

Cross-Party Group on Towns and Town Centres

Wednesday 9th March 2022, 12:45-13:45

Minutes

Present

MSPs

Neil Bibby MSP
Siobhian Brown MSP
Sharon Dowey MSP
Fiona Hyslop MSP

Invited guests

Emma Fyvie, Clackmannanshire Council
Neil McInroy, Scottish Government
Mhairi Paterson, North Ayrshire Council
Phil Prentice, Scotland's Towns Partnership

Non-MSP Group Members

Monica Allen, Voluntary Action South Lanarkshire
Bill Anderson, Carluke Development Trust Limited
Nicol Armstrong, West Kilbride Community Council
Laura Babington, East Dunbartonshire Council
Pamela Barnes, Linlithgow Community Development Trust
Elaine Bone, Scotland's Towns Partnership
Raymond Boyle, New Consensus
Chic Brodie, Caledonian Strategy (Scotland) Ltd
Sophie Brodie
Rhona Brown, Scotland's Towns Partnership
June Burnett, Aberdeenshire Council
Gordon Carmichael, Kirkintilloch BID
Pete Cheema, SGF
Sarah Christie, South Lanarkshire Council
Duncan Clelland, South Ayrshire Council
Andrew Colvin, East Ayrshire Council
Chris Cook, Institute for Strategy, Resilience & Security, UCL
Chris Cullen, South Ayrshire Council

Miriam Dornan, National Trust for Scotland
Mark Dowey, CoMoUK
Patrick Dunne, South Ayrshire Council
Victoria Eccles, South Lanarkshire Council
Lisa Edwards, ShopAppy
Mike Evans, Inverness BID
Graeme Finlay, Clackmannanshire Council
Doug Flett, SCCN
Luke Fraser, ASPIRE Orkney
David Gear, East Dunbartonshire Council
Rona Gibb, Paths For All
Mark Greaves, South Ayrshire Council
David Grove, Fife Council
Kimberley Guthrie, Scotland's Towns Partnership
Declan Hehir, Limerick PPN
David Henderson, COSS/DTAS
Alison Jones, Scotland's Towns Partnership
Shirin Karbor, Whale Arts
Fraser Kerr, East Ayrshire Council
Hilary Kidd, Young Scot
James Lamb, CoSLA
Alison Laurence, East Dunbartonshire Council
David Lonsdale, Scottish Retail Consortium
Colin Love, South Ayrshire Council
David MacDougall
David Macleay, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Helena Macleod, Muir of Ord Development Trust
Rebecca Madgin, University of Glasgow
Richard Marsh
Ross Martin
Katey McKay, Angus Council
Craig McLaren, Royal Town Planning Institute
Barbara McNaughton, East Ayrshire Council
Audrey Michie, Angus Council
Derek Miller, Carnoustie Community Development Trust
John Mowat, Kirkwall & St Ola Community Council
Deborah Murray, Byres Road & Lanes BID
Catriona Nicolson, Aberdeenshire Council
Nairn Pearson, West Lothian Council
Antonia Pompa, Discover Lanark
Gary Porter, The Coalfields Regeneration Trust
Diane Pryde, Midlothian Council
Rhiannon-Jane Raftery, Creating Climate Conscious Communities
Derek Rankine, SURF

Grant Riley, North Lanarkshire Council
Angus Roberts, Arbroath Courthouse Community Trust
Jo Robertson
Christine Ruckley, Creative Scotland
Maria Rybaczewska, University of Stirling
Kirsteen Scott, Scottish Enterprise
Laura Scott-Simmons, Benton Scott-Simmons
Ashley Smith Hammond, Creative Scotland
Tom Sneddon, Tom Sneddon Architect
Deneebo Sommerville
Chris Story, Message Matters
Richard Todd, East Dunbartonshire Council
Nicola Tomkinson, NHS Ayrshire & Arran
Emily Tracey, Historic Environment Scotland
John Turner, Byres Road & Lanes BID
Julie Twaddell, Friends of the Broadway Prestwick
John Weir, Isle of Bute BID
John Whitelaw, Lenzie CDT
Corri Wilson
Kate Wimpres, North Edinburgh Arts
Jo Winterbottom, Public Health Scotland
Nick Wright, Nick Wright Planning

Apologies

Paul McLennan MSP
Professor Leigh Sparks
Paul Sweeney MSP

Agenda item 1

Welcome and Opening Remarks – Siobhian Brown MSP

Convener Siobhian Brown MSP welcomed all to the meeting and noted MSP attendance and apologies. She noted the meeting would focus on Community Wealth Building and Towns.

