

CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

16th Meeting, 2023, Session 6

18 May 2023

Culture in Communities

1. The Committee is undertaking an inquiry focused on the idea of a ‘place-based approach’ to culture within communities in Scotland, with the aim of understanding good practice and barriers to place-based cultural policy.
2. The [call for views](#) on this inquiry opened on Friday 17 February and closed on Friday 7 April. It received 57 submissions which are available to view [online](#). The themes arising from these submissions were [summarised by SPICe](#).
3. At this meeting, the Committee will take evidence from—
 - Craig McLaren, Director of Scotland, Ireland and English Regions, Royal Town Planning Institute
 - Johanna Boyd, Chief Executive, Planning Aid Scotland
 - Euan Leitch, Chief Executive, SURF – Scotland's Regeneration Forum
 - Ailsa Macfarlane, Director, Built Environment Forum Scotland
4. This will give the Committee the opportunity to consider the role of planning, place-making, and regeneration, as well as the importance of physical assets, in supporting culture in communities.
5. The following papers are attached—
 - Annexe A: SPICe briefing
 - Annexe B: Written submissions from the Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland and Planning Aid Scotland.

**CEEAC Committee Clerks
May 2023**

SPICe

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

18 May 2023

Culture in communities

Introduction

This will be the fifth meeting during which the Committee will take evidence on its inquiry on culture in Scotland's local communities.

This week the Committee will take evidence from organisations with a focus on regeneration and planning. A theme of the Committee's work has been the value of local capital assets – community halls and other spaces to meet and perform. This evidence session gives the opportunity to explore how both professional and everyday cultural practices are supported in planning and regeneration activities.

Importance of local facilities

The access to spaces locally has been a recurring theme of the Committee's work. Taking a broad view of culture and cultural activities means thinking of cultural assets broadly as well. This could be local community halls, theatres, cinemas, concert halls, schools, libraries, or pubs. These assets may be the responsibility of the local authority or may be owned by the third sector (e.g., churches or clubs), communities or privately.

How these local facilities are used will vary from place to place, reflecting the interests and activities in communities.

On [27 April](#) Professor Stevenson argued that there is an imbalance in the attention given to different cultural assets. He noted that the closure of the Filmhouse in Edinburgh had been met with a public response, whereas community centres close without similar "anguish" being displayed. He suggested that in a cultural ecosystem, more attention should be given to community halls. He said—

"The danger is that when we consider what works, we are not also looking at what works but we are ignoring—the places that are shutting. A better idea is to give people just a little—to allow them a little time and a little resource to do

things within existing spaces. Also, we need to understand that any space can be a cultural space. That will not always require significant investment, but it does require that we value the things that people are already doing.” (Col 8)

In a [submission to the Committee’s pre-budget work in 2021, Making Music](#) argued for “financial support for the network of community halls, centres, arts spaces, concert halls etc that provide the rehearsal and performance spaces for leisure time music (and other art form) groups.” Later in that submission, Making Music said—

“Support for our sector does not need to come through direct investment. But the investment in communities is vital for the infrastructure that support us - public transport, cultural venues, community halls.”

Professor Stevenson made a similar point suggesting that there should be better clarity about who is funding what and whether national and local funding streams could have different purposes. He indicated that a key issue is how overheads are met and he said that the “biggest challenge that we face is the persistent and pernicious obsession with short-term funding”. (Col 19)

Community Leisure UK’s submission also noted that maintaining community assets can be costly. It said—

“Across the local public culture sector, the age and condition of some cultural venues and facilities and associated maintenance costs also require consideration, with investment needed into these venues, particularly reflecting the role of the sector to support progress towards net zero. Where there are listed buildings, planning permission and investment for decarbonisation proves even more challenging.”

Steve Byrne from Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland told the Committee last week that in one local authority he worked, 133 community spaces are potentially being considered to be “divested from its estate”. ([4 May, col 16](#)) The National Performing Companies told the Committee that access to spaces where they could perform was key to where they could tour in Scotland. The panel on 11 May noted that the rationalisation of the church estate created uncertainty in relation to access to spaces for groups to meet.

