

Cross-Party Group on Towns and Town Centres, Creating Inclusive and Accessible Towns and Places – Why?’ - including Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 10th September 2024, 17:40-18:30

Minutes

Present

MSPs

Meghan Gallacher MSP
Stephen Kerr MSP

Invited guests

Chiquita Elvin	Sustrans Scotland
Irene Beautyman	The Improvement Service and Public Health Scotland
Kimberley Guthrie	Scotland's Towns Partnership

Non-MSP Group Members

Alison Luke-Jones	Scotland's Towns Partnership
Beth Hiblin	Transport for Quality of Life
Chris Story	Message Matters
Elaine Bone	Scotland's Towns Partnership
Elisa Meza Noguez	East Dunbartonshire Council
Eugene Mullan	Smith Scott Mullan Associates
Hollie Bruce	Scotland's Towns Partnership
Isabelle MacKenzie	The Highland Council
James Trolland	Sustainable Drumchapel
Jayne Smith	HA Scotland
John Forbes	CHT
Jonny Pickering	Glasgow City Council
Leigh Sparks	Scotland's Towns Partnership
Maria Rybaczewska	University of Stirling
Mark Shields	Sustrans Scotland
Mhairi Donaghy	Scottish Futures Trust
Peter Fraser	Aberdeenshire Council
Rebecca Mather	Scotland's Improvement Districts
Reeni Kennedy-Boyle	Fyne Futures Ltd
Rim Chouaib	Kevin Murray Associates

Stevan Gilchrist
Suzanne Hamilton
Suzanne Rhind
Tom Sneddon
Tony l'Anson

North Lanarkshire Council
Frontline Consultants
Aberdeenshire Council
Carluke Development Trust
Milngavie Town Centre BID Ltd

Apologies

Katy Clark MSP
Alistair Kyle
Andria Reid
Gemma Slight
Nairn Pearson
Norma Lyall
Steve James
Stuart Black

East Dunbartonshire Council
ARBC Change
Fife Council
West Lothian Council
Brechtin Community Led Tourism
Broughty Ferry Traders Association
Highlands and Islands Enterprise

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 added the topic for the meeting was “Creating Inclusive and Accessible Towns and Places – Why?”

Agenda item 2

Minute of the last meeting held 18th March and Matters Arising – Meghan Gallacher MSP, Convener

Minute of the last meeting accepted. Proposed by Mhairi Donaghy and seconded by Kimberley Guthrie. There were no matters arising.

Agenda item 3

On Annual General Meeting business, the following were proposed and seconded by Meghan Gallacher MSP and Stephen Kerr MSP.

Convener - Meghan Gallacher MSP
Deputy Convener – Katy Clark MSP
Secretary – Alison Luke-Jones, Scotland's Towns Partnership
Treasurer- Elaine Bone, Scotland's Towns Partnership

The CPG's annual report is to be submitted to the Scottish Parliament following this meeting outlining the previous year's topics. These included 'Enterprising Communities: A Force for Good in our towns', 'Town Centre Living: A Catalyst for Change' and 'A New Approach to Local'. The forward plan being to support the CPG

secretariat with attendees encouraged to submit any topic ideas to the secretary or treasurer.

Agenda item 4

Discussion Introduction “Creating Inclusive and Accessible Towns and Places – Why?” Kimberley Guthrie, Chief Officer, Scotland’s Towns Partnership

KG introduced the above discussion topic noting that this Cross Party Group topic is in response to a Scottish Towns Partnership learning event, which prompted this wider debate. Defining the aspiration to accessible and inclusive towns and places, KG also referred to a recent STP poll on pedestrianisation, which raised some relevant findings:

- 53% of respondents said they were unlikely to support pedestrianisation in their town centre, predominantly due to reduced vehicle access and pressure on small businesses.
- 46% of the sample disagreed that pedestrianisation makes places more attractive
- And over half of the survey respondents stated it does not enhance inclusivity and accessibility.

The report does though highlight the biggest benefit of pedestrianisation as the provision of community space that has enhanced safety, security and connection. With this in mind, tonight’s session aims to answer the following:

Why should we invest in accessibility?

What makes a place accessible?

What are the benefits, challenges and solutions around pedestrianisation?

Is it good or is it bad for business?

How important is early community ‘buy in’ when delivering these initiatives.

What interventions are required to facilitate them?

How do we change attitudes, minds and behaviours in the delivery of accessible places?

