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A Future for Town & City Centres

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Editorial

I hope you are all safe and coping in these difficult times.

This debate about the future of our town centres and high streets may have been taking place before the pandemic but COVID-19 has added an urgency to the need for fresh thinking to respond to the challenges faced. Someone once said that if you change the way you look at things then the things you look at change. This seems very appropriate and so this issue of the Scottish Planner attempts to explore some of the new ideas that could be considered and new approaches that are already being taken forward. We hear from the person leading the government's review of the Town Centre Action Plan, Leigh Sparks, whilst there are pieces on the town centre first principle and the possibility of simplified planning zones for town centres. We also hear about ground-breaking projects aiming to rejuvenate town centres in Dumfries

and across North Lanarkshire whilst Stuart Hay discusses the importance of the twenty minute neighbourhood concept which was promoted by the First Minister in the most recent Programme for Government.

Throughout the year all of us at RTPI Scotland have worked as hard as we can to continue to support our members and, hopefully, you will see how we have adapted our services to do this. My thanks go to the small, but perfectly formed, staff team we have in Scotland and the members who have done so much to help us. Particularly our Convenor Irene Beautyman, the Scottish Executive Committee and those who volunteer to develop and help deliver our programmes in the Chapters.

All at the Institute hope you have a peaceful and happy festive period, whatever that may look like.

- Craig McLaren - Editor

Convenor's Comments: Happiness, Addictions and Lifestyle: All part of the job



Irene Beautyman
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Irene Beautyman, Convenor of RTPi Scotland 2020

I'm finding the science that sits behind our happiness a lot more appealing as restrictions continue into 2021. We've all heard the messages about our "working from home" wellbeing reduced into snapshots of advice: take regular breaks, virtual chats with colleagues and go for a walk everyday. Why? And if it will make me happier to go for a walk then why do I not feel like stepping out into Scotland's best winter afternoon weather? Tal Ben-Shahar explains. He runs the most popular course ever in Harvard's history: the opportunity to study the Science of Happiness.

To be honest I've always inwardly screwed my face up when people describe Spatial Planning as a science. Science, to me, was chemicals, body parts and energy molecules. But listening to this Harvard professor has clicked it into place. No matter where we come from, what our culture is and what makes us all so very different, we have the same desire to have more pleasure than pain in our lives. Ben is clear. The first way to achieve that universal desire is how much we invest each day in our relationships with family, friends, colleagues, our community and beyond. After that comes four daily activities proven to help; get moving, learn something new, make a contribution and be grateful for where we are in this big world. These five strands fuel our preference for pleasure over pain as they trigger the chemical releases in our brain to induce our happy feelings. So the behaviour change needed to help people and planet is about chemicals, body parts and energy.

Before I get to the planning bit (for those beginning to think I'm being too woo-woo) there is one more bit of brain chemical science that matters. Really matters. It is not inbuilt in us to move without a purpose or, in other words, to exercise. Quite the opposite; our brain tells us to conserve energy for when we need it. This doesn't just lead to a significant cohort of people preferring not to pursue the daily movement mentioned above. I believe it also fuels one of our greatest addictions. Using the car. Is addiction too

strong a word? An addiction is defined as "the inability to stop using something, especially something harmful". In addiction terms I would suggest we "have a habit".

The impact of how we shape Place on the wellbeing of people through enabling social connections, being more active and so on has been well versed in my previous Convenor Comments. Places help or hinder us to take those 5 daily actions, especially around social connection, movement and making a contribution. But with every policy and decision we make as planners, do we ask ourselves how it will impact the above hard-wired science? Can we remember the science that fuels our addiction to cars? How do we stop feeding that addiction?

With the growing emphasis on 20 minute neighbourhoods the word "lifestyle" keeps coming up. It's a helpful word as its already well linked as means of addressing an addiction. Don't focus on the number of minutes; focus on a lifestyle where people choose to travel less, move more and increase connection with people and nature. This is the nub of it: we will choose to travel less when our local areas offer us more. When we have a purpose in stepping out of our door and walking past the car. When our new build is at a density and mix of housing types that provides the critical mass for local services and amenities to thrive. When we embrace the transforming opportunity for every town centre in Scotland to lead the need to retrofit our existing built environment's impact on lifestyle choices. This issue inspires just that.

We can make policy and implementation choices every day that lockdown the behaviour change needed to enhance our wellbeing and protect our planet. Happiness, addiction and lifestyle really are the day job. ■

"Don't focus on the number of minutes; focus on a lifestyle where people choose to travel less, move more and increase connection with people and nature."



Article:

Measuring What Matters: How can we assess the impact of planning?



Iain MacPherson MRTPI, Associate Director in Kevin Murray Associates discusses research undertaken to support planners to better measure the impact of their work.

Plan the World We Need – the RTPi's current campaign and mantra is entirely apt for where we find ourselves. Back in December 2019, we were commissioned along with team members from across practice and academia, the UK and Ireland, to undertake research into measuring planning outcomes. At the time I wrote a blog for the RTPi in which I considered the idea of we are what we measure. There are other ways of expressing this, but the sentiment is that if you want something to happen you have to be measuring. It's not a case that measurement makes it happen but playing the long game you can only make progress if you are tracking, making change and improvement, all to ultimately reach a goal or target that has been set.

Planning by its nature is a future oriented activity. At the risk of covering old ground, I will make the point that for planning to remain future oriented there has to be a future focus. Challenges around this include a shorter-term focus on meeting immediate needs around planning consents, delivery of vital infrastructure and as many of us have found ourselves doing, crisis response. It is ok to have a focus on these things, they are important, but they cannot be everything.

This is where the Measuring What Matters toolkit comes in. Through this research we have established a pathway that helps to shift the focus from the current view of performance by consents (and performance around process such as speed and number), through development outcomes (what actually gets built or protected) and to the end goal of impact and contribution to wider societal, economic, health and environment outcomes.

What we have produced is a series of steps with a diagnostic tool at the centre of this. It enables work on measuring outcomes to begin now, no additional work is required before beginning this (a barrier to previous good efforts to measure outcomes). The toolkit has established a process to move from current measurement of consents through different and more ambitious levels of measurement.



Iain MacPherson
MRTPI
Associate Director,
Kevin Murray
Associates

“The Measuring What Matters toolkit is not about adding a layer of measurement, but it is fundamentally about a reframing of planning as an activity in service of the public good”

Initially the expectation would be around level 1 being understanding consents given and how this measures up against policy and the intended objective. Knowing this helps to establish a target or objective around development delivered. Level 2 focuses on this, the outcomes of the planning process and applications – what is being developed or protected and does this match up with the policy objective and intention. Levels 1 and 2 set an essential groundwork for then moving on to the more ambitious work of understanding wider impact of planning. In level 3, the impact of planning policy and its intent/objective can be measured against wider societal, health, economic and environmental outcomes.

In Scotland, the National Performance Framework (aligned to the UN SDGs, as a localised expression of these) provides a common framework for all public agencies and local authorities to use to work towards “a more successful Scotland.” The Scottish context as regards planning outcomes is set out in current Scottish Planning Policy:

- **Outcome 1:** A successful, sustainable place – supporting sustainable economic growth and regeneration, and the creation of well- designed, sustainable places.
- **Outcome 2:** A low carbon place – reducing our carbon emissions and adapting to climate change.
- **Outcome 3:** A natural, resilient place – helping to protect and enhance our natural and cultural assets and facilitating their sustainable use.
- **Outcome 4:** A more connected place – supporting better transport and digital connectivity.

We have set out what planning should be having an impact on in these outcomes (and this will be reaffirmed in NPF4).

Next we ask what does planning need to do to achieve this? We need to understand the inputs into our planning system, policy intention and have associated objectives and targets that help us move to these outcomes. (Level 1 in the toolkit pathway).

Once we have a good understanding of this, we can consider if our built environment and places are reflecting progress towards these outcomes? Here we measure development outcomes against policy intention (Level 2 in the toolkit pathway).

Finally, we must ask how we know we are getting there? At this point we are able to be more ambitious and consider an evaluation of impact, both direct and indirect, of planning on achieving these National Outcomes (Level 3 in the toolkit pathway).

Here are 5 lessons we took from all of this and they apply to Scotland.

1. Measuring outcomes needs to have an anchor.

Debate around what outcomes should be measured could go on endlessly – but there is already a well-established international set of outcomes in the UN Sustainable Development Goals that the Irish, UK and Devolved Governments are already signed up to. By looking towards these goals, and national expressions of these adopted in governmental policy and national planning policies, there is a ready-made focus for measuring the impact of planning. For Scotland we have the National Performance Framework – we can use the toolkit to demonstrate how planning is contributing to Scotland’s vision.

