

'making towns count': reviewing the case for scotland's small towns

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‘Making Towns Count’: Reviewing the Case for Scotland’s Small Towns

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

The COSLA Small Towns Group commissioned Adrian Colwell Associates and Hexagon Research and Consulting to undertake a review and evaluation of the policy context for Scottish towns and to identify the potential for more integrated support from the Scottish Government. The purpose of this report is to assist the Small Towns Group to take forward its work in implementing the recommendations of the '*Scottish Small Towns Report: 2007 - 2013*' within the context of the changing policy environment since the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections.

Towns have occasionally featured within strategies from the Scottish Government, but not in a systematic way. There is a need for thinking that breaks out of the exclusive focus on using our cities as drivers of growth, in order to examine and secure the untapped potential of Scotland's towns.

With a few notable exceptions such as the COSLA Small Towns Group, there has been only limited interest by policy makers in the fate of Scotland's towns. Apart from the '*Scottish Small Towns Report: 2007 – 2013*' there has been very little systematic analysing and assessing the state of Scotland's towns and the future development challenges they face.

This report reviews the policy context in Scotland and recent developments from England, and offers some ideas on how best to champion Town issues with the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament to influence policy development and secure a more joined up approach across all portfolios.

2. THE CHANGING CONTEXT: EMERGING ISSUES

This chapter reviews the changes to Government policy and approach since the Scottish elections of 7th May 2007. It reviews the new Government's policy programme and examines the implications for the sustainability and growth of Scotland's towns. It covers:

- Scottish Government Commitments
 - The Scottish Spending Review 2007
 - Developing National Outcomes
- The new relationship with Local Government
 - Lessons from England - Strategies and reviews

The new policy objectives of the Scottish Government inform what new policies will be designed to achieve and this raises issues around:

- Interpretation of what the Government is looking for;
- Engagement in developing the detail of the new agenda;
- Alignment of objectives of the Small Towns Group with those of the Scottish Government.

The policy agenda of the new Scottish Government heralds major change to the physical landscape in Scotland. The most significant set of decisions are set out in the Scottish Budget Spending Review 2007 (SR07) published in November 2007

which details how the different objectives are to be realised through the Government's programme, its three year spending commitments, its legislation and strategies. SR07 includes a number of specific references or commitments related to towns.

Importantly, SR07 applied the five themes of government (Wealthy and Fair, Healthy, Safe and Strong, Smart, Green) to portfolios and policies, together with starting to build a stronger role for, and relationship with, Local Government. The negotiation of Single Outcome Agreements with each of the 32 Local Authorities agreed as part of the concordat between the Scottish Government and COSLA raises opportunities for how town development might be addressed within the new political agenda.

As this study shows, there are gaps in the application of Scottish Government policy on towns and a general gap in understanding of the spatial impact of policy. While the recent steps to enhance the ability of Local Government to act locally are to be welcomed. The 'baseline' for assessing the impact and outcomes of that new local action is not clear. The following two chapters consider this issue in more depth.

Whilst the Scottish Government has a commitment to further decentralise power from the centre and Local Government to local communities, principally through Community Councils, it remains to be seen how this commitment is to be put into practice and the implications this might have for the development of the small towns agenda.

3. SUMMARY OF THE CHANGING POLICY ENVIRONMENT FOR TOWNS

This chapter provides an overview and summary of the comprehensive and detailed review of Government policies impacting upon towns which were carried out for this study. It shows all the five Strategic themes or objectives adopted by the Scottish Government and almost all areas of Government and Government policy have an impact on the context for the development of towns in Scotland.

However, there has been no attempt by the current or previous Scottish Governments to produce a substantive strategy or policy for towns and few examples of the role of towns or the impact of policies on towns being identified explicitly in policies. For example, the Climate Change Programme 2006, National Transport Strategy 2006, Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, Planning reforms 2006, Regeneration Statement 2006 and Local Government Act 2003 all make statutory demands on Community Planning Partners, Local Government and the wider public sector to deliver sustainable development. However, these strategies do not consider the needs of towns specifically.

Since Devolution in 1999 there has been no consideration of the needs of towns as a specific focus of policy intervention, though many national policies have implications for, or impact upon towns. Very few policies have considered their impact on towns in Scotland, there is thus a 'spatial gap' to policy making in Scotland; a gap which the Small Towns Group is well placed to press for being closed.

The policy context in Scotland has evolved substantially since 3rd May 2007 with the publication of various Scottish Government policy papers and consultation papers including the consultation on housing policy, '*Firm Foundations*' (Oct 2007), and the '*Government Economic Strategy*' (Nov 2007). Within these and other papers there is evidence of a growing focus by the Scottish Government on the 'built environment', though it can be argued that the spatial focus of Government policy remains relatively undeveloped.

The policy issues for supporting the built environment and towns are interconnected with the Scottish Government's focus on the five Strategic themes for Government. The links can be shown as follows:

- **wealthy and fair:** areas are regenerated to create attractive, connected places as part of a flourishing and diverse local economy, using planning and transport policies with programmes of funding and spatial intervention;
- **healthy:** health policies and investment in quality housing to create a sense of wellbeing;
- **safe and strong:** places that are safe and communities are empowered to improve their built environment;
- **smart:** education and learning policies that contribute to economic growth and establish skills for delivering regeneration;
- **green:** policies for the urban environment support improved physical and environmental development, through planning and investment in attractive streetscapes.

The summary of the comprehensive policy review undertaken for this study covers ten key policy themes.

