

Cross-Party Group on Towns and Town Centres

Wednesday 7th December 2022, 12.45 -13.45

Minutes

Present

MSPs

Neil Bibby MSP
Siobhian Brown MSP
Fiona Hyslop MSP

Invited guests

Susie Fitton, Inclusion Scotland
Hilary Kidd, YoungScot
Fiona McKenzie, CentreStage MT
Phil Prentice, Scotland's Towns Partnership

Non-MSP Group Members

Sarah-Jane Allsopp, Dumfries and Galloway Council
Iqbal Bedi, Intelligens Consulting
Laura Bell, Scottish Borders Council
Karen Blyth, Scottish Enterprise
Denise Booth, GoFibre
Stewart Boughen, NHS Ayrshire & Arran
Joanne Boyle, Scottish Government
Siobhian Brown MSP, Scottish Parliament
Hollie Bruce, Scotland's Towns Partnership
Sam Cassels, Scottish Government
Maina Coroller-Larifla, Sustrans Scotland
Benet Davis, Fife Council
Marina Di Duca, VisitScotland
Mark Dowe, Architecture & Design Scotland
Ramsay Duff, Fife Council
David Dunlop, Glasgow City Council
Michael Dunn, EKOS Ltd
Graeme Finlay, Clackmannanshire Council
Susie Fitton, Inclusion Scotland

Tony Fitzpatrick, The Stove Network
Doug Flett, SCCN
Vivienne Forbes, NHS Ayrshire & Arran
Ian Fowell, Scottish Small Towns Group
David Gear, East Dunbartonshire Council
Kimberley Guthrie, STP
Emma Husband, Scottish Borders Council
Fiona Hyslop MSP, Scottish Parliament
Derek Inglis, Scottish Borders Council
Janet Joes, Stranraer Development Trust
Steve Johnson, Blairgowrie & Rattray Development Trust
Ken Johnston, Upper Achintore Regeneration Group
Alison Jones, Scotland's Towns Partnership
Jacq Kelly, Registers of Scotland
Reeni Kennedy-Boyle, Fyne Futures Ltd
Hilary Kidd, Young Scot
Antonia Lee-Bapty, Euan's Guide
Euan Leitch, SURF
Sarah Macdonald , Explore Selkirk
Stuart Macpherson, Fife Council
Cllr Clare Maitland, East Ayrshire Council
Bernardo Mantilla, Forres Area Business Association
Richard Marsh, 4-consulting limited
Graham Marshall, A Greener Hawick
Douglas McGlynn, Fife Council
Fiona McKenzie, Centrestage Communities Ltd
Caroline Mitchell, Scotland's Towns Partnership
Aileen Moffat, NHS Ayrshire & Arran
Rosemary Munro, Huntly Development Trust
Deborah Murray, Byres Road & Lanes BID
Bill Pagan, Cupar Development Trust
Martin Patrick, Midlothian Council
Nairn Pearson, West Lothian Council
Phil Prentice, STP
Sharon Renwick, Scottish Borders Council
Suzanne Rhind, Aberdeenshire Council
Grant Riley, North Lanarkshire Council
Angus Roberts, Arbroath Courthouse Community Trust
John Robertson, Kingussie Camanachd Club
Andrew Russell, Alloway, Doonfoot & St Leonards Community Council
Maria Rybaczewska, University of Stirling
Alan Scott, Scottish Borders. Council
Laura Scott-Simmons, Benton Scott-Simmons
Margaret Simpson, Scottish Borders Social Enterprise Chamber CIC

Stefano Smith, Stefano Smith Planning
Jayne Smith, Hammond Associates (Scotland) Ltd
Tom Sneddon, Tom Sneddon: Architect
Chris Story, Message Matters
Emma Thomson, Glasgow City Council
Anna Watkiss, Argyll and Bute Council
John Weir, Isle of Bute B.I.D. Visit Bute
John Whitelaw, Lenzie CDT
Paul Zochowski, East Lothian Council
Heather Polnick, East Dunbartonshire Council

Apologies

Ronald Beveridge, Tillicoultry Coalsnaughton and Devonside Community Council
Elaine Bone, Scotland's Towns Partnership
Rhona Brown, Scotland's Towns Partnership
Willie Coffey MSP
Andy Dunlop, Barrhead / Clarkston BIDs
David Lonsdale, Scottish Retail Consortium
Sher Peek, ALACHO
Prof Leigh Sparks, University of Stirling
James Tolland, Sustainable Drumchapel
Cllr Dræyk van der Hørn, Moray Council

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 Accessible Towns.