2. Measuring what is happening on the ground is a critical step in all of this.

Great policy, with great intent can be written into plans, but if implementation or delivery fall short then the potential impact is lost. Measuring across the proposed 3 levels helps to track this.

3. Making the broader case for planning within local authorities.

If everything a local authority does should ultimately be pointing in the direction of contributing to Scotland’s National Performance Framework outcomes, then planning’s ability to demonstrate how it is having this impact adds weight to the case for planning being at the top table. Planning may intuitively know the contribution that it makes but being able to demonstrate this with data puts this on a new plane.

4. Tracking change over time is necessary – and use the feedback for putting in place lessons learnt and improvements ahead of the next cycle of plan-making.

As such, embedding this into the planning processes would be the best approach to implementation. Using this as a tool to not just to measure impact, but to track improvement in planning as it refocuses on outcomes and impact. This should be a full working through of policy intention.

5. How this process is resourced or fits into existing processes is a key question.

If this is a separate process, or creates a heavy additional burden, it will not be used and there will be no progress in measuring the impact of planning. The toolkit has been designed to start from the current positions of planning authorities. Initial pilots have tested the overall framework, additional use of the toolkit will help focus it further and this should result in a tool that can be embedded into current systems without a big resource impact.

The Measuring What Matters toolkit is not about adding a layer of measurement, but it is fundamentally about a reframing of planning as an activity in service of the public good.

The toolkit was developed by the research team (KMA, yellow book, McCabe Durney Barnes, University of Dundee and Cardiff University) in conversation with planners, developers, other agencies and community organisations across the UK and Ireland. We are incredibly grateful to all those who took part in the research and focus groups, and in particular to the pilot areas who took part in the research so willingly. Thank you to the Highland Council, City of Edinburgh Council, North Lanarkshire Council and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority. ■



Q&A

Public Enquiries

**Gale Beattie MRTPI, Chief Officer
Strategic Place Planning in Aberdeen
City Council answers our questions.**



Gale Beattie
MRTPI, Chief Officer
Strategic Place
Planning, Aberdeen
City Council

1 Who has been the biggest inspiration or influence on your career and why?

I have been very lucky in my planning career to work with some great planners and there have been two in particular who have shaped my career.

The first is the quiet man of planning in the North East - Allan Garvie. I never worked directly for Allan but had many interactions with him over the years particularly around Structure Planning. I was always impressed by his quiet manner and methodical approach to dealing with complex issues. As someone who loves to talk (who knew!), his very different approach showed me at an early stage of my planning career how effective a steady and considered approach can be. He was also incredibly generous with his time in supporting and developing young planning talent in the North East.

The second significant inspiration was Maggie Bochel who was my Head of Service for ten years at Aberdeen City Council. Maggie was an inspirational leader and always keen to acknowledge and nurture great ideas no matter where they came from. She had a powerful approach to breaking down hierarchies and created an improvement culture within planning which is still part of our ethos today.

2 What do you feel is the biggest issue facing planners and planning at the moment?

Well for a profession that had its roots in improving public health this is certainly an interesting time to be a planner! The need for high quality places has never been greater as we have all spent much more time in our local environment. As a profession we have always been aware of the links between the quality

of homes and places and physical and mental health and that need to continue to create great places in such a challenging economic climate will be our biggest challenge going forward. Now more than ever we need to embrace our role in public health and play our part in delivering better outcomes for everyone.

3 Why is planning important?

Planning and planners offer a unique skill set which is increasingly valued, certainly in Aberdeen City Council. Whilst there has sometimes been a frustration within the profession at the perception of planning and our place in corporate management, I genuinely believe this is changing.

We're leading this change by shaping those management cultures with the skills and knowledge we provide. Planners are constantly balancing and managing competing interests and demands, their negotiation and communication skills are amazing and their ability to understand the wider context of decisions and forward thinking is second to none. Who wouldn't want us at the top table!

4 Where do you think best exemplifies planning's role in creating great places for people?

Given our current circumstances I won't push anyone over the edge by mentioning any of the amazing European towns and cities that I've been fortunate to visit and focus on two examples closer to home.

The first is one of our most successful examples of masterplanning at Stonewood in Aberdeen, which has successfully delivered a range of house types, sizes and tenures. This

with the retail facilities, employment land and high quality open space has created a thriving and engaged community and it always lifts my soul when I'm there.

The second gets the nod because of a conversation with a member of a local community where she spoke so passionately about the positive impact on her wellbeing during lockdown of a small community growing space that had been secured by planning obligations.

We are rightly proud of the large contributions we make as a profession to creating great places but let's never overlook those small contributions which are so important to our communities.

5 What can planning authorities do to support the post Covid-19 recovery?

As I said earlier planning is uniquely placed to help with the challenges ahead in the short, medium and long term. My teams have been involved in shaping the public realm to allow physical distancing and promote active travel in response to Covid-19 and this allows us to understand some of the improvements that will help us deliver our net zero ambitions. Covid will pass but our need to tackle climate change will remain. Much of what has happened over the last few months will impact on the way we will live our lives in the future. The importance of local facilities and high quality environments will be even more important and with our experience of considering public health outcomes as part of our policy making we will be uniquely placed to shape our communities in the brighter times ahead. ■

Immaterial Considerations

An irreverent look at the world of planning...



Scottish Planner Screen Time

The usual RTPi Scotland conference was transformed this year as it moved online and comprised a series of 10 online webinars looking at how we can create healthy places. It proved to be a very informative and inspiring 'event' with all speakers providing much food for thought. Some of the slides appearing on our screens included...



Angela Scott, Chief Executive of Aberdeen City Council outlined how she has been converted on the road to Damascus on the importance and value of planning...



Daisy Narayanan from Sustrans talked through the impact the different places where she has lived have impact on her...



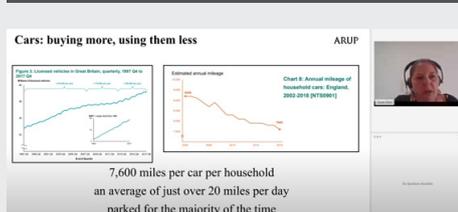
Stuart Hay from Living Streets Scotland using the ability to buy toilet roll to defining 15 / 20 minute neighbourhoods... ..and then quoting Sir Patrick Geddes as an eccentric planning hero who can save the planet...



Shaun Andrews from Nexus Planning discussing portable forests...



Mike Morgan from Perth and Kinross Council using the power of cartoon to remind people of a truth.....



Susan Claris from Arup highlighting some interesting and surprising trends...

The best transportation plan is a great land use plan!

And Ian Findlay from Paths for All quoting Brent Toderian and showing the real importance of planning...



All the session were videoed and can be viewed on the RTPi YouTube channel at www.youtube.org/theRTPi



Back to the Future?

Kirsty Macari managed to bring a bit of light relief in these difficult times with her tweet, above, on what the future of our towns and cities may have looked like if you lived in 1962. And, as she says it all looks strangely prophetic!

In Focus:

Who Wouldn't Want to Live in a Carbon Conscious Place?



Heather Claridge
MRTPI
Principal Design
Officer
Architecture and
Design Scotland

Heather Claridge MRTPI of Architecture and Design Scotland (seconded from Glasgow City Council), shares an overview of the newly published report on designing for a changing climate, supporting the development of carbon conscious places.

Imagining what places might look like in 2050 is a challenge, even for planners. However, what we do know, is we would want them to look like the places we would want to live ourselves. Greener, sociable, with more opportunities to lead healthier lives. To explore how we design places to deliver these qualities and respond to the climate crisis, Architecture and Design Scotland embarked on a project supported by the Scottish Government, in 2019. This involved working with four pilot Local Authorities across Scotland including Shetland Islands Council, Moray Council, Glasgow City Council and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, to support a 'learning by doing' approach.

By facilitating workshops and exchanging insight, the findings of the pilot work helped to shape the Carbon Conscious Report, published on the 6th of October 2020. The report offers examples, principles and illustrations to help guide and inspire people to take a whole place approach to reduce, repurpose and absorb carbon and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

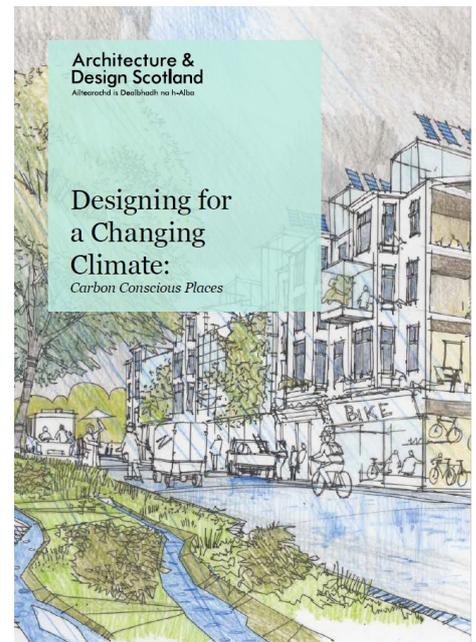
The eight principles identified set out important concepts to consider when planning for great places. Not intended to be used as a definitive set of solutions, the principles include:

- **A place-led approach.** This involves understanding, appreciating and working with existing assets, the surrounding landscape and the place identity.
- **A place of small distances.** This encourages the creation of complete and self-sufficient neighbourhoods with everyday services and facilities within a short walking or cycling distance.
- **A network of small distance places.**

This involves connecting complete neighbourhoods to provide a network of places that support greater self-sufficiency and low carbon living.