Agenda item 5

Irene Beautyman, Place & Wellbeing Partnership Lead at the Improvement Service & Public Health Scotland

The convener introduced IB, noting her work in place and wellbeing and in addressing inequalities in her work across health and local government.

IB presented the following:

Why should we invest in creating inclusive and accessible towns? Imagine a town or place that supports every individual with their physical, social and economic wellbeing and boosts the local economy.

Why does this matter to our communities? This entails looking at what is actually happening in communities, which is quite dire. Including increasing early death rates, increasing time spent in ill health and the widening life expectancy gap between the poorest and the wealthiest. With forecasts pointing to these areas worsening over the next 20 years.

All of the above has an impact on our physical, social and economic ability to take part in life. In addressing these issues or tendency is to depend on the NHS but this only addresses issues once people are already unwell which can only mitigate these health statistics by 20%. However, numerous other socio economic, environmental and health behaviour factors (see slide) are what can address issues of health inequality. IB additionally highlighted how heavily intertwined health and poverty are, with all of the above illustrating the impact of inclusive and accessible places and the need to promote, invest in and govern an area that has such an impact on the wellbeing of our people.

Our places can have both a very positive or equally negative impact on wellbeing and inequality. Most people are now impacted by both the physical environment and an online environment, which has also altered our behaviour in shopping and socialising etc.

Scotland already has a set of Place and Wellbeing outcomes, which we know if we get them in a place, have a great impact across wellbeing, equalities and net-zero. These long-term preventative outcomes, embedded in our work going forward are a low intensity resource, which requires looking at our policy decisions. This would then deliver on many of the National ambitions (see slide) and in delivering the long-term preventative actions outlined in the 'Christy Commission'. Place and Wellbeing outcomes are a fundamental foundation for us delivering on Place. What is important in looking at these outcomes is that the evidence and research, which details the health and planetary impact of Place, already exists.

In terms of local economy we have again evidence and research that shows for instance that stores placed in pedestrianised areas have higher sales and that those who are accessing town centres are predominantly not travelling by car (see slide).

Thoughts on delivery of inclusive and accessible places (see slide):

- Taking a place-based approach and looking at the data on the people in terms of equality etc.
- What do people need from these places
- Embedding wellbeing outcomes and raising awareness of the preventative role of place
- Governance in organisations that promote the role of place
- Place and wellbeing assessments
- Utilising our own anchor organisations and making decisions about where services are located – to allow for pedestrian access

Local decisions enable and enhance:

- Mental and physical well-being,
- Community connections,

- Business and public transport viability,
- Air quality,
- Connections for the half of household with no car
- Reduction of in-work poverty caused by car ownership.

How do we introduce these changes? Gradually and with communities. An example being the very busy, business and traffic heavy Main Street in Reykjavík. Many businesses did not want the road pedestrianised and so this was done very gradually, such as closing short term for various festivals and taking feedback on these instances. Eventually closing during busy tourist months then gradually moving to full closure. Two thirds of respondents are now happy with these changes.

Some initial thoughts in the way we deliver change:

- We need to take a place-based approach to change and not just utilise budgetary decisions. –
- We need to lead and monitor gradual reduction in cars in certain parts of our cities if we want to see our town centres thrive as places to live and spend time in.

Additional resources were provided (see slides)

The convener thanked IG for her presentation and the oversight in terms of how we build and rebuild our town centres and attract people to them.

Agenda item 6

Chiquita Elvin, Head of Engagement, Sustrans Scotland
Creating Inclusive & Accessible Places in Scotland

This presentation will look at some of the most promising examples across Scotland of inclusive and accessible projects of town centre regeneration; place making; and safe active travel infrastructure each of which had its own unique challenges and solutions.

Walk, Cycle, Live Stirling

This project has connected communities around the city, and has proved particularly transformative, especially for children. It has been funded via various sources, including across local and central government working together with communities and businesses. All projects involving Sustrans Scotland include high quality community and stakeholder engagement; the development of a robust equality impact assessment and where possible an element of collaborative design.

CE noted the key stakeholders including, The University of Stirling, Forth Valley College and planning and heritage teams involved in the and process and highlighted how bold yet careful designs were used to prioritise the needs of young scots and in providing links between education hubs and the city centre.

The project team was supported by Sustrans and engaged with the community and key stakeholders via the use of targeted events and the of the 'Commonplace' platform. This allowed for input and comments into the designs as they developed. The result has been the provision of two strategic, safe and accessible routes (The University Route and The College Route) linking transport and education hubs, city centre and city landmarks that are free from passing traffic.