Agenda item 2

Minute of last meeting and Matters Arising – Siobhian Brown MSP, Convener
Minutes accepted. There were no matters arising.

Agenda item 3

Overview: Phil Prentice, Chief Officer, Scotland's Towns Partnership

PP introduced today's theme, *community wealth building*. This is a time to do things differently following a disruptive period and with a challenge around net zero. This is a time for opportunity. Coming out of Scottish Government, we have a new National Strategy for Economic Transformation, to support an economy that works for all; a new National Planning Framework, supporting a drive to net zero and climate action; and the Town Centre Action Plan 2 (TCAP2): A New Future for Scotland's Towns. TCAP2 looks at how we rebalance the inequities within the retail sector and online; how we deliver on climate, inclusion and community wealth building. There has never been a time with so much political focus and opportunity for towns and city centres, aligned with various funds such as, place based investment, vacant and derelict land, levelling up – all multi-year consistent funding. Together, all of this creates massive opportunity and it's important to hear from our guest speakers today, on how we can build community wealth and a fairer society for all.

All presentation slides from today's contributors are available on the Scotland's Towns Partnership website with summary points below.

Agenda item 4

Context of Community Wealth Building in Scotland: Neil McInroy, Fellow, Democracy Collaborative and Community Wealth Building Adviser to Scottish Government

Neil McInroy (NMCI) quoted Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, "*Intricate minglings of different uses in cities (or towns) are not a form of chaos, on the contrary, they represent a complex and highly developed form of order*". This is about relationships not transactions, how the commercial, social and public economy work effectively together to create a vibrant economy for all.

What happens in towns is reflective of wider economic transformation. We need a full system view of the economic system – public, social and commercial. The economy should be relational to our lives rather than transactional.

Wealth is not effectively redistributed and the economic multiplier effect is not thought through. We need to reset how we think about economic development and hotwire wealth into pre planning instead of waiting for the growth. Community wealth building is a deep resetting of how we think about economic development in Scotland, creating an ecosystem that directs wealth to where it should be. Supporting this model are five pillars - finance, workforce, spending, land and property and inclusive ownership. All parts of the system that we seek to redirect.

In Scotland this is how we are making this happen –

- Policy – making connections with economic delivery and other linked policy areas, e.g. health, police, local government.

- Practice – significant progress in pilot areas, Clackmannanshire, South of Scotland, Wester Isles, Tay Cities/Fife and Glasgow City Region. North Ayrshire began this journey earlier and are well advanced. Other areas are developing including, West Lothian, South Lanarkshire and Dundee. In programme for government covid recovery plan, looking to advance strategies and plans for all 32 local authority areas.
- Movement Building – there has been a lot of work done across public, social and commercial sectors on building the ethos of community wealth building.
- Legislation – solidify an additive piece of legislation in a Community Wealth Building Act.

Agenda item 5

Case Study: Mhairi Paterson, Community Wealth Building Coordinator, North Ayrshire Council

North Ayrshire's Community Wealth Building (CWB) Strategy launched in May 2020. It demonstrates commitment to a CWB approach and aspirations for a fairer, more inclusive economy. The CWB mission is to enhance local wealth, create fairer jobs and maximise the potential of all places through working in partnership with communities and businesses.

It was the first CWB strategy in Scotland and it's a long-term strategy that works across all services and with anchor partners, businesses and communities.

To support this, they have invested in staff across key teams, including, economic policy, business support, communities, regeneration, employability, skills, HR and procurement.

There are 55 strategies within the action plan, aligned to all five CWB pillars.

There is also an investment fund used to accelerate financial recovery, tackling, regeneration and climate change.

Towns are facing new challenges, with changing retail patterns. Through a CWB approach, North Ayrshire is supporting towns to be thriving, creative, enterprising and accessible places; committed to a place-based locality approach, using CWB principles as a driver. CWB is about an holistic approach, recalibrating how money flows in and out of the local economy. Towns and communities need to be supported to become vibrant and resilient which is more than just physical regeneration projects. Rather, through wider economic development support - growth and diversity of business base (plural forms of ownership), opening procurement opportunities, investing locally in community enterprises and projects.

To create thriving towns, you need to work across the CWB pillars that are relevant to towns:

Land and assets – review priority of vacant and derelict land sites and buildings, improving commercial estates, review environment and develop proposals to support town centre living.