- **A place designed for and with local people.** This involves placing people's needs at the centre of decision-making, service provision and investment in our places and ensuring they are actively involved in key stages of the design process.
- **A place that reuses, repurposes and considers whole life costs.** This supports the retrofitting of existing structures and brownfield sites first, giving consideration to embodied carbon in place. This principle supports viewing structures as 'material banks' with components which are demountable, rebuildable and reusable and considering the cost of the entire lifecycle of a structure rather than only its initial capital costs.
- **A place with whole and circular systems.** This involves enhancing, repairing and joining up the different systems which support a healthy, carbon conscious place.
- **A place that supports sharing.** This encourages the sharing of assets and services in places to enable lower carbon living and connects people to their neighbourhoods. This can range from sharing tools, bikes, electric vehicles to accommodation and education facilities.
- **A place designed in time.** This involves ensuring the place planning and delivery process considers the dimension of time from long term visions to short-term approaches to test ideas.

The Carbon Conscious Places report goes on to considers how these principles can



apply at four settlement scales - an urban neighbourhood, a city centre, a town and a rural community. Through this, we are able to imagine what 2050 might look like if we support a whole place approach to the climate challenge. The report acts as a helpful resource for all places across Scotland to work with the different sectors, to ultimately create the places we all would want to live in.

The report is available here: https://www.ads.org.uk/designing-for-a-changing-climate_report/

If you have any comments on the report or would like more information about the support Architecture and Design Scotland can offer, please contact: info@ads.org.uk. ■

In Practice:

Mental Health and Town Planning: Building in resilience



Sarah Lewis
MRTPI
Planning Practice
Officer RTPI

Sarah Lewis MRTPI, discusses new practice advice published by RTPI

We have all heard so many times this year that we are 'living in extraordinary times' that we need to get used to 'the new normal' whilst adapting to 'build back better' and we frequently end conversations with 'stay safe'. And who had ever heard the phrase 'social distancing' before 2020? There have been frequent warnings about an impending mental health crisis because of Covid-19 and the associated social and economic repercussions of lockdowns and restrictions on movement. The problems may initially seem insurmountable, but there are solutions that town planning can, and does, implement to help promote good mental health.

However, we must acknowledge that in the UK and Ireland, the rates of mental health illness were already high before the pandemic. It has been estimated that around one in four people will experience a mental health condition. This places a huge burden on individuals, their families and on society. Research has found that where someone lives can have an impact on their mental health. The quality of the wider built environment is also a determining factor, with noise, pollution levels, quality of green space, access to services and even 'beauty' all playing a part. Creating an accessible, inclusive built environment that enables everyone to play an equal role in society is important in protecting and enhancing everyone's mental health. And this is more important in 2020 than ever before.

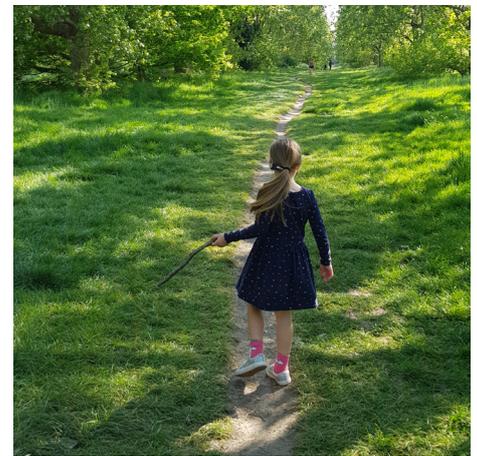
The Centre for Urban Design and Mental Health has developed a simple framework to consider the impact of urban places on mental health that is very useful for town planners. It focuses on four key principles for designing places that effectively link all other policies together in a people centred model for health. The principles are:

- **Green** - access to natural settings in neighbourhoods and the course of people's daily routines;

- **Active** - embedding opportunities for activity as part of day-to-day lives, with opportunities for exercise, social interactions and active travel;
- **Pro-social** - urban design that facilitates positive, safe and natural interactions to promote a sense of community, belonging and meaning;
- **Safe** - lighting, surveillance, permeability, legibility, and people-centric design are all important, along with measures to reduce pollution, traffic and crime.

A Scottish case study is the Glasgow Stalled Spaces programme. It supports community groups and local organisations develop temporary projects on stalled sites and vacant or derelict spaces as a community asset. These can take the form of growing spaces, pop-up gardens, wildlife areas, urban gyms or natural play spaces, temporary art, spaces for events or exhibitions or any other innovative idea. The emphasis is on meeting the needs of the community. In the first five years the project helped deliver over 100 projects bringing over 25ha of land into temporary community use under the banner of 'a community fit for a wee bit'. These temporary projects can deliver multiple gains, making an area safer and more attractive. They improve health and well-being through enhancing a community's access to green spaces and through community engagement by providing communities with an opportunity to work together as a team and contributing to social capital. Architecture & Design Scotland have now expanded the scheme to other parts of Scotland and published a Stalled Spaces Scotland Toolkit.

Another example of the impact of the built environment on health is the Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary. The hospital was planned to maximise the rural setting by bringing the wider landscape into the site. This approach was taken because research



has demonstrated that connections to nature results in positive health outcomes and faster healing times. The hospital has been designed around 17 courtyards and gardens in order to optimise views and natural daylight. The result is an uplifting, therapeutic and person centred environment. A strong partnership approach was employed throughout the project, with the NHS and the local authority working under a community planning partnership that involved key staff at all levels. A senior planning officer was embedded in weekly NHS project meetings from early in the pre-application stage.

Mental health and town planning gives advice on how planners can work within the current UK planning systems and with other professionals to promote good mental health when making changes to the built environment. It summaries expert advice, outlines key planning policy, good practice and case studies. Read the full advice here www.rtpi.org.uk/practice/2020/october/mental-health-and-town-planning/.

If you have a positive case study you would like to share, I love to hear them sarah.lewis@rtpi.org.uk. ■

Article:

Post Pandemic Planning and the rise of the twenty-minute neighbourhood

Stuart Hay Director of Living Streets Scotland, outlines his thoughts.

Who, or more importantly what, is the Scottish planning system for? Sadly, in terms of urban space allocation it is too often the movement of vehicles instead of creating places for people. But as we prepare for a post pandemic future, this approach seems incompatible with the twenty-minute neighbourhoods concept announced in Scotland's programme for government.

During the first lockdown one of the few positives was a focus on staying local to access essential amenities and greenspaces for exercise. For the first time in over 50 years traffic fell to very low levels. This encouraged many more people to experience their neighbourhood by foot and by bike, discovering a range of local places and services. It also showed how living more locally could be supported via digital connections. Notably, COVID-19 restrictions significantly accelerated the uptake of digital alternatives to long daily commutes on increasingly congested roads. This disruption offers a once in a generation (or more) opportunity to tackle a host of transport-based societal problems including carbon emissions, air pollution, inactivity related diseases, traffic accidents and weak community connections.

Most of these problems were predicted by Scottish Planner Colin Buchanan in his 1963 report *Traffic in Towns*. The options presented to the government of day were either to restrain traffic or attempt to accommodate its growth. Successive governments in the UK and Scotland, as well local planning authorities, have consistently chosen the latter option. This approach sustained the rise of the car commuting suburb, dormitory towns, and the hollowing out of neighbourhood services, such as the traditional high street. Despite well intentioned statements of policy the focus on mobility instead of place remains systemic to this day. For example, the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation includes an indicator involving drive time to petrol stations.

“This disruption offers a once in a generation (or more) opportunity to tackle a host of transport-based societal problems including carbon emissions, air pollution, inactivity related diseases, traffic accidents and weak community connections .”