3.1 Statistics, Typologies and Definitions of Towns

This section reviewed a range of issues arising from statistics and the typologies and definitions of towns including:

- National Statistics and High Level Summary of Statistics
- Population Estimates for Localities
- The Scottish Urban- Rural Classification 2007-2008
- The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Recommendations from this section of the report included that the Small Towns Group should:

- Seek Scottish Government support for the development of and/ or support for an independent research resource that would provide evidence based information on Scotland's towns, including the development of High Level Statistics to enable the tracing of trends relating to the quality of 'place';
- Make the case to the Scottish Government for a revised Urban – Rural Classification that is based on a more graded settlement population threshold that would be a more representative profile of Scotland's settlement profile and give more sophistication to settlement planning;
- Press for the published form of the SIMD to go beyond the worst 15% to show the pattern of the changes in all data zones and the impact of low pay to reveal which might be areas facing decline.

3.2 Towns and Economic Policies

This section reviewed the place of towns within existing Scottish Government policies for economic growth and wealth creation, in particular the Scottish Government's Economic Strategy and draws comparison with the Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration in England.

The key recommendation from this analysis was that the Small Towns Group should press the Scottish Government to commission 'A State of Scotland's Towns Report' to start the process of examining their needs, problems, economic and social trends as well as their potential in a more holistic and comprehensive manner.

3.3 Regeneration Policy for Towns

This section addressed regeneration policies supporting city and town redevelopment including:

- Community regeneration and Regeneration Outcome Agreements;
- Urban Regeneration Companies (URCs);
- Land constraints to regeneration;
- Possible lessons from the English Experience;
- Business Improvement Districts (BIDs).

Recommendations arising from this analysis included that the Small Towns Group should:

- Consider working with one or more URC on the applicability of the lessons from the pilots to other towns;
- Address the lack of a comprehensive approach to the regeneration of Towns and press the Scottish Government to consider supporting a programme of town centre regeneration;
- Monitor the progress of BIDs

3.4 Planning, Land Use Development and the Development of Towns

This section analysed how the modernising of the planning system and National Planning Framework might impact on towns and the potential significance of integrated place making and shaping. Arising from this analysis the report made the key recommendation that the Small Towns Group should consider making representation to the Scottish Government to ensure that the development of the National Planning Framework should secure a more comprehensive overview of the place and potential of towns in Scotland and consider more substantively their infrastructure needs, alongside those of the cities and regions of Scotland.

3.5 Housing and Sustainable Communities

This section considered housing policies and in particular the implications of the Scottish Government's consultation paper, *Firm Foundations* (2007), which could have an impact on town growth and development. It highlighted that the new focus of the Scottish Government on the 'built environment' is an opportunity to address the quality of the physical environment in an integrated way.

3.6 Transport

This section examined current transport policies for supporting connections across local areas and between towns and cities as laid out in the National Transport Strategy and guidance for Regional Transport Partnerships. It highlighted that to achieve the Scottish Government's national growth objectives will require continued transport investment, to improve links and connections, all of which will add value to

new areas. The challenge for towns will be how to capture this investment value and ensure towns benefit from the faster links between towns and town and city.

The emphasis of both the National Transport Strategy and Regional Transport Strategies on connectivity between cities and towns needs to be balanced out with recognising the importance of towns as sustainable communities.

3.7 The Environment and Sustainability of Towns

This section considered the relationship between small towns and the environment and the concept of 'Green Infrastructure'. Little consideration has been given by the Scottish Government to the potential that small towns have to play in helping to meet climate change obligations (e.g. reducing the use of cars to take commuters to work and shoppers to out of town shopping centres; meeting demand for housing through bringing derelict properties back into use; and supporting 'green infrastructure').

The key recommendation from this analysis was that the Small Towns Group should consider how to develop the importance of quality 'green' environment in terms of attracting investment, improving health and improving the quality of life of towns and groups of towns in Scotland; including working with other organisations with an interest in this issue to commission research to support the development of quality 'green' environment and the 'green infrastructure' concept as it relates to towns.

3.8 Rural Development and Towns

This section examined the place of towns within current rural policies, including planning policy and the funding programmes that have been made available in recent years for rural development. It highlighted that the Government's rural strategy *Rural Scotland: A New Approach (2000)* made almost no reference to the place of towns in rural areas.

Also it included a summary of current rural policies and funding programmes that highlighted that the Scottish Government (and previously the Scottish Executive) placed a significant level of priority to rural development in contrast to small towns' development.

The key recommendation from this section was that the Small Towns Group should ensure that a 'State of Scotland's Towns' Report considers the role that towns play in supporting rural communities and whether there are any policy models or funding mechanisms for supporting rural communities that could inform the development of similar support for supporting Town development.

3.9 Culture and Tourism

This section highlighted that culture and tourism are important to Scotland's towns both from the perspective of providing a high quality of life and contributing to the economic wellbeing through providing jobs and income from visitors. The key recommendation from this analysis was that the Small Towns Group should consider pressing for a more systematic assessment of the tourism and cultural potential of Scotland's towns as part of the 'State of Scotland's Towns' Report.

3.10 Healthier and Safer Towns

This section considered the role that towns can play in helping to meet the Scottish Government's objectives relating to health and wellbeing and creating safer communities. It highlighted that all aspects of lifestyles and life circumstances impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. The quality of the built environment has a central role to play in contributing to achieving health improvement objectives, reducing inequalities and improving life circumstances. The commitment to combine health, housing and regeneration to secure good health and wellbeing may precipitate a shift in emphasis in health and housing policy. Consideration of the relationship between health and towns might be considered in more depth in the 'State of Towns Report'.