Professor Miles gave evidence to a 2018 Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee on the social impact of participation in culture and sport. [His succinct submission to that inquiry](#) made a number of suggestions and comments based on the UEP that are relevant to the present inquiry. One suggestion was:

“Location is an important factor in participation levels. Our research has demonstrated that libraries with the highest number of users typically have good connectivity to the public transport network and are close to other local participation assets such as shops.”

Professor Miles told the Committee on [27 April](#), “if you are looking for practical ways of encouraging people to engage with different types of culture, and if that is thought to be a valuable thing to do, you need to put culture, or interventions, in the places that people normally inhabit—the places of their everyday engagement. People have

done that: arts organisers have put work in shopping centres and so on.” (Col 7) Jemma Neville from Creative Lives told the Committee last week that communities could benefit from a reimagining of civic spaces and the creative commons, and better using the range of community assets, including parks and pubs as well as libraries and schools, for example.

The Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland’s submission linked the idea of 20-minute neighbourhoods, it said—

“The 20 minute neighbourhood concept focuses on providing residents with easy access to essential amenities and services within a 20 minute walk or cycle from their homes. Dense, walkable town centres will enhance vibrancy and create opportunities for the arts, culture and creative industries but equally, ensuring local communities have access to cultural amenities and activities means that residents will not have to travel far for cultural experiences, thus reinforcing the 20 minute neighbourhood concept.”

The Scottish Library and Information Council said—

“For many members of the public, local libraries are the first place they experience and engage in a range of cultural experiences. The success of the delivery of programmes depends on trained staff or ability to commission someone to deliver a programme. Many programmes which run in public libraries are free to access and may be delivered by a third party ie. not library staff but the venue being used as a point of access for a third party.

“Libraries are trusted safe spaces in communities hence why they are ideally placed to host a range of cultural activity and programmes.”

The Committee has heard that one barrier to participating or attending events or activities is a lack of public transport particularly in rural areas.

How do we know what exists?

One of the actions in the Culture Strategy for Scotland was to “work with Creative Scotland to map local authority support for culture and to explore future models of collaboration between national and local bodies”. This does not appear to have been completed. And, as indicated above, the cultural eco-system goes beyond local authority or nationally supported assets or groups.

Some local authorities have undertaken cultural mapping exercises, for example, [The City of Edinburgh](#).

Professor Stevenson told the Committee that “we do not have a good data set for all the assets and spaces” and Professor Miles said that during a research project his team collected its own data on assets because “official sources were so inaccurate and did not encompass the wider of definition of culture we use”. (Cols 13-14)

As noted in the SPICe briefing paper last week, the Scottish Household Survey provides data on the extent to which respondents agree to the statements “this is a neighbourhood where there are welcoming places and opportunities to meet new

people” and “this is a neighbourhood where there are places where people can meet up and socialise”. This can provide a national picture of people’s opinions of the assets in their neighbourhoods.

In the absence of clear datasets of existing assets, how planning and regeneration activities support the creation and protection of cultural assets is unclear.

PAS’ submission said that its work to support community-led plans includes determining what physical assets and cultural activities exist. It said—

“Through this process, people often discover under-utilised assets (e.g., a hall, a gathering space, a playing field etc.) that, with co-ordination and a willingness to cooperate, can then be brought into use to benefit the community’s cultural life. It’s also an opportunity to avoid duplication and to encourage greater partnership working at the local level (e.g., local groups may join forces to attract funding and investment).”

Planning processes and placemaking

Taking place-based approaches is a key pillar of the Culture Strategy for Scotland. In [2019 the Scottish Government and COSLA agreed to adopt](#) a “Place Principle to help overcome organisational and sectoral boundaries, to encourage better collaboration and community involvement, and improve the impact of combined energy, resources and investment.” Key to this principle is the consideration of the potential of people, physical and natural assets in a place and understanding how these interact and how policy can work within this existing framework to improve outcomes.

The Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland’s submission said—

“The role of culture is fundamental to successful town centres. The cultural value and heritage of a community can determine the design, function and use of public spaces and their infrastructure. In addition, the cultural sector and the historic environment of a place contributes both to tourism and economic development as well as broader placemaking objectives such as sense of community, identity, and health and wellbeing.”