Procurement – keep-it-local campaigns, supporting town centres and local businesses, proactive procurement approach to support and grow local suppliers, and delivery of community benefits and wish lists.

Plural ownership and financial power – business locality officers directly support businesses with financial support, empowering town-based community projects through the community investment fund, and exploring the feasibility of establishing a repair economy/network building on existing community and business led activities.

Example projects are not just about physical regeneration but sit within 2021-26 regeneration delivery plan which aligns closely with CWB strategy.

It outlines the priorities for maximising land and assets and strategic regeneration of places. Locality partnerships are key community partners in place making and regeneration, supporting local enterprise and regeneration and contributes to Net Zero.

CWB Examples

Restoration of Millport Town Hall, Isle of Cumbrae; creating a community hub and events space.

Stevenson Beach Hub - community hub with café, workshop, classroom and events space and showcase the town's natural heritage.

Future Skills Hub, Kilwinning. Good example of anchor partners working together. The council provided land via asset transfer and the college will deliver courses on engineering, construction, smart technologies, as well as house an apprenticeship programme. This feeds into wider aspects of creating fairer employment routes, ensuring skills in the local area and supporting employers to create apprenticeships.

Another key element of CWB which is embedded in the approach is maximising use of land and assets, including land or property which is vacant or derelict.

Town centre living pilot is a good example of repurposing and maximising property use. Two sites in Irvine are being developed.

The Repurposing Property Grant Fund aims to support landowners and community groups to bring back vacant land and property into productive use, initially supporting feasibility studies.

These examples illustrate, supporting our towns/town centre in a holistic way beyond just physical regeneration but where the bigger flows of money and employment is in our towns.

Agenda item 6

Case Study: Emma Fyvie, Senior Development Manager for Development, Clackmannanshire Council

The council has been working with NMCI and Scottish Government to create a CWB action plan and embed the approach in all they do.

The council has a good track record on delivering on the Place Principle – which is a collaborative approach which requires all those responsible for providing services and look after assets, to work and plan together to improve the lives of people, create inclusive growth and more successful places. Building on the place principle through a CWB lens centred on the five pillars, can further improve on those outcomes.

EF shared the historic economic picture of Alloa, once a bustling industrial town with an active harbour and known for weaving, glass making, brewing and distilling – jobs were plentiful. Now the harbour is no longer open and a decline in traditional industries, has led to the economy relying more on retail and services, with housing and retail built on former industrial sites. Both Alloa and the wider community has a high number of workless households. EF tabled SIMD map displaying high areas of deprivation; in parts in the top 10% most deprived areas of Scotland and a quarter of children live in poverty and there are health, education and wider inequalities. The council is clear that new approaches are needed to improve lives and working with Scottish Government, they're adopting a wellbeing economy approach, recognising that wellbeing indicators are as important as traditional GDP measures to measuring the success of a place. The council sees CWB as a key tool to delivering on a wellbeing economy. The next local outcome improvement plan will be a wellbeing one and CWB will be embedded into its action plan. They are also part of the Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme.

CWB Examples

Forthbank - close to areas of multiple deprivation. The council has been working with partners, including Stirling University and the energy sector, to consider locating a large scale solar farm and food growing project, also possibly geothermal facility. The aim is to create a heat network to buildings and most deprived housing estate.

Food growing project – uses enclosed food growing towers, where any food can be grown. The community can take on ownership and local food will benefit those in poverty.

Living Alloa Project

On the site of a former public toilet, a new Alloa hub will be created, run by a new charitable organisation including the Business Improvement District and third sector. It will have facilities to support the aims of improving fitness, reducing social isolation, highlighting the heritage offer and boosting the wider regeneration of area. It will include an active travel hub, bike workshop, flexible space for local hire, tourist information point, and a shop selling locally made goods.

A Community Benefits Society will operate the hub and local people and businesses can buy shares, giving them a say in how it operates.

Alva Pathfinder Project

Alva's industrial heritage in textiles has gone and it's now a service centre and commuter town. Architecture and Design Scotland (ADS) and Scottish Futures Trust have worked closely with the local people and council to create a vision for a thriving town centre with a whole place collaborative approach. It will focus on the town plus a former mill site on the town's edge.

The place standard was used to identify local needs. ADS then worked closely with healthcare and other professionals, members of the community and school pupils, to test scenarios from the consultation and vision for action.

This will help support a local place plan under forthcoming legislation. It also provided options for the mill site beyond just housing. All the scenarios included housing but identified other uses too. For example, health centre consulting space, facilities for young and old and for visitors including off-road active travel network, library.