4. NEW TOOLS AND APPROACHES TO SUPPORT THE TOWNS AGENDA

This chapter explored the following issues that could provide new tools approaches to support the towns' agenda:

- The National Performance Framework;
- The enhanced role for Local Government and Community Planning;
- Strengthening the relationship between Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) and towns, town specific Performance Indicators and A State of Scotland's Towns Report;
- Lessons from the strategies and processes adopted in England including new tools for Town Assessment; Quality of Life Assessment, Market Town Health Checks and the Renaissance Towns & Cities Programme;
- The Spatial Assessment of Scottish Government Policy;
- Financing Town Development.

4.1 Scotland Performs, National Purpose and National Outcomes

All 15 of the Scottish Government's National Outcomes will impact upon towns. However, one of the national Outcomes could be seen as being directly relevant to towns: *'We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need.'* Though towns are not mentioned specifically in this Outcome it is clearly a significant hook on which the development of the small towns agenda can be hung and on which it can be tied to a specific Scottish Government priority.

None of the 45 National Indicators are exclusively focused on the needs of towns, though several have the potential to have a particular impact on them, including:

- Increase the rate of new house building;
- Increase the percentage of adults who rate their neighbourhood as a good place to live;
- Improve the state of Scotland's Historic Buildings, monuments and environment.

Arising from the review of the National Performance framework the report recommended that the Small Towns Group should consider the most appropriate indicators for using at the local level that relate to the delivery of the national outcomes and whether the national outcomes adopted so far are supportive of the aspirations of the Group for sustainable town growth.

4.2 The Enhanced Role for Local Government and Community Planning

By bringing together the various public sector agencies that have a role to play in supporting the development of towns and communities Community Planning should be a key instrument in supporting the small towns' agenda. The development of Community Planning at the community level through the engagement of communities in the Community Planning process (and potentially the development of SOAs) is potentially very significant for the development of the small towns' agenda.

As the *Small Towns Report* (2006) noted, it is a community driven, bottom up and partnership led approach to regeneration, as exemplified in the Market Towns Initiative in England, that should itself be applied to Town development. This is an approach that has been supported in previous Scottish Executive strategies, though the new SOA process presents an opportunity for closer, cross agency alignment of policies and delivery, area by area. What is currently lacking, at both a national and local level, is an explicit acknowledgement that the focus of Community Planning (and SOAs) at a town level could be a major tool in focusing public policy on meeting the needs of towns.

4.3 Strengthening the Relationship between Single Outcome Agreements and Towns

The SOAs that were developed following the SR07 and the Concordat between COSLA and the Scottish Government were based on a menu of draft Local Indicators developed by the Improvement Service for Scottish Local Government. Very few references to towns or towns' development were made in the SOAs that have been agreed between Scotland's 32 Councils and the Scottish Government. One such reference was made in the East Ayrshire SOA: *"Regenerating our towns and villages is seen as an essential component if we are to strengthen and grow our local economy."* Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders SOAs also included references to towns.

SOAs have been developed on a whole Council area basis. However, future SOAs might usefully give consideration to a number of approaches and national 'asks' that would assist to draw out the particular needs of towns. SOAs provide the opportunity to consider the development of outcome measures or indicators that are related to the sustainability and development of towns. These could be based around Area Profiles for towns.

The report makes several recommendations relating to the SOA process, including that the Small Towns Group should:

- Engage with the Improvement Service with a view to the development of tools that will address the issue of how to monitor the impact and effectiveness of town development through SOAs. In particular this should include consideration of whether there might be scope within SOAs to support the development of 'whole town action plans';
- Work with the Improvement Service to develop a suite of Performance Indicators that can trace the development of towns, support the development of SOAs and underpin the use of Town Health Checks and Town Action Plans based on Area profiles.

4.4 Lessons from Strategies and Processes Adopted in England

The development of Community Planning and SOAs in Scotland mirrors many of the developments that have taken place in England in recent years. The report provides a comprehensive review of the different approaches that have been developed in England around the objectives of focussing on how local government addresses the key objectives of providing value for money, accountability and community engagement. These include:

- Local Strategic Partnerships and the Local Area Agreement and Comprehensive Area Assessment processes;
- Quality of Life Assessments;
- Markey Town Health Checks and Action Plans;
- The Renaissance Towns and Cities programme.

The report recommends that the Town Health Check and Action Plan model should be promoted as a means by which the Community Planning process, SOAs and Development Plans might be closely aligned and directed to secure the future potential of towns.

4.5 The Spatial Assessment of Scottish Government Policy

One of the conclusions from the review of current policies influencing towns is of the existing 'spatial' gap in Scottish public policy. The report highlights that the need to press for more systematic analysis of the spatial impact of new policies. This would help to enable an earlier understanding of the likely impact of new policy on towns. This is particularly important for economic development, regeneration, planning, housing and transport.

4.6 Financing Town Development

The context for a new approach to funding the development of town policy is becoming more difficult. The current financial downturn is reducing the finance available for private sector partners' investment in business estates, town centre development and housing investment, even where a demonstrable demand exists.

A specific area in which the Small Towns Group might seek to exert influence at both the central and local government level is in relation funding decisions. Are issues of town development taken into account within the range of Scottish Government funded grant programmes and is there scope to reduce overlaps, duplication and complexity across such programmes to support town growth in a more focused way than hitherto?

5. PRESENTING ARGUMENTS TO SECURE INFLUENCE

This chapter considers how best to build support for the case for towns with Government and within Parliament including:

- Influencing – developing an advocacy strategy;
- Building understanding of the case for Scotland's small towns;
- Establishing an Alliance for Scotland's Towns;
- Using the Parliament effectively to promote the small towns agenda;

- Engaging with Political Parties and the Political Groups in the Scottish Parliament.