On [27 April](#) Professor David Stevenson stressed that cultural practice and participation is not homogenous. He said to the Committee—

“Part of the challenge for good cultural policy is that good place-based cultural policy should be responsive to different groups, communities, people and places, so it is vital that it represents the differences that people express in that way. We all experience culture and we all want to participate in and express our cultures. However, there are differences. When we are faced with limited resources and there are discussions about how and on what we spend money and use the spaces that we make available, there are choices to be made. Part of the difficulty can be that we fall into thinking that there is a one-size-fits-all model and that we can invite people into a universal shared culture. Cultural participation is something that we all share, but meaningful

cultural participation can look very different for different groups and communities of people.” (Col 2)

The Committee has explored how culture and the interests of the cultural scene is or can be represented at the local strategic planning forums. Jemma Neville from Creative Lives said that the linkage between professional and volunteer or community infrastructure could be improved. She said that while there are good examples of this in areas where there is regeneration work, in general, culture is not represented well enough within community planning processes.

Community planning partnerships are intended to enable public bodies to work together along with local communities to design and deliver better services. The Committee heard on 20 April that there was a mix of experience in relation to how and whether culture policy and the interests of the creative sectors was represented at the CPP level. Kirsty Cumming from CLUK said—

“It is not about our members being on community planning partnerships per se but about a mechanism for a cultural voice locally. ... For me, it is about having somebody who can give a representative opinion on behalf of the community, as the voice of culture—not necessarily one organisation or one service, but a mechanism through which people can feed into and take things back from those opportunities.” ([20 April 2023, col 27](#))

The Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland’s submission highlighted the importance of [Local Place Plans](#). Its submission stated—

“In the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, Local Place Plans (LPPs) were introduced to offer communities the opportunity to develop planning proposals for the use of land in their local area. LPPs are a way in which we can achieve placemaking objectives but they could also provide a useful mechanism for community-led cultural provision and wider community engagement around the planning of town centres.”

However, the RTPI identified three potential challenges to the LPPs working as intended and supporting a thriving local cultural scene. These included:

- ensuring that culture is embedded in LPPs
- ensuring that LPPs are inclusive and representative of the diverse cultural groups that exist within the community; and
- ensuring that there are resources and expertise to support the process.

The submission from PAS said—

“For a place-based process (e.g., creating a Local Place Plan) to be effective, it is important to enquire, understand and incorporate aspects of a place’s cultural life into the process and eventual outputs. We cannot understand a place without developing an understanding of how people use their place, which is inherently linked to the cultural life of that place – from sports and

recreation to green space, heritage, cultural activities, play opportunities, learning opportunities etc”

The new [National Planning Framework 4 \(NPF4\)](#) includes a policy on culture and creativity. NPF4 listed three policy outcomes under “culture and creativity”—

- Locally distinctive places reflect the diversity of communities and support regeneration and town centre vibrancy.
- Cultural and creative industries are expanded, providing jobs and investment.
- Communities have access to cultural and creative activities.

Community asset transfer

One way of maintaining community assets is to bring them into community ownership. There is a trend of more assets being brought into community ownership in Scotland.

Paul MacAlindin from the Glasgow Barons noted that in Govan—

“We have some derelict buildings which could be repurposed for community cultural use, but are being held by private owners. This is a barrier in the community’s eyes.”

Volunteer Scotland’s submission noted that managing these assets is a challenge. Its submission stated—

“The Scottish Government is committed to community ownership of such places and spaces where volunteer-led cultural activity takes place. This is demonstrated through ambitions related to Community Wealth Building which holds the ‘socially just use of land and property’ as a core pillar. However, the community groups that seek to own and sustainably manage community spaces are finding the level of responsibility challenging.”

Sarah Latto from Volunteer Scotland expanded on this point last week. She said that some people felt that communities were forced into taking on the responsibilities and liabilities associated, otherwise the assets could be lost to the community.

The number of assets in community ownership is an indicator in the National Performance Framework. Data on this indicator shows that community ownership has been steadily growing over the past 15 years. It was recorded as 711 in 2021 which was 7.2% higher than in 2020.

Ned Sharratt, Senior Researcher (Education, Culture, SPICe)

11 May 2023

Note: Committee briefing papers are provided by SPICe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. They provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest to committees and are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.