Stuart Hay
Director
Living Streets
Scotland



Figure 1: Factors Importance in Choosing Where to Live (Source: Paths for All 2019 (2))



Figure 2: Essential Services Supporting 20 neighbourhoods

Since the 1980s planning for out of town retail, business parks and low-density green-field -housing has become normalised. Brownfield, well-located, urban-infill schemes have played second fiddle to edge-of-town green field developments or village expansions across local authority borders. Meanwhile efforts to regenerate town centres (including a wave of pedestrianisation in the 1990s) have struggled in a decentralised world of office and retail parks. Decades of sustainable transport policy have had little impact. For example, in 1999, NPPG 17 Planning for Transport stated:

“There is also significant scope to influence travel through land use change at the destination end of trips. The location of major travel-generating uses are critical to the number and length of trips, particularly for shopping, industry, offices and leisure. The ability to control such developments, by locating them in places well served by public transport, especially town centres, and by restricting associated car parking, should gradually have an effect on traffic growth.”

Twenty years later, research by Living Streets Scotland into low car neighbourhoods⁽¹⁾ found a near total absence of good practice in promoting sustainable transport ahead of cars. A soon to be published follow up report on business parks, will show that Scotland’s major centres of employment are near impossible to walk to, poorly connected by public transport and dominated by parking.

Despite this challenging starting point there is hope for twenty-minute neighbourhoods and alternative forms of development. For example, a major national public opinion study by Paths for All in 2019 (2) revealed nearly three quarters of people wanted to live places where they could walk to the shops and nearly

two thirds wanted good bus services. Only around a quarter of people valued driving to work or retail parks. Interestingly walking was seen as much more important than cycling despite its lower profile in public policy and the media. These findings, and the importance of walking in neighbourhood design, are illustrated in **Figure 1**.

Sustaining services based on walking, as opposed to catering for a wide car-based hinterland, will be critical. This means sufficient people (urban density) within a fifteen-minute walk for most local services and access to public transport services and schools with ten minutes. **Figure 2** shows the range of services that on a daily or weekly basis that need to be accessible by foot in a sustainable urban neighbourhood. Such places are inherently viable as demonstrated by the popularity of Victorian and Edwardian tenement districts or colony flats, where density is high, greenspace and parks are available and public transport services are frequent. This contrasts with the poorly connected low-density residential monocultures Living Streets Scotland saw in the new housing developments it studied.

In a post pandemic world neighbourhood will also need better links to green spaces, and a range of social spaces (e.g. cafes and halls) seldom seen in today’s housing developments. Addressing the spatial impacts of the digital economy will also be important - not least convenient places to pick up and drop of parcels aimed at halting the growth in van traffic. A sense of place and environmental quality will also be critical, which means much less parking and traffic. A move to bigger catchment campus style schools must also be reversed to put education back within walking distance. Planning policies must be strengthened, better defined (e.g. level of service

expectations), and be adhered too if genuine twenty-minute neighbourhoods are to be created. This means telling developers what they ‘must do’ in terms of facilities, density and local walking and cycling connections. This need not be complex. For example, asking whether it is possible to buy toilet roll within ten minutes’ walk of new housing will reveal a lot. Other signs that all is not well are large amounts of space given over to parking, and the presence of space hungry infrastructure such as roundabouts. Whether car clubs are viable provides another useful indicator that a development will be sustainable. Meanwhile, countervailing forces such as new drive through restaurants and big box retail must be halted at all costs.

President Obama’s health care guru Donald Berwick noted that:

“every system is perfectly designed to get the result it gets”.

This is a sobering thought in the context of a planning system which continues to deliver rising levels of emissions, congestion, air pollution and places that do little to encourage daily physical activity beyond a drive to the gym. Despite this, Scottish planners should take solace in the words of American urbanist Fred Kent that:

“If you plan cities for cars and traffic, you get cars and traffic. If you plan for people and places, you get people and places.”⁽³⁾

Time will tell if people and places will finally win out against cars in Scotland, but twenty-minute neighbourhoods offer a good starting point for systemic change. ■

¹ Promoting Low Car Neighbourhoods in Scotland 2017, Living Streets Scotland Como UK

² Attitudes and to Barriers to walking in Scotland 2019 Paths for All

³ <https://www.transportation-planning.com/quotes.html>

Article:

Reclaiming the High Street - Midsteeple Quarter

Scott Mackay MRTPI discusses the project aimed at regenerating Dumfries Town Centre



Scott Mackay
MRTPI
Manager of the
Midsteeple Quarter

Midsteeple Quarter (MSQ) is a pioneering, community-led initiative working to breathe new life into Dumfries town centre. The initiative involves the local community taking control of underused and neglected high street buildings to refurbish/redevelop these as a contemporary living, working, socialising, learning and enterprising quarter – a new beating heart for a more diverse high street and a catalyst for a thriving and resilient future town centre.

The London School of Economic's recent 'Saving the High Street' report included MSQ as the only Scottish example of 6 UK case studies highlighting new thinking as a response to the current high street crisis. Commissioned by the Power to Change trust, the study states:

"Midsteeple Quarter is a unique and ambitious community-led initiative, one which presents an opportunity to rethink the high street in order to achieve the widest potential community and town centre benefits. It shows that by giving the community control over the commercial and creative opportunities in the high street, the challenges presented by the dramatic change in high street retailing can be addressed."



Photos courtesy of Midsteeple Quarter

The Carnegie UK Trust also used MSQ as one of 11 UK case studies following the Turnaround Towns UK report which draws together stories of towns around the UK who are transforming their futures.

The current crisis on our high streets, has promoted a rethink of town centres as somewhere that genuinely meets the needs of our population. The underlying issue of fragmented property ownership and disengaged landlords is choking the life from the high street and will destroy it if we don't act now. Examples of this market failure in Dumfries High Street are the existence of 3/4 storey buildings, where the upper floors were abandoned decades ago to maximise return from retail rents from the lower floors. These upper floors are mainly empty, unmaintained and no longer fit for purpose. In some, stairways from the ground floor have been removed in order to maximise ground floor retail floorspace. Another building has a lease with many years to run, but an absent tenant now controlled by an international investment fund, closed the unit many years ago. The landlord has no financial incentive to release the tenant from the lease and continues to receive rent while leaving the building abandoned in the heart of the high street.

Planning policy has contributed to this decline and has been slow to respond. In Dumfries, the prime retail frontage policy, intended to protect Class 1 retail, is now out of date as demand for retail floorspace contracts. Many years of this policy has resulted in a shopping monoculture, which when shops close for the evening, leaves a lifeless ghost town. In general the public

sector has been unable to adequately respond and regeneration strategies have been slow to catch up. Private sector investment in the town centre has dwindled. Dumfries has one of the lowest levels of residential living of any High Street in Scotland.

Through the pioneering work of The Stove Network in Dumfries over many years, local creatives formed an artistic expression of a protest movement to raise wider community awareness. As part of the engagement process, local officials and politicians (Council and MSP's) were included and got involved. Artists helped create interest and profile by emulating a protest movement and created a local action group called the Doon Toon Army,

"...put the community in the driving position to turn around the local economy, retaining investment benefits in Dumfries rather than profits leaking away from the town..."

organising clean up days and market stalls selling t-shirts and badges, supported by extensive social media campaign, all to raise the profile and buzz about the project. They asked simple questions - Who does the high street belong to?

Community Clean up days were organised - to gather volunteers into the project, build capacity and engender a pride in the town centre and grow a movement of people feeling that they could make a difference. On the back of all that consultation and activism, in 2017 a partnership project was initiated looking at the major redevelopment of a key location in the High Street - The Midsteeple Quarter - through which the local community gained support from the Scottish Government and Dumfries and Galloway Council

Midsteeples Quarter is now a Community Benefit Society in its own right. It is registered as Dumfries High Street Limited (DHSL), trading as Midsteeples Quarter and has over 400 members each owning an equal share in the society and voting rights for individuals and business members within the DG1 and DG2 postcode areas which covers the whole of Dumfries with associate membership available to others. DHSL members annually elect a board to direct the project, they employ a project team for day to day delivery.

Midsteeples Quarter evolved from a consensus amongst local people, businesses, groups and agencies that a more diverse town centre underpinned by residential use on upper floors is a priority for a 'future Dumfries'. Out of extensive public engagement and consultation emerged a more considered VISION of what Dumfries town centre might become. How to achieve a more vibrant and open high street economy where the market has failed?

The current depressed economics of the town centre present a unique opportunity to gather prominent High Street properties into community ownership. To take back control and put the community in the driving position to turn around the local economy, retaining investment benefits in Dumfries rather than profits leaking away from the town to absentee landlords and off-shore investment funds. Midsteeples Quarter see community ownership as vital to the revival of the high street. Communities not only care passionately about their local area, more importantly they understand the needs of local people and provide distinctive services that meet local needs.

The vision is that the Midsteeples Quarter will bring new life to a concentrated area in the very centre of the town and stimulate new growth around it as a foundation for a more stable, sustainable and thriving town centre that is in the best possible shape to deal with any future crisis. With this in mind, the focus fell upon the central stretch, the heart of the High Street adjacent to the iconic category A-listed Midsteeples building, where almost all the properties had been empty or disused for some time. Many were significantly decayed as a result of neglect and lack of maintenance by absentee owners. The site covers a block of the original town, with main building frontages to the High Street. The site contains a number of listed buildings and

historic closes, although some of these routes have been blocked over the years by backland development, where floorspace has often been extended to cover most or all of the plot. Many of the properties are in poor condition.

