewska, University of Stirling
Emma Scott, SURF
Pat Scrutton, Outside the Box
Stefano Smith, Stefano Smith Planning
Tom Sneddon, Development Trust Association Scotland
Leigh Sparks, University of Stirling
Donald Stavert, Bathgate Community Council
Nicola Stead
Rowan Stewart, Aberdeen City Council

Chris Story, Messages Matters
Sheila Stuart, Aberdeenshire Council
Richard Todd, East Dunbartonshire Council
Julie Twaddell, Friends of Broadway Prestwick
Karen Walker, East Ayrshire Council
David Watt, Arts & Business Scotland
Kathryn Welch
Andrew Wilmot, Oberlanders Architects LLP

Apologies

Eamonn Campbell, Glasgow City Council
Meghan Gallagher MSP
Marie McNair MSP
Bill Pagan, Cupar Development Trust

Agenda item 1

Welcome, opening remarks and matters arising – Siobhian Brown MSP, Convener

Convener Siobhian Brown MSP welcomed all to the meeting and noted MSP attendance and apologies. She noted the meeting would focus on Culture and Place. As part of her opening remarks, she introduced herself as the new Convener of the group and as a new MSP to Session Six of the Scottish Parliament, covering the three towns of Ayr, Prestwick and Troon. She added that she is looking forward to working with the Cross Party Group to share ideas and work towards creating attractive, sustainable, bright and vibrant town centres.

There were no matters arising.

Agenda item 2

Overview: Phil Prentice, Chief Officer, Scotland's Towns Partnership shared an overview of today's theme, Culture and Place.

Phil Prentice welcomed all to the meeting and stated his enthusiasm to work with the new Convener. Phil noted that Scotland is known for its rich and deep culture, provenance, products, heritage and traditions, and our towns are a storybook of that, and something we should be celebrating. He added that the culture sector has suffered throughout the pandemic – from built heritage to festivals to performances and markets – events that bring people together and make life more interesting. He's hopeful there will be a new Town Centre Action Plan in the future that will take a strategic place-based approach to recovery.

Presentation slides available on the STP website with summary points below.

Agenda item 3

Karen Dick, Head of Place, Partnerships and Communities, Creative Scotland

Karen discussed the opportunities and challenges for culture in places and communities and the work Creative Scotland deliver that make a difference in peoples' lives and towns. The pandemic has had an impact on accessing services in Scotland, including culture: The heartbeat of local places are usually cultural places. There are still cultural venues that are still inaccessible to the public. The pandemic has laid bare a continuing trend of reduction of budgets, local expertise and venue access in the sector and impacts on equity of access to cultural opportunities.

Partnerships have developed quickly throughout the last 18 months to support vulnerable members of the community. Emergency funding has supported staff retention and the pandemic allowed a development of ideas, support to local artists and performers, recognising the importance of local assets and new ways to access culture, for example, outdoors and digitally when indoor access wasn't permitted.

Agenda item 4

Robert Livingston, Director, Regional Screen Scotland

Regional Screen aims to enable more people in more places to experience greater screen experiences. Robert shared some themes and issues to consider in the future, that would still be apparent without the COVID-19 pandemic. Robert believes every community has its own unique culture, whether expressed through heritage clubs, seasonal themed displays, sporting club or facilities, or green spaces - they form the identity of the community. Placemaking, local planning or 20-minute neighbourhood policy much incorporate the town's unique culture, pride and knowledge.

It's important to recognise places and spaces that are important to community cohesion, a problem that predates COVID. Community hubs, as part of 20-minute neighbourhood planning, must recognise existing hubs and local patterns of behaviour. Many community venues are already at risk and there is not enough data of pre-existing local knowledge, culture, groups and coordinated activity. It is vital that culture, arts, heritage, and entertainment should feature more prominently in the 20-minute neighbourhood policy and placemaking.

There are ways to allow communities to be given the opportunity to express and enjoy its own approach to culture. Some approaches will come from within communities themselves, but for many smaller, remote and/or economically deprived communities, it is important to recognise what digital and mobile opportunities can do.