The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP www.parliament.scot

Written submission from Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is the champion of planning and the planning profession. We work to promote the art and science of planning for the public benefit. We have around 2200 members in Scotland and a worldwide membership of over 27,000. RTPI Scotland's members will in large part be responsible for the successful implementation of the planning system. Overall, our vision is to be the world's leading professional planning body and more specifically, our ambition is to promote healthy, socially inclusive, economically and environmentally sustainable places.

RTPI Scotland would like to highlight that town planning is an artistic and creative pursuit. Town planning seeks to create liveable, vibrant and diverse town centres through regeneration and placemaking objectives. Placemaking refers to the design and development of high-quality spaces that prioritise the health, happiness and well-being of individuals. The collaborative nature of town planning ensures a wide variety of actors are involved in creating and improving places over time.

The role of culture is fundamental to successful town centres. The cultural value and heritage of a community can determine the design, function and use of public spaces and their infrastructure. In addition, the cultural sector and the historic environment of a place contributes both to tourism and economic development as well as broader placemaking objectives such as sense of community, identity, and health and wellbeing.

In the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, Local Place Plans (LPPs) were introduced to offer communities the opportunity to develop planning proposals for the use of land in their local area. LPPs are a way in which we can achieve placemaking objectives but they could also provide a useful mechanism for community-led cultural provision and wider community engagement around the planning of town centres.

RTPI Scotland would also like to highlight the increasing role that planning will likely have in supporting the culture sector with the adopted National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) containing a new policy on culture and creativity. This policy recognises the importance of the sector and requires proposals to make provision for public art, encourages creative and cultural uses, protects existing venues, and reflects the agent of change principle.

Specifically, we would like to draw your attention to the potential role culture could play in achieving the 20 minute neighbourhood policy in NPF4. The 20 minute neighbourhood concept focuses on providing residents with easy access to essential amenities and services within a 20 minute walk or cycle from their homes. Dense, walkable town centres will enhance vibrancy and create opportunities for the arts, culture and creative industries but equally, ensuring local communities have access to cultural amenities and activities means that residents will not have to travel far for cultural experiences, thus reinforcing the 20 minute neighbourhood concept.

RTPI Scotland would like to highlight a number of potential barriers to growing cultural provision locally, from a town planning perspective:

Resources and Funding

Town planning and town planners have a crucial role to play in supporting our town centres. However, planning authorities' budgets have decreased in real terms and resources are limited. Recent research from RTPI Scotland showed that:

- Nearly a third of planning department staff have been cut since 2009
- Planning authorities' budgets have diminished in real terms by 42% since 2009
- In 2020 local authorities only spent 0.38% of their total net revenue budgets
- Planning application fees only cover 66% of their processing costs
- There are 91 new and unfunded duties in the Planning (Scotland) Act, which could cost between £12.1m and £59.1m over 10 years
- Over the next 10 to 15 years there will be a demand for an additional 680 to 730 entrants into the sector.

Based on these findings, a tight budget in planning could have a significant impact on town centre regeneration. In particular, the decrease in planning authorities' budgets can make it difficult to fund the infrastructure improvements required to make town centres liveable, vibrant and diverse. A lack of resources coupled with planning authorities' extensive list of duties may also lead to authorities having to scale back the scope of their regeneration efforts. This could lead to certain aspects of a project not being addressed, e.g. cultural initiatives.

Local Place Plans (LPPs)

LPPs are an important tool for communities to shape the future of their local areas. RTPI Scotland believe that LPPs could pose a potential barrier to the provision of cultural initiatives locally. We must ensure that culture is embedded in LPPs so that unique cultural characteristics are preserved and placemaking objectives such as sense of community, identity and health and wellbeing are achieved.

Lack of representation in LPPs could also hinder cultural provision locally. Depending on community engagement, in some cases LPPs may not be inclusive or representative of the diverse cultural groups that exist within the community. In turn, resulting in a lack of consideration for the cultural need and values of these groups.

Finally, LPPs could also be viewed as a barrier in regards to the issues mentioned above, regarding lack of resources and perhaps, the lack of expertise within the community. RTPI Scotland has called upon the Scottish Government to dedicate resources for planning authorities to support LPPs, ideally through creating dedicated planning officer roles or through support provided by a national body which can facilitate local links. To support communities to produce LPPs, RTPI Scotland calls upon Scottish Government to establish a national grant scheme for communities as has been established in England to support Neighbourhood Plans.