5.1 Influencing – Developing an Advocacy Strategy

Securing influence takes time and sustained engagement. One-off submissions, meetings and correspondence rarely secure the sort of influence necessary to influence or change policy.

Indirect influence is achievable and important. It creates the conditions through which direct active relationships can be more effective and have greater impact.

The report recommends that the Small Towns Group should agree an Advocacy Strategy with short, medium and long term priorities for engagement with decision makers. The primary objectives for an advocacy strategy for the Small Towns Group would be to:

- Raise the profile of the Small Towns Group and towns issues across the Scottish Government and within the Scottish Parliament;
- Build awareness and recognition of the needs and opportunities in Scottish towns;
- Secure consensus on how these needs should be met and the opportunities realised through engaging with national agencies, representative bodies and national and local elected representatives who share the aim of supporting the development of small towns;
- Realise the ambitions of the Small Towns Group to become a stakeholder for government.

5.2 Building Understanding of the Case for Scotland's Towns

Central to securing influence is to understand how the administration works; both at the political level and the administrative level. Systematic engagement is essential to secure policy intervention as more than one Directorate have policies that impact upon Scottish towns. In seeking to engage with the Scottish Government, the Small Towns Group needs to present clear, crisp and succinct arguments that

- Show clearly why Scottish towns matter for the future of Scotland;
- Show the relationship to the five Strategic themes established by the Scottish Government and the cross portfolio links, showing why towns matter to policy success and the delivery of Government policy;
- Show why the policy gaps should be closed and the difference that supporting towns would make to them and to Scotland.

5.3 Establishing an Alliance for Scotland's Towns

Collaboration is the best way to show that there is an issue or idea which Government or Parliamentarians should take seriously.

The Small Towns Group should identify and engage with potential allies in making the case for small towns to the Scottish Government with a view to establishing an Alliance for Scotland's Towns. Building an Alliance beyond the current Small Towns

Group and Local Government is vital if the case for supporting Scotland's towns is to be made effectively.

5.4 Using the Scottish Parliament to Promote the Case for Towns

Engaging with the Scottish Parliament can have a real impact on policy. With the current Parliamentary arithmetic the importance of the Scottish Parliament as a forum has increased.

The Association of Town Centre Managers (ATCM) is working with MSPs to establish a Cross Party Group on Town Centres. The Small Towns Group should liaise with the ATCM to ensure that the Cross Party Group has a broad enough remit to cover all town development issues and should join the Group.

Also the Small Towns Group should consider raising the awareness of the Scotland's towns within the Committees of the Scottish Parliament by:

- Contributing evidence to Committee enquiries;
- Developing a relationship with the committee clerks; as these are the people who help shape the agendas and determine who might be invited to give evidence;
- Pressing for enquiries on issues of significance to towns.

5.5 Engaging with Political Parties in the Scottish Parliament

This section of the report highlights the extensive commitments to towns in the political party manifestos for the May 2007 Scottish Parliament elections.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The report contains 49 recommendations for the Small Towns Group to take forward. The recommendations are re-presented in the final chapter under four broad headings:

- Improving the information base for the case for Scotland's small towns and developing innovative approaches and good practice;
- National Outcomes, Single Outcome Agreements and small towns;
- Government policy and guidance (including funding);
- Advocacy and building an Alliance for Scotland's Towns.

The recommendations have been accorded one of three levels of priority – High, Medium or Low – based on factors such as importance and significance to developing the Small Towns Group's agenda, timescale and relevance. The recommendations given a 'High' priority are those which the Small Towns Group need to prioritise in order to have the greatest potential impact.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Remit

Adrian Colwell Associates and Hexagon Research and Consulting were commissioned by the COSLA Small Towns Group to undertake a review and evaluation of the policy context for Scottish towns and to identify the potential for more integrated support from the Scottish Government.

The objectives of the study were to provide the Small Towns Group with:

- Options and recommendations for the Small Towns Group to take forward its work to promote the interests of towns;
- Advice on the next steps.

This report builds on the '*Scottish Small Towns Report: 2007 - 2013*' prepared by Scottish Borders Council, COSLA Small Towns Group and the South of Scotland Alliance in 2006. '*Scottish Small Towns: 2007 – 2013*' demonstrated that Scotland's towns are vital for the development of the economy of Scotland and made a strong case for concerted support from the Scottish Government to stop the decline of small towns and allow them to fulfil their potential.

The purpose of this report is to assist the Small Towns Group to take forward its work in implementing the recommendations of the 2006 report within the context of the changing policy environment since the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections.

1.2 Background

Scotland's towns are central to what Scotland is; its history, its economy, society and its future. They are an embodiment of a sense of identity; have a close association with perceptions of quality of life and where people aspire to live. However, there is a challenge to build a fuller recognition of their significance to Scotland.

Scotland's towns require dynamic policies to support them as places to live, work and visit. They need policies and interventions to support their growth; renew and regenerate them; and to re-establish them as a central policy feature of Scotland.

Towns are an essential part of Scotland's connectivity. Transport connections, business and service growth fit together. Towns are critical 'vectors of growth' that have a fundamental part to play in supporting regional growth. Towns are the places where many policies converge, yet their specific policy needs go unaddressed.

Towns have occasionally featured within strategies from the Scottish Government, but not in a systematic way. There is a need for thinking that breaks out of the exclusive focus on using our cities as drivers of growth, in order to examine and secure the untapped potential of Scotland's towns.

In welcoming the launch of the *Scotland's Town's website*¹ (in a statement made on the website) in 2008, John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth put on record the Scottish Government's recognition of the importance of towns:

¹ <http://www.scotlandstowns.org>

“Scotland’s town and city centres are the beating heart of our economy. The businesses on high streets up and down Scotland are crucial drivers that can help keep our economy moving – particularly at a time when Scotland is feeling the effects of the global downturn.