The design concept is to create a vibrant and sustainable quarter with a new and resilient approach to town centre development that is diverse, adaptable and driven by community needs, aspirations and enterprise, recognises and respects the environment, re-opened closes and public spaces and included residential units on upper floors. Ground and first floor spaces need to be flexible and multi-use to create activity and be affordable to enable small businesses and makers to get established. The Masterplan envisages the creation of over 60 new homes

and 50 new commercial spaces within a new neighbourhood, sheltered within a town block which will become home to in the region of 200 people. The Masterplan was approved in November 2019 as supplementary planning guidance related to a specific MSQ mixed use policy allocation in the recently adopted Dumfries and Galloway Local Development Plan 2.

“The design concept is to create a vibrant and sustainable quarter with a new and resilient approach to town centre development...”

A phased approach is required to achieve change and build a track record as soon as possible. Phase 1 of the project at an advanced stage of design and planning and comprises the redevelopment of no. 135-137 High Street and its entire plot to the rear. The building was formerly occupied by The Bakers Oven and is now known as 'The Oven'. The proposals provide a range of flexible business, cultural and community spaces on the ground and first floors, with 7 affordable homes to the rear of the plot and upper floors. The existing High Street building façade will be retained. The delivery of Phase 1 is the key to this, as it will bring much-needed momentum and build confidence amongst the community, funders, investors and occupiers for the remaining phases. Feasibility work has taken development proposals through architectural design, community engagement and business planning. A full planning permission for The Oven project was granted in August 2020. A development contract start is planned for spring 2021, with completion mid 2022.

Phase 2 is also well underway with the acquisition of additional high street properties. MSQ now own 3 large high street buildings which they have named The Oven, The Smithy and The Press and are in negotiations with the owners to acquire more.

Midsteeples Quarter as an organisation has matured from a campaign group with a mission to become a community property development organisation with assets and a plan. What they are doing is pioneering and a potential inspiration for communities across the country to reclaim their High Street too. ■



Photos courtesy of Midsteeples Quarter

Article:

What Future for Scotland's Town Centres?



Leigh Sparks
Professor of Retail Studies
University of Stirling
and chair of the
Review of the Town
Centre Action Plan

Leigh Sparks, Chair of the expert group reviewing the Town Centre Action Plan discusses its role

Scotland is a nation of towns; they are the organising place of much of Scottish life. Towns differ from centres on islands (e.g. Stornoway) to standalone towns (e.g. Peebles) through to towns that are part of our largest cities (e.g. Corstorphine). Our towns vary in scale (e.g. Paisley and Turriff), but all are unique and have their own identity, history and significance.

Over recent decades though we have decentralised and fragmented our lives and our places. Development has been permitted on a large scale away from town centres and we have seen a huge growth of commercial and public sector functions move to new separate sites. Out of town retailing, cinemas, football grounds, offices (public and private), workplaces, homes, schools and colleges have all contributed to sucking activity away from our town centres. The costs of operating in town centres and the costs and problems of renovating and using older and often historic buildings far outweigh those in new purpose built 'centres' or sites on discrete out-of-town locations. In many, though not all cases, we have lost the sense of shared purpose and experience of towns and have removed reasons for people to visit, live in and use their towns.



Photos courtesy of Pixabay

The National Review of Town Centres in 2013 and the subsequent Town Centre Action Plan provided a route map for Scotland to begin to reverse this position. This, and the ensuing activity, is recognised internationally as providing a strong base. However over the intervening years there has been a range of national policies shaping Scotland's future and a recognition of the vital importance of responding to the new national priorities. Our national focus on the climate emergency and net zero, a desire for significantly enhanced inclusivity and wellbeing and a focus on towns becoming greener, healthier and fairer have emerged to challenge the direction and nature of development.

Then came COVID-19 and a stark reminder of the fragility of our existing ways of living and working, a clear demonstration of the inherent inequalities our current approaches allow (or indeed encourage) and the re-emergence of community as a practical response.

It is in this context that in July 2020 I was asked by the Scottish Government to lead a review of the Town Centre Action Plan and to develop a refreshed vision for town centres in Scotland and the steps needed to implement it. The Review Group has since late July been taking written and oral evidence from key groups, organisations, representatives and the public.

In setting up the Review the instruction was to consider how we develop a greener, healthier and a more inclusive nation of towns. This has received general endorsement by those we have engaged with, though the methods to achieve it vary. The strongest

theme to emerge has been a feeling of 'not being listened to' and that decisions are being taken for commercial reasons alone and not for the benefit of society and community. There is strong support for towns and town centres and a desire to see them flourish,

but a need for them to become more inclusive, greener and healthier places.

If we are to have a flourishing society and economy of this form then towns have to be more central in our national priorities; developments that

“There is strong support for towns and town centres and a desire to see them flourish .”

harm towns need to be halted and reversed; the comparative costs of operating and living in towns need rebalancing; and the nature of shape of operations within towns needs to be more diverse and locally organised.

We are now finalising our thinking in terms of the vision and its implementation. The steps to achieve this are being outlined and developed by the Review Group. This is not an easy task, nor will it be without challenge. Reversing the neglect and destruction of many of our places over the last 50 years will not be a quick process. Scotland has a sound starting point and clear priorities; the pandemic has provided a major impetus to right the problems that it has exposed in health, inequalities and wellbeing. With the need to address the climate emergency, the future of Scotland's towns can be highly positive, highly local and meet the needs of all society and economy.

Many of the aspects of the Review can be found on Leighs blog at www.stirlingretail.com. ■

Article: Could Simplified Planning Zones be the key to Town Centre Regeneration?



Rhiannon Moylan MRTPI, Planner in Montagu Evans considers new approaches to planning for town centres

Rhiannon Moylan
MRTPI
Planner
Montague Evans

The coronavirus pandemic and subsequent lockdowns have shifted the focus for many across the world, creating a greater awareness of the importance of our local communities and local high streets. With working from home now becoming the norm, we are seeing a greater reliance on smaller local town centres and a move away from the model of large city centres primarily supported by office workers.

Many national chains are feeling the repercussions of the pandemic, both on retail and on associated town centre uses such as coffee shops. While the devastating impacts on people's livelihoods should not be underestimated, the question is, could this actually be to the benefit of local town centres?

Evidence shows that retail spend has been gradually decreasing, with a greater emphasis on online shopping, which has become all the more prevalent during lockdown. Town centres are in urgent need of help, but how can planning help reinvigorate them?

In England, we have seen bold changes to the Use Classes in order to offer more flexibility and encourage a wider range of uses in town centres. We know that the more diverse a mix of uses in town centres, the more attractive the centre. Successful town centres demonstrate a mix of interconnected uses from retail and office to leisure, health and community uses. Could expanding the range of acceptable uses, and shifting from the principle of retail first, be the key to reducing vacancy rates and enhancing the vibrancy of town centres?

Given the radical changes in England I can't help but wonder, is it time for a change in Scotland? In my opinion the existing policy approach to safeguard retail uses can be damaging to the role of our local centres. It does not promote a diverse range of uses which reflect the needs of each local centre, and as such reduces the vibrancy and individuality of our towns and cities. We are already seeing the beginning of policy shifts which reflects this change, with some cities relaxing the permitted uses on their primary retail streets to encourage more leisure and class three uses. A prime example of this is Edinburgh City Council's City Centre Shopping and Leisure Supplementary Guidance.

In my view, change is needed, but perhaps a more measured approach may be more appropriate in Scotland, one that encourages flexibility and promotes growth. With this in mind, could Simplified Planning Zones be the solution for town centres? This change could allow a range of appropriate uses to be supported in existing retail units, which will enhance the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. This would certainly benefit local

communities where planning polices which promote retail Class 1 uses in the town centres mean that it can often be challenging to promote other footfall-generating uses, such as a gym or community hub, in traditional retail units.

At the core of any change is a requirement to make sure town centres serve their community, and a retail-based focus will not necessarily meet the needs of many members of the community. The local high street should

"...perhaps a more measured approach may be more appropriate in Scotland, one that encourages flexibility and promotes growth."



Photos courtesy of Steve Tiesdell Collection

be a community hub with a range of vibrant uses, including healthcare facilities, cafes, gyms and many more, all successfully co-existing with an existing retail offer.