Written submission from Planning Aid Scotland

Who We Are

- PAS (Planning Aid Scotland) – we are a charity and social enterprise that helps people to navigate the planning system.
- We support a planning system that is responsive to the needs of Scotland's communities, where people have the opportunity to shape the future of their place in an impartial, open and inclusive way.
- Later this year we will mark the organisation's 30th anniversary. For the last 30 years, volunteering has been at the heart of what we do. We continue to be a volunteer-led organisation, now supported by a network of over 400 specialist volunteers, professionals from across the built environment sector. (See our case study in the Scotland's National Volunteering Framework on [page 23](#)).

How We Help

- We provide a free [Advice Service](#) for members of the public, community groups and business start-ups (funded by Scottish Government) to provide impartial and independent advice on a wide range of planning issues.
- We support community groups, local authorities and public bodies and across Scotland to promote effective community engagement in planning and placemaking.
- We deliver training and mentoring for community groups and local authorities, and support communities looking to develop a [Local Place Plan](#) for their area.
- We particularly seek to support seldom-heard voices and marginalised groups to participate in the planning system.

A place-based approach to culture

- Through our work helping communities in creating community-led plans (such as Local Place Plans) for their area, we understand the importance of culture being embedded in place-based approaches.
- In the words of Sir Patrick Geddes, to understand a place you have to understand three elements: place, work, and folk. The people who live and use a place are key to any plan-making process.
- For a place-based process (e.g., creating a Local Place Plan) to be effective, it is important to enquire, understand and incorporate aspects of a place's cultural life into the process and eventual outputs. We cannot understand a place without developing an understanding of how people use their place, which is inherently linked to the cultural life of that place – from sports and recreation to green space, heritage, cultural activities, play opportunities, learning opportunities etc.
- Our focus is on supporting high quality community engagement and participation in place-based processes. However, we often find ourselves playing the role of place-based broker in the later stages of a project. That is to

say, helping a community to turn a plan into something deliverable, prioritising short/medium/long term objectives, building relationships with partners and funders, and identifying 'quick wins' for the community.

- A place-based approach can only achieve positive outcomes when all partners are involved, such as different arms of the local authority, as well as relevant public bodies and agencies. To deliver on the 'Place Principle', a place-based cultural approach needs a decentralised, local approach that is agile and responsive to the needs of individual communities.

How do national and local layers of government, along with the third sector, complement each other to ensure that communities have opportunities to take part in cultural activities?

- Through our work helping communities to create community-led plans, one of the simplest yet most important actions is to understand and co-ordinate the physical assets and cultural activities of a place.
- Through this process, people often discover under-utilised assets (e.g., a hall, a gathering space, a playing field etc.) that, with co-ordination and a willingness to cooperate, can then be brought into use to benefit the community's cultural life. It's also an opportunity to avoid duplication and to encourage greater partnership working at the local level (e.g., local groups may join forces to attract funding and investment).
- It's also important to co-ordinate not just within the community but also with wider partners such as the local authority and other public bodies – again, a place-based approach requires active participation of all stakeholders.

How is unmet cultural need determined? And who decides this?

- Communities are best placed to determine which of their needs are unmet. From our perspective working within the planning system, this is something we see great potential for Local Place Plans to address and deliver.
- Local Place Plans are a new type of plan brought in by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 and give communities the right to plan for the development and use of land in their community. They are also a key delivery agent for the new National Planning Framework 4 and its aspirations to deliver better neighbourhoods and improve local living across Scotland.
- Whilst a Local Place Plan cannot address every issue within a community (it is primarily a land-use plan), it can help pull together and co-ordinate community needs and ambitions in a cohesive way.

What does good 'place-based' cultural policy look like in practice?

By bringing cultural life into a place-based process, we can ensure that culture helps to shape and positively influence the outcome. For example, some of the outputs of previous place-based projects where we have supported communities include:

- Design and creation of heritage trails; creation of public art, wayfinding etc.; greater partnership working between organisations/schools; co-ordination of community cultural activities to avoid everything happening at the same time (which limits participation); sharing of venues; greater awareness of funding sources to support community-led change.