“The Scottish Government is determined to support these small and medium sized businesses through the current tough conditions – and help them to flourish and grow both now and when the full effects of recovery begin to kick in.”

The aim of the website is to allow town centre practitioners to share good practice, information and guidance on Scotland's town centres and high street. However, it is noteworthy that the website's 'Studies and Reports' section contains only four reports, highlighting the lack of published work on the role and impact of Scotland's towns.

In recent years there have been a number of reports published which examine the state of towns in Britain, from the New Economics Foundation (NEF) report into 'Ghost Town Britain' (2002) to the most recent Work Foundation Report: 'How Can Cities Thrive in the Changing Economy?' (2008). These reports paint a picture of the changing fortune of the town centre and how towns are being shaped by, and are responding to, global economic challenges.

In contrast, the situation in Scotland is largely unknown. With a few notable exceptions such as the COSLA Small Towns Group, there has been only limited interest by policy makers in the fate of Scotland's towns. Apart from the 'Scottish Small Towns Report: 2007 – 2013' there has been very little systematic analysing and assessing the state of Scotland's towns and the future development challenges they face.

As this report will show, while there are a wide range of policies that impact upon towns, consideration of the spatial impact of Scottish Government policy on towns is rare and there is little Scottish Government policy of direct relevance to towns.

This report urges a similar level of consideration of the place of towns in Scotland's economy and analysis of the place of towns in Scotland and the forces shaping their economic, social and environmental future as is evident in England.

In 2002 NEF published 'Ghost Town Britain', which suggested that the UK was rapidly losing the local shops and services that have been the economic backbone, and an essential part of the social "glue", of rural and urban communities across Britain.

It noted that in place of 'real local' shops has come a package of "identikit" chain stores replicating on the nation's high streets. Many of the town centres that have been "regenerated" have lost their traditional facades as local building materials are replaced by identical branded storefronts. As a result the individual character of many towns is being lost; while the lack of diversity ultimately leads to a loss of true choice for consumers.

NEF argued that the homogenisation of high streets was not a benign or inevitable product of 'progress' but due to planning and regeneration decisions that have created a retail infrastructure hostile to small, independent businesses.

NEF recorded some dramatic changes. Between 1995 and 2000, the UK lost 20 per cent of some of its most vital institutions – corner shops, grocers, high street banks, post offices and pubs – amounting to a cumulative loss of over 30,000 local economic outlets. A further 28,000 outlets stood to be lost by 2005 and on current trends the number of local outlets will have dropped by nearly a third in the two decades to 2010.

The result of these changes was described as being ‘Ghost Town Britain’, where communities and neighbourhoods in core urban as well as rural areas are without easy access to essential elements of both the economy and the social fabric of sustainable communities.

The more recent Work Foundation report *‘How Can Cities Thrive in the Changing Economy (2008)’* reveals a widening gap between what it described as the ‘thriving’ and the ‘striving’. With the financial markets crisis hitting hard and increasing fears of a significant recession, there will soon be greater disparities between what the report describes as ‘resurgent’ cities and towns with flexible, high value added labour markets and those that are ‘stuck’ with predominantly low-skilled jobs. The report concludes that those cities and towns that need regeneration most are least likely to get it as the economy continues to slow. Therefore, already struggling areas may be left further behind in the recession.

For example, in the early 19th century Hastings was among the most fashionable holiday destinations of the metropolitan set, but is now home to one of England’s most embattled local economies. The Work Foundation study into 56 cities and towns shows Hastings shares the need for a drastic change of fortune with other coastal communities such as Birkenhead, Blackpool, Grimsby, Hull, Liverpool, Middlesbrough and Plymouth. In contrast, cities such as Manchester, Reading and Newcastle have made substantial gains, joining “knowledge economy” powerhouses such as Oxford, Cambridge and York, where public spending on education, medicine and sciences have contributed hugely to success.

The report noted:

"Some big cities have clearly bounced back from the decline of manufacturing and have galvanised themselves to be thriving, productive 21st-century places. But look at the next tier and political alarm ought to set in. The 'stuck' cities have rising proportions of people in low socio-economic groups and very low rates of employment in better-paying professional jobs ... many refuse to recognise that their economic future relies on trade links with a neighbouring city that, despite being an economic rival, is now thriving. And they are often blighted by either chaotic or complacent leadership."

These reports and the issues they raise highlight the need for a thorough examination of the state of Scotland’s towns and how existing or new policies might better support their sustainability and renewal.

Although, in recent years the state of Scotland’s towns has not been high up the local or national political agenda it should be noted that the political parties did put forward extensive commitments on town renewal at the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections (see Appendix 1).

More recently, the small towns featured prominently in the political bargaining between the SNP minority Government and the opposition parties in the run up the

Scottish Parliament with the Government conceding to include £60m for a Towns Regeneration Fund in the 2009/10 budget.

The state of Scotland's small towns was raised in a speech to the Scottish Parliament by Chris Harvie MSP on 14th May 2008, when he called for a series of 'clone' and 'home' town studies to examine how much damage is done when the supermarkets and major high street chains come to dominate a community. Harvie noted:

"Melrose is what the Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland calls a home town' - good butchers, bakers, fish shop, greengrocery, wine merchants, ironmongers and - no coincidence - excellent small hotels and restaurants. Some 80% of the shops on its high street are independent, with good public transport and plenty of car parking. Of how many Scots towns can this be said?"