Connecting Clydebank

This project has been delivered by West Dunbartonshire Council and was initiated from a 2015 community consultation, which found the need for improvement of the public realm and improved connectivity across the A814 Dumbarton Road. The ambition of the project was to transform the look and feel of Clydebank, including both town and transport facilities and to create a more attractive pedestrian and cycle friendly place. This project also included wide community and stakeholder consultation to ensure the civic centre could function effectively. Improvements to the public realm included the use of high quality materials and widened and level access and footway improvements, all of which contributed to a heightened sense of place and safety. The additional landscaping and seating provided also contributed to improved accessibility and inclusivity.

Wick Lanes Pocket Places

This initiative stemmed from community engagement and led by Wick and Highland Councils to address issues of the lanes connecting to Wick town centre, which were deemed critical to accessibility. The project included a series of engagement events, workshops and site visits. There were additionally events focussed on diverse stakeholder groups such as young people and disabled groups as well as the businesses on or near the lanes. The issues raised included cleanliness and maintenance in addition to physical access issues and poor lighting. These issues set the design objectives including that of celebrating Wick's history and character in order to make the lanes feel safer and more inviting to move through. This also included the addition of artwork, new lighting, bin screens and seating with aesthetics and materials used to tie in with the future High St project.

Winchburgh Street Design

This is an example of a project still in development, taking place in an area of significant growth. The project is focussed on the development of Winchburgh Main Street, to improve the sense of community and cohesion and to take advantage of the new housing developments and associated infrastructure. Sustrans worked with the community, developers, businesses and the council to understand what improvements were required and developed design solutions in response to this engagement. Solutions so far have included:

- A range of traffic slowing measures in the town centre
- Accessible areas to sit and rest;
- Defined parking spaces (including increased disabled parking provisions)
- 'Park and Stride' spaces which would allow people to park nearby and walk into the area via local amenities and shops .
- Tree planting and additional greenery are also included in the plans in line with further planned improvements to the community garden

Sustrans are continuing to work with West Lothian Council on a detailed technical design, which it is hoped will progress to construction in the next 18 months.

The convener thanked the speaker, noting how positive it was to see investments across the country in making town centres more inclusive and people friendly and that highlighted the need for collaborative work.

Agenda item 7

Discussion and Any Other Competent Business

The convener opened the floor for further comments:

- Stephen Kerr MSP noted considerable concern about the condition of many of our built environments, including issues of cleanliness and litter. In response, the convener noted that that we cannot simply create positive built environments, and then not provide funding to maintain the quality of these spaces and their associated impact on wellbeing and belonging.
- KG noted that business improvement teams are working hard across the country and that they play a part in public realm improvements given that the attractiveness of our spaces does play a part in business investment. KG additionally noted the importance of community groups in maintaining places.
- A comment from the online chat noted how minimal cost items such as painting bollards or removing graffiti play a big part in maintaining areas and again the importance of community groups in maintaining spaces.
- The issue of how the CPG can work with town councils to assist in the speed with which regeneration projects can proceed, as once signed off these can take too long to come to fruition with delays contributing to deterioration.
- It was noted that findings from the 'Shaping Places for Wellbeing' programme points to the often short term nature of funding being a major barrier to the kind of regeneration projects that have been discussed at this meeting, which involve longer term working with a community and implementing change over time.
- The place based funding, which runs over 5 years can allow for longer-term delivery of plans; however, these plans also require people as a resource to manage them, in addition to the maintenance provision.
- Decision-making too often only stakes into account financial and economic implications and not the additional wider impacts that have been discussed.
- Connections between public health and place are incredibly important and the issue of air quality was raised as was the availability of relevant data on this issue. IB confirmed that a variety of data sources were in use but Public Health Scotland is continually looking for further peer reviewed data sources. IB also noted that there was a need for a platform for this data to be made more widely available.

The convener added further comments from the online chat below:

- The importance of understanding neurodiversity and disability in re-shaping designs.
- Recognising the impacts of large out of town developments and it was noted that this issue could be added to the agenda for a future meeting.
- The issue of a cluttered landscapes, including street signs, was raised and it was noted that Living streets are doing work in this area to improve accessibility.

Agenda item 8

The convener requested feedback on the hybrid functioning of the meeting.

Elaine Bone highlighted the upcoming Parliamentary Reception on Oct 2 and the [STP Scotland's Towns Conference](#) being held at Perth Concert Hall on 27 November 2024.

Close of Meeting