The twenty-minute neighbourhood model shows the importance of having local services near local people. So why should the town centre, the hub of many towns, be focused only on retail? Yes, expanding Use Classes could help achieve this goal, but does this give us as planners enough confidence that the right development will happen in the right place, and will this encourage a place based approach to development? Perhaps not. Could Simplified Planning Zones and masterplans for town centres be the balanced middle ground that will ensure planning continues to be a tool for growth, whilst protecting and enhancing our existing assets? Only time will tell, but it is clear a change to the approach towards Use Classes in town centres is inevitable. ■

Article:

A Vision of Tomorrow's Town's Today

Image courtesy of Ironside Farrar Ltd

Craig McIntyre MRTPI outlines North Lanarkshire Council's Town Visions Project

It is clear across Scotland that the old model for town centres is not sustainable. North Lanarkshire Council is taking a proactive, strategic approach to the changes impacting on our high streets to produce visions for each of our eight towns and give them a sustainable future.

The Plan for North Lanarkshire and our Economic Regeneration Delivery Plan identify the need to reposition our towns as vibrant mixed-use spaces, promoting town centre living and putting staff and services closer to communities.

A key element of The Plan is our ambitious council housebuilding programme which will see 5000 new homes built by 2035; with many of these planned in town centres. Our schools too will be part of the town planning, not only places to learn but multi-agency community hubs that host health, council, police and voluntary sector services, with business space, culture and leisure facilities.

Following a range of physical improvements to the public realm within town centres in the mid 2010s, we recognised the need to look beyond the streetscape and investigate ways to influence how town centres are used, making them destinations for activity and symbols of community. This chimed with the



Image courtesy of Ironside Farrar Ltd

renewed interest in the high street in national policy, the publication of the Town Centre Toolkit and the emergence of agencies such as Scotland's Towns Partnership.

Our ambition predates the Scottish Government's "A Vision for High Street Regeneration" and reflected most of the proposals set out in this guidance, particularly the importance of place in terms of people's sense of community, civic identity and belonging.

North Lanarkshire has a rich and varied composition of towns. It is a confederacy of quite disparate communities which reflect different periods of urban development, from historic mining towns, market towns, industrial/post-industrial towns through to planned new towns, all of which have their own challenges. Therefore a one-size-fits-all approach to planning the needs of each town is not appropriate. Our lead consultant, Ironside Farrar Ltd, emphasised the need for a place-based approach to the individual propositions for each town.

The visions reflect best practice in placemaking, active travel, low carbon and the 20-minute neighbourhood, while proposing pragmatic scenarios based on current trends. Approved in March 2020, they identify that the solution to a reduction in retail can only be delivered if public and private partners move towards a more mixed-use town centre with residential development, active travel infrastructure and open/civic space.

The visions are deliberately pitched at a conceptual level and promote bold structural change to encourage debate in an effort to build a consensus. They are advocacy documents which emphasise the need to build partnerships between public and private institutions.

However, the visions are not empty rhetoric. The council will support the changes set out through a share of our Ambition Programme's capital fund. We plan to invest £3.5 billion over the next 10 years, which, along with private sector inward investment, will create around 12,000 jobs and generate an additional £1 billion for the local economy.

To become a reality, these visions need to be shaped through extensive consultation and engagement with community planning partners, landowners, retailers, residents and other agencies.

The pandemic has accelerated the spiral of decline on our high streets so the public consultation is a timely opportunity to debate the future shape and function of our towns and build consensus on the "new normal" for North Lanarkshire's towns.

Public engagement is taking place via online virtual exhibitions, webinars and meetings between October 2020 and February 2021. Final versions of the town visions are scheduled for publication in summer 2021.

The draft town visions are available at www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/vision. ■



Craig McIntyre
MRTPI
Project Development
Co-ordinator,
GrowthTeam
North Lanarkshire
Council

Article:

Town Centre First Principle – How successful has it been?



Mhairi Donaghy
Associate Director,
EKOS, RTPI Affiliate &
Vice Chair Scotland's
Towns Partnership

As the Town Centre Action Plan is reviewed, **Mhairi Donaghy**, reflects on the impact and lessons learned from the introduction of the Town Centre First Principle

Town Centre First is the principle that underlies the six themes of the 2013 Town Centre Action Plan. It is a call to central government, local authorities, businesses, communities and institutions to put the health of Scotland's town centres at the heart of decision making.

At its best it is embedded into policy and decision making at the local level – for example in Aberdeenshire Council it has been

“There are still too many instances where development happens on the edge or even out of centre that didn't need to be there”

enshrined into policy since 2018 and officers must ensure *“consideration of the overarching principles ... such as the Town Centre First Principle”*. This has clearly influenced activity, including the dispersal of Council staff from one central Aberdeen HQ into three town centre sites across the region.

There are also excellent project examples where the principle has made a positive difference to our town centres – recently the multi-award winning West Dunbartonshire Council HQ in Dumbarton brought 500 people to work in the town centre in a redeveloped Cat-A listed long-term vacant building.

But does the fact that after seven years of Town Centre First we're still able to say “look here, it's worked” mean that it's not been as effective as we'd hoped? There are still too many instances where development happens on the edge or even out of centre that didn't need to be there.

There are lots of reasons why this happens, some project specific some more deep rooted. In my experience there are three key issues that hold it back from being fully embedded.

Firstly, it is a principle rather than a duty so it can be all too easy, especially where time and resource is constrained, to see it as just one other consideration and to continue with “business as usual”. This is particularly hard to overcome where the benefits are not well understood or valued.

Secondly, it is almost always more difficult, expensive and time consuming to deliver projects in a Town Centre setting, but this is rarely acknowledged, especially when people are looking for quick change. We need to have a better understanding of the difficulties involved, and for project teams to be given the time

and resource, where needed, to develop effective long-term solutions.

Thirdly, and probably most importantly, there is still too much focus when appraising projects on traditional financial and economic considerations around value for money, rather than taking a wider societal impact. We need to take a broader approach that incorporates social and environmental factors to deliver long-term sustainable outcomes for people and places, making the best use of the resources that are available.

Addressing these would help to ensure that TC First Principle becomes more effective, and

Scotland cements its position as a world leader in supporting our town centres. Where used effectively, the Town Centre First principle is powerful ammunition for local and national stakeholders. The principle continues to build momentum and filter down into project proposals – Midsteeples Quarter in Dumfries, Falkirk Council HQ and re-purposing one of the shopping centres in Paisley – but has it reached a tipping point where it has become the norm?

It takes time, effort and leadership to drive real change – with a plethora of strategies at local, regional and national levels, aligning projects with key policy aims like Town Centre First is not automatic and can sometimes be very difficult for project teams.

In June 2020 the Scottish Government announced a review of Town Centre Action Plan – over 1500 individual people responded to an online survey with overwhelming support for our village, town and city centres. Is now the right time to shift the principle up a gear and make Town Centre First a duty, where clear evidence is needed on why it is not being adopted? ■



Photos courtesy of Pixabay



Update: Scottish Government

A regular update on planning at the national level from the **Scottish Government's** Planning and Architecture Division.

2020 has been nothing like a normal year in many aspects of our lives; and that certainly applies across planning and how we work together. Temporary changes to our planning system were introduced earlier in the year so we could continue to go about our work and maintain a functioning system. Planning in Scotland has certainly risen to that challenge.

We are still keeping an eye on the potential for continuing changing circumstances and the need for the planning system to remain agile. Meanwhile, attention has been turning to learning the lessons of 2020 and applying those to our major workstreams around National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), the wide-ranging reforms of planning and

the clear benefits from high standards in placemaking for our physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Since the summer, the Scottish Government has published its Programme for Government, which gives clear and strong support for the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods so that facilities and services are available locally from our homes. And the recent consultation on the draft Infrastructure Investment Plan recognised the need for close links with NPF4 to support delivery, and included proposals to invest £275 million on community-led regeneration and town centre revitalisation, and £35m on a new, open-access, digital planning system.

Moving all of this forward, we are in a particularly busy run-in to the end of the year and into 2021 on the continuing transformation of planning. We say more about this below.

National Planning Framework 4

We have recently published a position statement to explain our current thinking and direction of travel in the preparation of NPF4, drawing on the evidence we received through our early engagement programme and call for ideas earlier this year. With the impacts of this year's events on the overall timescale for NPF4, we see this as an unplanned but helpful extra opportunity to advance thinking for the draft NPF4, which will be presented for consultation and scrutiny next autumn. While we already have substantial stakeholder evidence at our disposal from that earlier engagement, we are inviting responses to the position statement should people be keen to share their thoughts.

You can see the position statement and find out how to contribute at www.transformingplanning.scot/national-planning-framework.

Planning's Digital Transformation

We also recently launched Transforming Places Together: Scotland's Digital Strategy for Planning. There is immense potential for digital to enhance how we all engage and play our parts in the planning of great places. The strategy is ambitious. It sets out a vision to create a world-leading planning system and a set of key missions to deliver it, centred on the themes of: data; digital technologies and services; ways of working; people; and innovation.