As the Herald newspaper recorded (15th May 2008) 'He contrasted this with clone towns', saying:

"The high street is under challenge from edge-of-town' shopping... (and asked)...."Can't we have a trial in which home town' is matched against clone town'? The internal patterns of commerce and society within both can be measured so we can get a picture of the economic dynamics which hold communities together, or pull them apart. There isn't anything inevitable about what's happening."

This report addresses some of these issues, though it is a policy evaluation not an evaluation of individual towns and town types. It is intended to enable the COSLA Small Towns Group to present arguments to the Scottish Government that will raise the profile and recognition of Scottish towns and the issues they face.

1.3 This Report

This report aims to build on the momentum generated by the 'Scottish Small Towns Report: 2007 – 2013' in the context of:

- A new government with new priorities;
- The concordat between the Scottish Government and Local Government;
- The development of Single Outcome Agreements.

This report reviews the policy context in Scotland and recent developments from England, and offers some ideas on how best to champion Town issues with the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament to influence policy development and secure a more joined up approach across all portfolios.

The report's findings and recommendations are set out in the following chapters:

Chapter 2: The Changing Context: Emerging Issues

This chapter reviews the changes to Government policy and approach since the Scottish elections of 7th May 2007 and the election of the minority SNP Government.

Chapter 3: Summary of the Changing Policy Environments for Towns

This chapter summarises the detailed review of policies relevant to towns in Scotland and possible matters for the Small Towns Group to seek as a national 'ask' through the new concordat between the Scottish Government and Local Government.

Chapter 4: New Tools and Approaches to Support Town Development

This chapter covers Single Outcome Agreements and the need for a Case for Scotland's Towns Report and Town Health Checks. It also considers some of the new tools and financial instruments available to support town sustainability and development.

Chapter 5: Presenting Arguments to Secure Influence

This chapter covers how to engage with the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament, reviewing the current position of the political parties on towns' instruments.

2. THE CHANGING CONTEXT: EMERGING ISSUES

This chapter covers how the context for the development of towns in Scotland changed on the 3rd May 2007. It reviews the new Government's policy programme and examines the implications for the sustainability and growth of Scotland's towns. It covers:

- Scottish Government Commitments
 - The Scottish Spending Review 2007
 - Developing National Outcomes
- The new relationship with Local Government
 - Lessons from England - Strategies and reviews

2.1 Scottish Government Commitments

The context for the development of towns in Scotland changed on 3rd May 2007.

The fact that the new SNP Scottish Government is a minority administration puts a premium on it having to work with other political parties and other agencies and organisations outside the Scottish Parliament in order to implement its programme for government. The new Government, even more than previous administrations, needs active partners which means adopting an approach that is informed by listening and working with other bodies.

What is clear is that the SNP has continued many of the policies put in place by the previous Scottish Executive, building on them where appropriate and refocusing where necessary.

Whilst the Government's programme is informed by the SNP's manifesto commitments, the detail of many of these commitments was not fully developed. Therefore, there is a substantial opportunity to present ideas and build a working relationship with the new Government on the place of towns in building a successful Scotland.

Despite the lack of explicit references to towns *per se*, in the SNP manifesto it did contain several policy commitments that could affect the way in which towns might develop. There are commitments which will affect both people *and* places – commitments to renewal of the physical fabric which fit with people's aspirations for their families and where they live.

As with existing policies carried over from the previous administration, very few new commitments actually consider the policy impact on towns, or on specific geographical areas. However, taken collectively the Government's election manifesto commitments could have implications for how policies affecting towns might develop.

The following table provides a summary of the SNP's manifesto commitments that might have an impact on the place of towns in Scotland. Small towns can play an important role or have an impact on each of these commitments.

SNP Manifesto Commitments Relating to Towns	
Clearing our transport arteries	Work closely with Regional Transport partnerships to ensure long-term planning for future road improvements.
Economy Targets	<p>Growth must include the whole society and not come at the expense of our environment. We set ourselves a new commitment to deliver high levels of sustainable growth for Scotland, with three Scottish standards – solidarity, cohesion and sustainability:</p> <p>Solidarity – overall wealth and the proportion of national wealth held by each of the lowest six income deciles to increase.</p> <p>Cohesion – the wealth of every region to increase, and for there to be a 10 per cent reduction in GDP (gross value added) disparity per head between the richest and poorest parts of Scotland.</p>
Energy Saving	Establish an expert panel to report on the changes we need to make to building regulations in Scotland to increase energy efficiency and encourage more local energy production.
Greener Scotland	Protecting and enhancing Scotland's environment will be central priorities for the SNP in government. In government we will introduce a Climate Change Bill with mandatory carbon reduction targets of 3% per annum and, also set a long-term target of cutting emissions by a minimum of 80% by 2050 – above the UK target of 60%.
Housing	Recognise the acute shortage of affordable homes in many areas of Scotland. Value the community rented sector provided by local authorities and housing associations and will assist them to identify need and ensure that the house building and improvement programme is appropriate to local needs.
Integrated Public Transport	Bring together Scotland's transport stakeholders to take forward measures to ensure greater integration of our public transport network and will put forward for consideration the development of an integrated payment card.
More Community Level Management and Ownership	Consult on measures to enable new models of community management of facilities within local authority control. Also consider ways to transfer under-used public assets into community ownership without the need for ministerial approval.
New Powers for Communities (Communities in Control)	Opt for de-centralist policy solutions that devolve power to local level wherever that is possible and seek ways to devolve power from local authorities to community level. Particularly want to empower Scots living in areas of deprivation. Pilot a community empowerment scheme giving deprived communities the ability to opt for empowered status.
A skilled workforce	Work with national agencies, training agencies, the voluntary sector and local community enterprises to promote activities which help increase the employability of individuals.