Combining CWB principles with a place-based approach to a town and whole systems approach, can add value and deliver what communities need.

Agenda item 7

Discussion

The Convener asked NMCI how people get involved in the CWB journey.

NMCI said that a number are already doing so, even without direct Scottish Government support. We're assembling materials and support with partners, Economic Development Association Scotland (EDAS). Moving forward, it's hoped there will be deeper support for councils and anchor partners. This is not traditional regeneration with a budget attached to it. This is about bending what we've got to work more effectively. This is not new money. This is a change in the culture of how we do things.

Fiona Hyslop MSP commented on being struck by NMCI's point on this being about relationships and the presentations were quite focussed on property and buildings. FH was interested to know what has changed in the relationships that's helped deliver change?

Mhairi Paterson suggested that one of the key changes has been breaking down traditional silos and having better working relationships internally and with partners. For example, internally, procurement and business support and development teams are working much closer together - there is a dedicated procurement officer to help support that. They work to support local businesses to grow, develop, submit tenders and increase successes. They are working regionally better, with the three Ayrshire authorities working together in the three year growth deal, supporting local business, developing a Fair Work Ayrshire service – helping local employers to embed fair work principles. A CWB Commission facilitates regional working, exploring new ways of working together and with anchor partners.

Emma Fyvie agreed with MP that there is greater communication and this has improved across all areas of the council. A recent positive is forming anchor partnerships with private sector, education, NHS - strengthening communications with partners with real spending power in the local area. The relationship element is so important in embedding the culture in the council and across other organisations, so that it becomes the way people think.

As a member of the Economy Committee, FH highlighted that the Committee is about to start the Town Centre Inquiry.

Graham Findley asked what mechanisms can be used to persuade those who previously or currently receive the wealth to redirect it back to the local area and who are those parties who should be approached?

NMCI said there are two main considerations. Public sector contracting and conditionality placed on that around community benefits. Also, soft encouragement of how they could see themselves as relational within the economy and how they develop the Scottish supply chain and create different forms of ownership within that supply chain. This benefits the economy but also wider security and resilience. Secondly, we need to ensure there is a Scottish business based that's fit to compete and win contracts and that is where Supplier Development Scotland and a range of business support is essential. NMCI's personal view is that Scotland could do more in building enthusiasm to compete and win on contracts and other commercial aspects within the economy.

Declan Hehir based in Ireland, stated there is a greater awareness of town centre issues, particularly the impact of edge of town retail developments on independent businesses. Where do we start in Ireland to lift the towns and villages?

NMCI said that relating to Ireland, it is on the CWB journey, for example, through progressive planning. In Scotland, the new National Planning Framework 4 is under Mr Arthur's remit. We should ensure planning is embedded in CWB and see considerations made to not just the direct impact of a new superstore, but consider what the wider relational aspects of that might be and how we can plan for more plurality and diversity within our economy. Other nations have different stipulations about out of town developments, e.g. social enterprise zones, that encourage different forms of commercial activity.

Phil Prentice agreed with NMCI on a need for system change. The examples shared today are key as first principles, a radical approach and embedding key stakeholders. Change from an extractive economic model won't happen overnight but it is a step in right direction. Aside from public procurement which is a big lever, public policy proposals are heartening, e.g. National Economic Transformation Strategy, National Planning Framework 4. The driver around net zero and post covid, is going to change how we live, work and be educated. Smarter private sector companies are aware and investing in town centre living at a scale that we haven't seen before – making use of existing asset base instead of field space which is unsustainable. The private sector and willing to engage and the public sector role in that is to work with them.

In terms of Ireland, STP has been working with the Irish government. For the first time, they have embedded the Town Centre First principle into their programme for

government. They are deliver a lot of collaborative town centre health checks. Ireland has the advantage that it didn't go down the clone town route and still have a lot of independents. There is more to be done around property ownership and community wealth but they are starting to give it the focus required and there's a real political interest. Ireland is driven by the Dublin economy and neglected its towns. PP is heartened of late by the interest from institutions and government in towns, in part due to towns getting a bit of a bounce-back from covid and moves out of Dublin.

The Convener thanked speakers for valuable contributions and all present. SB added that our towns are the heart of our communities and we have to build them back to meet the demands of our new world.

Agenda item 8

Any Other Competent Business

There was no further business.

Agenda item 9

Close of Meeting

The meeting was closed with a note that the next meeting will take place Wednesday, 8th June, 12:45-13:45.