To inform development of the strategy, we gathered a comprehensive evidence-base of user needs, insights and opportunities for transformation and innovation, and we will continue this user-centric approach to design and development moving into delivery.

You can see the Digital Strategy and that range of research at www.transformingplanning.scot/digital-planning.

Publication of the strategy will be followed by the launch of a 5-year transformation programme in 2021, delivering services and ways of working that make planning more inclusive, and opening up data that can strengthen collaboration and decisions about positive change.

Place Principle

The holistic approach of the Place Principle, with the support of the Place Standard tool, brings the opportunity to work much more collaboratively, utilising physical and social aspects of places to maximise positive outcomes. To build on that, we are preparing

to launch a new Place website early in 2021. The site will promote place-based working and can provide support for the delivery of 20-minute neighbourhoods. It will share supportive materials and innovative examples of how the Place Principle is shaping investment and decision making and improving outcomes for communities.

Planning Reform Implementation

After being partly paused during lockdown, work towards the implementation of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 is back in progress. With the Scottish Parliament election coming next May, we have prioritised some elements of the reform programme to be progressed in advance of the pre-election period. Here's an outline of what to expect over the coming months:

Permitted development: We have consulted on new and amended permitted development rights for digital telecommunications infrastructure, agricultural development, peatland restoration and development related to active travel. We prioritised these changes specifically due to their potential to support Scotland's green recovery and remote and rural communities. We expect to bring forward legislation before the end of the year. This is phase 1 of a larger review of permitted development rights, covering a wide range of different development types. We propose that the next phase will include changes that encourage vitality in town centres, drawing on the conclusions of the Town Centre Action Plan review.

Short-Term Lets: The recent consultation on the designation of Short-Term Let Control Areas – where the use of a dwelling for short-term letting will always be a material change of use – links in with wider proposals for a new licensing regime that is primarily about ensuring properties are safe. We are now considering the outcome of the consultation before bringing forward legislation.

Pre-application consultation: Our proposed changes are the first part of a wider package of measures to improve community engagement in planning, intended to clarify expectations and improve the quality of local consultation, including a second mandatory public event. Again, this consultation has closed and we are preparing to introduce the legislation shortly.

Mediation: We are preparing to consult on new guidance on the promotion and use of mediation in planning. The Act requires the finalised guidance to be issued by next July.

Local Place Plans: Regulations and supporting guidance will refine the requirements for content and processes for community bodies preparing their own local place plans, and for how those plans

are handled through the planning system. There is already interest in getting local place planning underway around the country. Recent discussions with the Community Engagement Working Group and some research are supporting this work. We will consult on proposals for local place plan regulations in early 2021.

Development planning: We will also be consulting before the election on the details of the new development planning system; alongside the arrangements for open space strategies and play sufficiency assessments. The Development Planning Working Group met recently to support proposals for: evidence reports and the gatecheck; scope and content of the new-style plans; and the LDP preparation procedures. Consulting early next year will allow us to have the regulations in place in good time before NPF4 is adopted. Meantime, we have recently published guidance on the transitional arrangements for LDPs, to clarify the position for those that are already underway in the current system.

Other aspects of the Planning Act's implementation programme, including changes to development management, masterplan consent areas and the performance and training provisions, will now need to follow next year's election. We will say more about the scheduling of that as soon as we can.

You can find out more about the reform programme and implementation of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 and keep up-to-date at www.transformingplanning.scot/planning-reform.

Staying in touch

For the latest messages from the Planning and Architecture Division, follow us on Twitter [@ScotGovPlanning](https://twitter.com/ScotGovPlanning) and [@DigiPlanningSG](https://twitter.com/DigiPlanningSG) and register for our Planning and Building update emails. ■



Appreciation



**ALAN SEATH
MRTPI**

All of us at RTPI Scotland and the wider planning family were deeply saddened and shocked to hear the recent news that Alan Seath, DipTP-Town and Regional

Planning, MRTPI, had passed away suddenly following a short illness. After hearing about his diagnosis Alan's response was typically positive and upbeat saying "what a great life I have had and what a wonderful career in planning"

Alan was born in 1955 and was a devoted family man, survived by his wife of 40 years Angela and family. My personal memories of Alan go back more than 40 years when we socialised together over a pint or two at the Golf Tavern in Leven, played football and supported Rangers. His planning career followed mine to Heriot Watt and Fife Council despite my warnings! He was funny, loyal, and passionate about helping people and

supporting planning and what it can positively achieve.

Alan was a previous member of the Scottish Executive Committee and held a variety of posts during a career marked with an incredible breadth of knowledge, diligence, a cheeky sense of humour and the sharpest dress sense and wardrobe you could ever find. Striped suits, colourful ties and waistcoats and the 2 tone leather shoes were his clothes of choice for work.

He studied planning at Heriot Watt University and initially worked with Fife Council. His career also took him into the private sector where he worked for Lomond Group PLC and RPS Group PLC where he was an Associate Director before he set up his own successful planning consultancy, Seath Planning Consultancy Ltd. He also found time in his busy schedule to lecture at the University of Dundee and volunteer for PAS. Alan was also a former chairman of Fife Construction Forum and Age Concern and he was also a candidate in recent local government elections in Fife, confirming and showcasing his community credentials and desire to help people in less privileged positions.

Alan worked tirelessly on behalf of Scotland's travelling community and will be especially remembered for his passion and commitment to achieving fairness and tolerance for them. He was an articulate advocate and a spokesperson for them and his work on a range of planning applications, appeals and inquiries, particularly in Aberdeenshire and Perthshire, is testament to his unfailing support for them.

In his article for Scottish Planner (Spring Issue 177- March 2019) he continued this championing role. He ended the article by setting out his hope that, "the trend (of improved measures including a 10 Point Action Plan) continues at national and local levels with meaningful changes having the ability to improve the lives of Gypsies and Travellers"

Former colleagues at Fife Planning remember Alan fondly as "a genuinely top man who always outshone his colleagues with his dapper dress style"

All our thoughts are with Alan's family and friends at this sad time.

Jim Birrell RTPI Executive Committee, friend and former colleague



ROGER KELLY

Roger Kelly who died in November will be well remembered by many in the profession, across Scottish Government, consultancy and at planning authorities particularly in Strathclyde. He was

convener of RTPI Scotland in 2008.

Roger was a colourful character, sometimes clean shaven, sometimes with the full set and always with an impish smile. A twinkle in his eye. Woolly suits and neckties a speciality. Group lunches to Pierre Victoire's restaurant in Edinburgh's Union Street were a favourite, with the never-ending supply of baguettes bringing a grin to his face.

J.R. Kelly graduated from Newcastle in 1967 and joined Kent County Council where a colleague testifies to his anarchic intelligence. A barrier was constructed to block an avalanche of papers from Roger's desk. He continued the tradition at New St

Andrews House in Edinburgh, then Victoria Quay in Leith where his mountains of paper were legendary. But everything could still be found.

He was a disruptor; a desirable quality now but less so back in the day. Authoring Planning Advice Notes, he favoured his own layouts and style at draft, only to be brought back into line by authority. He was a keen planning historian. In 2010 he curated a touring exhibition celebrating the 80th anniversary of the RTPI in Scotland.

The grey corridors of power were frustrating if not amusing from time-to-time. Roger got the evil eye and a mild rebuke from management one time for a scathing remark about end-of-year spend on of all things obsolete slide carousels.

Roger was an I.T. early-adopter; dragging the then Scottish Office out of the analogue dark ages, buying word processing packages taped to the front of computing magazines from John Menzies! Once, after misspelling and backspacing from typing too fast, he confessed to worrying about the fate of leftover characters cluttering the bottom of his PC screen. But he'd reuse them diligently

when the next opportunity for a vowel or a consonant came along. Nothing wasted. He had a big heart.

He immersed himself in community life. Along with his wife Jane (a talented potter) he ran an ethical products shop from home; the former Valleyfield Paper Mill owner's house in Penicuik. The shop later transferred to the High Street's Penicuik Community Alliance – in turn largely Roger's brainchild; a social enterprise focussing on local food, a community hub and recently funded to host a climate change project. He was a bit of an arts luminary and impresario in the Penicuik social scene, putting on theatrical productions in the Victorian town hall which he helped to keep in use.

We will remember Roger for being a critical friend and as a town planner with an imaginative mind.

Graham Marchbank

Update:

RTPI POLICY UPDATE

Policy Consultations

RTPI Scotland have submitted responses to the following consultations and requests for written evidence:

- Call for evidence on the Town Centre Action Plan Review by the Town Centre Action Plan Expert Review Group.
- Scottish Government's Technical Consultation on Proposed Policy Amendments on Housing
- Scottish Government's Consultation on a licensing scheme and planning control areas in Scotland
- Scottish Government consultation on Pre-Application Consultation.
- The Scottish Government's Programme for Reviewing and Extending Permitted Development Rights (PDR) in Scotland – Consultation on Phase 1 Proposals.
- Draft Infrastructure Investment Plan – 2021-22 to 2025-26, Scottish Government.
- Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030 Draft Public Consultation, Transport Scotland.