The new policy objectives of the Scottish Government inform what new policies will be designed to achieve and this raises issues around:

- Interpretation of what the Government is looking for;
- Engagement in developing the detail of the new agenda;
- Alignment of objectives of the Small Towns Group with those of the Scottish Government.

These issues are explored in the following chapters of this report.

The new Scottish Government has declared its commitment to “*working consistently and in an integrated way to make Scotland wealthier and fairer; smarter; healthier; safer and stronger; and greener.*” It has sought to support this commitment by bringing about the greater integration of policies across the whole of government in two ways.

Firstly it re-organised the administration by reducing the number of Executive departments and creating a smaller number of arguably more focussed Directorates. Included within this has been the abolition of the Development Department with its functions redistributed across the Executive.

At the same time it reduced the number of ‘Cabinet’ posts in the Government by creating new ‘super’ Ministries. The new responsibilities have brought together economic growth with the co-ordination of infrastructure investment, transport and land use planning in one directorate along with climate change and have combined health and wellbeing with housing and other communities’ related responsibilities.

Secondly, the Scottish Government adopted a single, central purpose to guide its overall approach and the development of all new policies: ‘*To focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth*’.

This overall purpose was combined with the adoption of five strategic objectives to which all policy will be directed and which collectively establish the purpose of the Scottish Government. The five themes are for Scotland to become:

- *Wealthier and fairer* – enable businesses and people to increase their wealth and more people to share fairly in that wealth;
- *Healthier* – help people to sustain and improve their health, especially in disadvantaged communities, ensuring better, local and faster access to health care;
- *Safer and stronger* – help local communities to flourish, becoming stronger, safer place to live, offering improved opportunities and a better quality of life;
- *Smarter* – expand opportunities for Scots to succeed from nurture through to life long learning ensuring higher and/ or widely shared achievements; and
- *Greener* – improve Scotland's natural and built environment and the sustainable use and enjoyment of it.

These five strategic objectives or themes interrelate and have driven the Government’s approach to strategy and policy formulation. They now feature consistently across all new strategies and policies from the Scottish Government.

The importance of the five strategic themes and how they lead to policy being developed in an integrated way is shown in the '*Economic Strategy*' (Nov 2007) and the Housing Consultation, '*Firm Foundations*' (Oct 2007) which are explored further in the policy review section of this report.

The Scottish Government is also looking to secure more effective government through 'cross compliance', ensuring that organisations deliver more than one outcome and a clearer organisational landscape by 'de-cluttering', to reduce the numbers of Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) and Agencies.

Understanding this new approach is of fundamental importance to understanding the new context for policy and its implementation.

The policy agenda of the new Scottish Government heralds major change to the physical landscape in Scotland. The most significant set of decisions are set out in the Scottish Budget Spending Review 2007 published in November 2007 which details how the different objectives are to be realised through the Government's programme, its three year spending commitments, its legislation and strategies.

2.1.1 The Scottish Budget Spending Review 2007 (SR07)

Importantly, SR07 applied the five themes of government to portfolios and policies, together with starting to build a stronger role for, and relationship with, Local Government.

The negotiation of Single Outcome Agreements with each of the 32 Local Authorities agreed as part of the concordat between the Scottish Government and COSLA raises opportunities for how town development might be addressed within the new political agenda.

SR07 focused on achieving outcomes with less ring-fencing than before. This decision builds on the commitment made in *People and Places: Regeneration Policy Statement* (2006) to '*realign and consolidate the range of funding streams that support regeneration to support strategic decisions in the spending review*'.

The Community Regeneration Fund (CRF) has been devolved to Community Planning Partnerships with the aim of making Community Planning more strategic. In many respects this approach follows the *Scottish Parliament Finance Committee's* recommendations on deprivation expenditure and in particular its proposals for a Single Deprivation Fund to tackle both area and individual deprivation. Devolving the CRF, together with the outcome based SOAs (through the new Fairer Scotland Fund) aims to secure better co-ordination of area based initiatives with initiatives geared towards individuals and families.

SR07 also placed an emphasis on supporting the 'built environment', raising questions over investment, design, the impact of transport spend on place-making and the importance of the relationship of the 'built environment' with health and wellbeing.

These developments potentially have enormous implications for the approach to local regeneration in general and specifically for towns' related policies.

SR07 includes a number of specific references or commitments related to towns including:

- *'If Scotland is to derive full benefit from its highly educated and skilled workforce, we also need to build on and broaden areas of comparative advantage in the global economy. This means expanding established areas of success (e.g. financial services and energy) and facilitating and accelerating emerging areas (e.g. creative industries and life sciences). To support this dynamism, we will establish a programme of activity to boost and promote Scotland's creative industries and hubs for cultural activity, developing Scotland's towns and cities as key drivers of cultural and economic growth.'* (P13)
- *'We must break the link between alcohol, violence and disorder. Far too many of our town and city centres are blighted by violence and disorder which is often fuelled by the over-consumption of alcohol. We will take steps to end the culture of deep-discounting and irresponsible promotions, and we will consider the feasibility of minimum pricing. These early actions will provide a platform for a long-term alcohol strategy that will seek to change the culture of alcohol consumption in Scotland'.* (P35)
- *'Our built environment has an impressive heritage, and we will work with our built and natural heritage partners to preserve this as part of the future fabric of Scottish towns and cities. Protecting and managing the environment in this way will ensure that people in Scotland can enjoy our historical, built and natural landscapes now and in the future. We will promote the responsible use and enjoyment of this asset, encouraging greater public access to and involvement in Scotland's natural and built environments.'* (P 42)
- *'The Forestry Commission Scotland regulates and supports the private forestry sector, promotes the expansion and sustainable management of Scotland's woodlands, supports projects which reduce the impact of timber transport operations on public roads and on communities, contributes to the Scottish Climate Change Programme, and increases the contribution of woodlands to the quality of our towns and cities through the Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) initiative.'* (P138)

These policy issues are explored in more detail in the following chapter.