Agenda item 2

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

Agenda item 3

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

PP introduced today's theme, Accessible Towns. Accessibility is critical, lots of focus on our towns and city centres in the recent enquiry report by Economy and Fair work committee and also in the first Town Centre Action Plan and in the more recent reiteration, accessibility featured strongly. Town Centres form the heart of our communities and should be accessible to all parts of communities and all sections of

society. We should be encouraging people into our town centres and make them more attractive. It's also about accessible public services, we should be supporting the 20% of our communities with disabilities.

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

Agenda item 4

Town Centres, Accessibility and Disabled People, Susie Fitton, Policy Manager, Inclusion Scotland

Inclusion Scotland is a national disabled people's organisation, led by disabled people, working to achieve positive changes to policy and practice so disabled people are fully included in all areas of society as equal citizens by -

- Influencing decision makers
- Supporting disabled people to be decision makers themselves
- Developing capacity, awareness and engagement of disabled people

They are an independent, non party political organisation that strives to ensure that disabled people have a voice. "There should be nothing about us without us."

Common Access Barriers – SF highlighted a list of common access problems such public and commercial buildings and open spaces without proper access and signage, suitable housing, accessible toilets, lack of blue badge parking, pavement clutter such as A boards and rubbish bins, absence of dropped kerbs.

Newer Access Issues as a result of the transition to net zero, for example floating bus stops - cycle lanes in town centres which run in front of bus stops - which prevent the buses from stopping at kerbside, fewer blue badge parking places and fewer dropping off points for disabled taxis. Initiatives for a net zero economy town centre for active travel and 20 minute neighbourhoods may fail to address existing access problems for disabled people but also create new problems for them.

What do we mean by Accessibility (as quoted in article 9 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Disabled People) -

"measures that enable (disabled) people to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life on an equal basis with others, and have access to the physical environment, to transportation, to information, and communications including information and communications technologies and systems and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public in urban and rural areas"

Inclusion Scotland would like to see community planning involve and engage with disabled people who struggle to feel represented, not every LA has an access panel and greater co-ordination, leadership and a community development focus is required to make framework effective.

Our town centres need to be socially and economically inclusive for disabled people. Diversity and representation in community planning is vitally important so that different voices are heard, we need to start asking new questions about town centres.

Agenda item 5

Hilary Kidd, Deputy Chief Executive, YoungScot

YoungScot support young people to thrive and make the most of their lives by providing universal services for young people combined with targeted and bespoke support to address stigma and inequalities to thrive and have fun.

Inclusion is at the core of our work at YoungScot, we are working hard to become an explicitly anti-racist organisation alongside our diversity, equality and inclusion strategy. YoungScot are keen to consider inclusive or accessible towns in the current environment and what young people are facing today.

YoungScot have developed a survey with young people open to 11-25 year olds living in Scotland to assess the impact of the cost of living crisis with over a 1000 responses received from all over Scotland. Some of the comments include:

“I can’t remember the last time my mum ate a full meal”

“my parents are collectively working 5 jobs”

“my mum worries about the cost of rent, food, council tax and now Christmas”

A key element of the work of YoungScot is recognising the importance of place in a young person’s life, we know that young people cannot flourish with access to non stigmatising services. The YoungScot National Entitlement card is a partnership between the Improvement Service, all 32 Local Authorities, the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland.

Some of the benefits of the card include local and national discounts, proof of age, budgeting, free bus travel etc. The card is available to all young people under the age of 22. We are working with local businesses to attract young people to shop locally and to ensure that local shops have disabled access.