Consultations currently under considerations are:

- A Consultation on the Digital Strategy for Scotland, Scottish Government.
- Councillors' code of conduct: consultation

2020, Scottish Government.

- Cleaner Air for Scotland 2 - a consultation on a draft new air quality strategy for Scotland, Scottish Government

Research

The Institute was commissioned by Scottish Government to undertake research outlining The Benefits of Investing in a Digital Planning Service. This aimed to explore the evidence base in implementing a Digital Planning Strategy through examining:

- the economic and societal benefits arising from digital transformation
- efficiencies that accrue within the planning system from investment in new technology and validation of the estimated cost and time savings
- the costs (financial and other) of not taking forward digital approaches across the planning service.

For this research RTPI Scotland has coordinated a programme of work analysing the need, demand and possible impacts of supporting a digital planning strategy. This comprises:

- An economic impact analysis, which was undertaken by KPMG, to assess the potential efficiencies that could be

provided from a digital planning service

- A user and customer impact analysis setting out the benefits for planning authorities, planning applicants and communities
- A policy impact analysis setting out the range of policy ambitions that rely upon a digital planning service
- Case studies, which have been written by KPMG, analysing the impact that digital planning could have on Scottish Government aspirations on its net zero carbon targets, in tackling health inequalities and as part of post Covid-19 recovery.
- A summary document setting out the key findings across the papers
- An infographic

These were published in November.

Update:

SCOTTISH YOUNG PLANNER NETWORK UPDATE

The Scottish Young Planners Network Steering Group are working hard to deliver a range of online CPD events and to promote the profession. So far this year, this has included engaging in the NPF 4 round table discussions, presenting to the Scottish Planning Schools and hosting an online summer social.

One of our ambitions for a number of years had been to move some of our events online to ensure we can reach young planners all across Scotland. I am always one to look for silver linings and if there is one thing to come out of lockdown it is that we have had to adapt and utilise new technologies to host our events which ensures we can reach a much wider audience.

Whilst we had been planning on hosting the RTPI's national conference this year, I am pleased to see that this will now be hosted online. The focus for this year's conference is "New Decade, New Leaders" and will discuss Young Planners embracing change with a very exciting programme of speakers from across the UK. I am looking forward to seeing how this event will run and it's great to see new technologies which include a chat function to encourage networking being utilised.

There is currently a vacancy on the Scottish Young Planners Network. If you would be interested in joining or have any questions please contact sypn@rtpi.org.uk. As always, if you have any event ideas, topics for discussion, or just want a chat please do

reach out. It's more important than ever that we help and support one another [in this stage in our careers!](#)

Rhiannon Moylan, Chair of Scottish Young Planners' Network

Update:

RTPI SCOTLAND UPDATE

COVID-19

All RTPI staff will continue to work from home but RTPI Scotland staff can be still be contacted through the usual phone number – [0131 229 9628](tel:01312299628) or email scotland@rtpi.org.uk

Scottish Planner Live

RTPI Scotland holds an annual conference which looks at topical issues in planning. This year's RTPI Scotland Annual Conference was transformed into The Scottish Planner Live comprising a series of shorter online events over the week 28 September to 2 October. It looked at a range of issues around health, planning and placemaking. Videos of all the sessions are now available to watch by clicking on the link below:

Connecting Planning, Health and Place

- [How Can Planners Embed Health in Place?](#)
- [How Can Planners Embed Place in Health?](#)

Designing Healthy Places

- [How do planners develop more resilient communities and housing?](#)
- [How can planners help move towards the 20 minute neighbourhood?](#)

Assessing the impact of planning on health

- [How can planners assess the Impact of Development on Health?](#)
- [How can planners build, use and source the evidence we need to support us to tackle health inequalities?](#)

Rethinking transport to support ambitions for health

- [How can planners prioritise Active Travel?](#)
- [How can planners rethink transport to support health as well as climate?](#)

Learning Lessons

- [What can planners learn from one another across the UK?](#)
- [What do planners need to make the step change?](#)

Communications

The following press releases have been issued:

- RTPI Scotland welcomes NPF4 position statement, November 2020
- Digital planning could benefit Scottish economy by £200m, says RTPI report. November 2020
- More effective way to measure impact of planning published by RTPI, 6 Nov 2020

- Minister thanks Scottish planners for 'rising to the challenge', 2 Oct 2020
- Planners welcome vacant land proposals, 1 Oct 2020

National Planning Framework

RTPI Scotland has been provided with grant funding to implement an engagement programme with the profession to help inform NPF4. As part of this it organised an online series of three webinars to learn from international practice in These are available on the RTPI You Tube Channel :

- The National Planning Framework included in Project 2040 Ireland https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mbkKw_cZK8
- Why Melbourne is seen as one of the most liveable cities in the world <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p86S6ChgKpc>
- How Finland aims to resource and deliver the country's carbon neutral target by 2035 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrx-xx55Q2U> Finland, Australia and Ireland.

Chapter Events

A number of events organised by RTPI Scotland chapters have also taken place and been recorded. These include:

- Grampian Chapter - The Events Complex Aberdeen (TECA) with a focus on net zero <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAGScwX7xY>
- West of Scotland chapter - Strategic Planning in the West of Scotland: moving with the times? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80-H5lea1nw>
- East Scotland Chapter - Nature-based solutions for water management – a case for multifunctional landscapes <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0qYav1-BNE>
- Dumfries and Galloway Chapter - Intergenerational Housing: care campus study tour to the Netherlands and Denmark <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elGec4Nyx9g>

More will be put on the RTPI You Tube Channel www.youtube.com/theRTPI

Planning Enforcement Week

A week of online sessions dedicated to the important role that enforcement plays in the planning process took place in October covering a range of issues including historic buildings, advertisements, technology,

enforcement notices and short term lets. Planning Enforcement Week is organised by the National Association of Planning Enforcement (NAPE) in association with RTPI Cymru, RTPI Scotland and RTPI Northern Ireland, in lieu of the Annual NAPE and Wales Planning Enforcement Conferences that would normally be held at this time of year. All 10 webinars are available to view on the RTPI You Tube Channel www.youtube.com/theRTPI

Other Events

Other events of note are:

- The Sir Patrick Geddes Commemorative Lecture on shaping the new normal with a wellbeing economy: The role for place and planning given by Katherine Trebeck <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Z9490YWYQc>
- Global Planners Network - How planners are supporting a green recovery around the world, chaired by RTPI Scotland Director Craig McLaren <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xkRUra9PX5A>



Scottish Executive Committee

After a nominations and elections process the following have been elected to the Scottish Executive Committee for 2021
Congratulations go to Nikola Miller

(pictured) who has been elected as Junior Vice Convenor for 2021 which means she will become Senior Vice Convenor in 2022 and Convenor in 2023.

Fiona Clandillon, David Leslie and Lisa Proudfoot have been elected to sit on the Scottish Executive Committee as Corporate Members for 2021/22.

Robbie Calvert and Samantha Seabrook-Stockley have become Student/ Licentiate Member representatives on the Committee for 2021.

Congratulations to all.

RTPI SCOTLAND CONTACTS



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MRTPI

Convenor

Irene chairs the Scottish Executive Committee and the Scottish Forum for Planning. She also represents RTPI Scotland at the RTPI General Assembly.

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Barbara Cummins
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Barbara chairs the RTPI Scotland Policy Subcommittee. Barbara also represents RTPI Scotland at the RTPI General Assembly.

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Andrew Trigger
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Junior Vice Convenor

Andrew chairs the RTPI Scotland Careers, Education and Lifelong Learning Subcommittee. Andrew represents RTPI Scotland on the RTPI Nations and Regions Panel.

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Julia Frost
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Immediate Past Convenor

Julia convened RTPI Scotland in 2019.

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The opinions stated are the contributors' own unless otherwise stated. The RTPI is not responsible for statements made or views expressed in this journal.

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[Twitter.com/RTPIscotland](https://twitter.com/RTPIscotland)



Craig McLaren
FRTPI

Director

Craig leads on public affairs, stakeholder relationships, development of CPD and skills, and communications. He is Co-Editor of Scottish Planner and Secretariat to the Communications Education and Lifelong Learning Sub Committee.

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Communications and Events Administrator

Jennie coordinates RTPI Scotland communications, including bulletins with information about chapter and national events. She is responsible for keeping the RTPI Scotland's website up to date, and assists with the delivery of CPD events.

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