Agenda item 5

David Paton, Associate Director, Crawford Architecture and Founder, Designer and Chair of Montrose Playhouse Project

David gave an overview of the Montrose Playhouse Project. Nine years ago, the community needed a cultural hub and a cinema and arts centre project was born when the local swimming pool closed within the town centre. Through public meetings and

local consultation, a group was formed, fundraising began, and the building was bought for £1 from the local authority. The building was stripped back by local businesses and volunteers before a contractor began work. The building is now designed to be fully accessible and includes a cinema, café bar, box office and cultural hub for the community. The people of Montrose and environs are now invested in this new hub for arts, activity, education and community and allows local access instead of 40 miles travel to the nearest cinema. The hub has employed 30 members of staff and has brought culture to the High Street in Montrose.

Agenda item 6

Discussion

J. Twaddell asked: “Robert Livingston gave me helpful advice when I set up Dementia Friendly Prestwick's "relaxed cinema" afternoons five years ago. Making culture accessible to all in communities must be part of the picture. Dementia friendly, autism friendly, it's not hard to do, just takes will and effort. This is part of the work needed to keep people enjoying their town centres, surely?”

Robert Livingston commented that cinemas are well adapted to offer a wide range of access to groups and activities. Screen Memories Scotland are a great organisation working with those with dementia. Phil Prentice added that Scotland needs to be mindful of its aging demographic. He cited the Town Centre Action Plan Review Group spent a lot of time consulting with the traditional ‘unheard voices’ to understand segments of the population, in order to be mindful of accessibility within towns and town centres.

S. Smith asked Robert Livingston: “Robert, you refer to the 20 Minute Neighbourhood concept which is currently very topical and supported by Scottish Government in NPF4 consultation. What happens to those communities that do not have the necessary ingredients for a 20 Minute Neighbourhood?”

Robert Livingston noted that his talk pointed to mobile culture facilities and added that 20 Minute Neighbourhoods need to be a balance of what the community can achieve and what can be provided. Karen Dick furthered that mobile facilities, like the Screen Machine and mobile galleries, don't just bring opportunities to places that might not otherwise have them, they allow communities to imagine and think about what else places can do with their existing assets. There's a direct correlation of the work of Regional Screen Scotland and the development of different and other facilities as they build audiences and communities. Phil Prentice added that 20 Minute Neighbourhoods is a flexible concept on sustainability and needs to be developed on community need.

D. Rankine asked: “Thank you for the helpful presentations, which referenced various place-focused strategies. A concern regularly voiced in SURF's network is that we are cluttered with too many strategies and attention/priorities are being diluted, with limited focus on delivery and implementation. Do panellists see this as an issue from your perspectives, and are there any existing good policies around improving the cultural offer and/or engagement in our towns and town centres, which you think we should be doing more to put into practice?”

Karen Dick responded that Culture doesn't feature prominently in a lot of strategies and plans. Quite often, there is a separate culture strategy with regeneration, community and economic impacts. Robert Livingston added that time limited cultural action plans are useful, rather than broad strategies, where there's action-focused on community need.

Willie Coffey MSP asked: "How can we try to deal with empty shops that become dirty, filthy and derelict. Some East Ayrshire colleagues are in the meeting and are doing great work in the towns. However, even with this great work, some derelict shops will continue and the powers we have are few. How have other towns dealt with this issue?"

Robert Livingston responded with an example from Selkirk. There were several pop-up shops that enhanced the High Street and gave opportunities for local small businesses and cultural groups to access. Phil Prentice added that the damage of vacant shops to community psychology and investment can be severe. Resources such as the Place Based Investment Programme and Vacant and Derelict Land Fund will target spaces within town centres to repurpose. Karen Dick pointed to the work of the Stove Network in the Midsteeple Quarter in Dumfries, who are attempting to repopulate the town centre of Dumfries.

Agenda item 7

Any Other Competent Business and Close of Meeting

Phil Prentice added under AOCB that the Minister of Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth, Tom Arthur MSP will commence a debate on the Scotland Loves Local Programme in the Scottish Parliament following this meeting.

The meeting was closed with a note that the next meeting will take place Wednesday 9th March, 12:45-13:45.