From another survey carried out with young people for the Town Centre Review Panel on accessible and inclusive towns, some of the responses include:

“I think there can be a view that young people can’t be trusted”

“a friendly town that gives young people employment opportunities is important”

“Events should be focused on young people rather than children”

“travel has to be more accessible to all”

“more places to meet up”

“better lit streets and more safety wardens”

When thinking about what makes a town more inclusive we should include young people using ethical and engaging design models. It is vital that we work in partnership with young people and benefit from their expertise, insight, creativity and talent.

Agenda item 6

Accessible Places Case Study – CentreStage - Fiona McKenzie, CentreStage, Kilmarnock

CentreStage was set up in 2006, we support people to live their lives by creating welcoming, aspirational, happy places by coming together around the arts. For that to happen the place has to be appropriate.

Having moved 15 times over 15 years, in 2016 the opportunity arose through the community transfer scheme to take over Kilmarnock Academy which was housed over three separate buildings with no disabled access or lift and one accessible toilets. After exploring and working with an amazing design team and asking people including young people, disabled people and people with dementia what they needed from this building, we started the construction in 2019 six months prior to COVID. The total project costs were £5.2m which is incredible

We achieved the space we now have with 3 lifts, 16 accessible toilets and a fully accessible garden as well as a café and performing spaces. We also have room to share the space with other services and charities

We know what we do best, we need other people to provide the things that we don't do best. Come find yourself! Please come and visit us and help us learn from you what we still need.

Agenda item 7

Discussion

SB asked SF about the statutory requirement to have an inclusive design but not all LA's have an access panel or representation of disabled people to planning. Which LA's are doing this well and which could learn from it.

SF realises she is not an expert on best practice, she raised the issue of multiple users having different needs. Disability Equality Scotland are the experts and a good place to start regarding where access panels have been used to good effect. And she would be very interested in helping to collate that information.

FH gave thanks to all the presenters. Asked about how disabled people cross the cycle lane to access the bus. In Copenhagen the cyclists stop to allow disabled people to cross the cycle lane. FH suggested Claire Baker, Convenor of Economy and Fair Work Committee would be a useful person to consult with.

SF said we need to involve disabled people in the discussion, it's only through talking to those people that you will achieve a solution.

SB has a blind constituent who has asked about talking bus stops.

NB – has two questions. The first is on accessibility on town centres, in 2022 we should be trying to make our town centres fully accessible for all. Some towns still have cobbled streets in conservation areas which cause concern re accessibility. We need to balance the historic preservation with accessibility.

The second question is regarding the young person's bus pass, it is a positive and welcome step however we need to ensure that all young people can access the pass. And a frequent complaint is what's the point in having a bus pass if there are no buses.

HK – YoungScot are not responsible for the application process, a lot of work has been done to improve the process and to improve communications. Massive improvements have been made in recent months, continuing to influence positive changes. And some areas have no bus routes at all or very limited which YoungScot feed in to decision makers.

SB agrees it is a great opportunity which is open to all young people under age of 22, they can apply online and through schools. She is aware that there has only been a 40% take up in her constituency.

Sandy Taylor, Chair of National Federation of the Blind was involved in a consultation in Sauchiehall Street. He thought no scheme could possibly be worse, however these mistakes are about to be replicated in Argyle St and the Gallowgate. He has also visited Leith in Edinburgh, which he described as shambolic, impossible for the visually impaired and disabled to access due to misuse of tactile paving, two way cycle lane at bus stops. A petition has been handed into Scottish Parliament, he would welcome a meeting.

Café furniture is preventing blind people and many others from accessing town centres and creates many hazards, boarded screening is the way to go. Disabled people need to be consulted much more in order to allow access to town centres.

Agenda item 7

No other competent business

Agenda item 8

PP and SB thanked all the speakers for a very useful and interesting discussion.

The meeting closed, the next meeting is a reception on Tuesday 28 February, 12:45-13:45.