2.1.2 Developing National Outcomes

SR07 does not just set out new policies and financial allocations to portfolios it sets out how the five themes of government are to be applied and measured.

'We are moving the whole of government to an outcomes-focused approach to performance. This means that we will be judged – as we should be – on the results that we achieve; results which reflect real and meaningful improvements in public services and quality of life for people in Scotland.'
(P45)

The Scottish Government has set a purpose to which all of its activities will be directed: *'To focus Government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.'*

This new purpose for government is to be delivered through a set of high level targets covering 'Growth, Productivity, Participation, Population, Solidarity, Cohesion and Sustainability.' These are set out in detail in the Scottish Government's 'Government Economic Strategy' (Nov 2007).

The five themes or Strategic Objectives for government – ‘Wealthier & Fairer, Smarter, Healthier, Safer & Stronger and Greener’ – are to be secured by delivery of a set of policies that will achieve a set of 15 National Outcomes (SR07 P46), which include two that are of particular relevance to towns:

- *‘We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need’, and*
- *‘We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations’.*

SR07 also sets a series of 45 National Indicators and Targets (SR07 P47) which are to be negotiated through the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) process between the Scottish Government and local authorities; including the following three that are critical for towns:

- *Increase the percentage of adults who rate their neighbourhood as a good place to live;*
- *Improve the state of Scotland’s Historic Buildings, monuments and environment;*
- *Increase the proportion of journeys to work made by public or active transport.*

However, many of the other 42 National Indicators and Targets will also influence the context for the sustainability and growth of towns.

The National Outcomes and Indicators are expected to evolve over time as experience is gained of this new process. It remains unclear what, if any, consultation and involvement will take place with stakeholders to assist in revising the National Outcomes and Indicators.

Recommendation 1

The Small Towns Group should aim to influence the nature and content of the negotiations that might take place between the Scottish Government and local authorities to ensure that the needs and interests of towns are taken into account in future revisions of National Outcomes and Indicators.

2.2 The New Relationship with Local Government

The Spending Review concordat between the Scottish Government and Local Government heralds a new relationship between the two tiers of Government; a new, closer, partnership that aims to re-establish Local Government as the leader of action at the local level. A new approach is being developed to scrutiny and performance management, which is less target driven and more outcome focused than previous approaches.

The development of new Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) by Local Government within this context is seen by the Scottish Government as fundamental to the delivery of its policy objectives.

Local Government is seen by the Scottish Government as the key body for securing its five themes and the national outcomes that have been set.

Recommendation 2

Whilst support for town development is not a primary outcome indicator, there is an opportunity for the Small Towns Group to influence the content of the menu of outcomes to be agreed for the future. This should focus on showing that developing sustainable towns can be a focal point for contributing to meeting the five themes and some of the national outcomes; for example, showing how SOAs impact on, and support, Town Growth, reinforce the collaboration underway through the Community Planning process and also relate to the preparation of the new Development Plans (see Chapter 4 Tools for further details) Good practice examples of how SOAs have included outcomes and indicators that support the small towns agenda should be disseminated through the Small Towns Group.

The Scottish Government also aspires to reduce the size of central government as a whole, reducing the numbers of Agencies and NDPBs. These changes aim to make central government more strategic and effective, and to liberate local innovation and creativity by devolving power from the centre downwards. For example, it is clear that while there are projects that are of national significance, the Government can be expected to take the view that the development of towns is best led locally; while the centre should create the tools and provide the finance necessary to support local growth and development activities.

Recommendation 3

In presenting the case for Government action to support towns it will be essential to show what blockages the Small Towns Group is looking to have removed and the scale of action it has attempted through the application of Community Planning, the application of Single Outcome Agreements and Town Action Plans etc.

However, as the policy review carried out for this study shows, there are gaps in the application of Scottish Government policy on towns and a general gap in understanding of the spatial impact of policy. While the recent steps to enhance the ability of Local Government to act locally are to be welcomed. The 'baseline' for assessing the impact and outcomes of that new local action is not clear. The following two chapters consider this issue in more depth.

There may be lessons to be learnt from the approach taken in England where major reforms have been adopted that aim to strengthen the role of local government and its relationship with place. For example, the *Lyons Review: Well Placed to Deliver? Shaping the Pattern of Government Services (2004)* published by the Treasury acknowledged the role of local government in England in place making.

Sir Michael Lyons noted at the launch of the Review that:

"I believe that local government is an essential part of our system of government today. Local government's place-shaping role - using powers and influence creatively to promote the wellbeing of a community and its citizens - is crucial to help improve satisfaction and prosperity through greater local choice and flexibility.

"In my final report, I call for a new partnership between central and local government. This needs to be based on changes in behaviours from all tiers of government to achieve a stronger relationship - creating a shared ambition for the future. Central government needs to leave more room for local discretion and recognise the value of local choice; while local government needs to strengthen its own confidence and capability, engage more

effectively with local people, make best use of existing powers, and stop asking for central direction.”

He also made reference to “*strong, confident local government with a good range of powers to tailor its place-shaping behaviours to improve wellbeing and prosperity in every community*”. Chapter 2 of his report on the role of Local Government includes the role of place shaping and supporting the wellbeing of communities, which he saw as vital to building a renewed sense of local identity and aspiration for an area. This is an approach that is echoed in the Concordat between the Scottish Government and COSLA.

The *Lyons Review* acknowledged and highlighted the placemaking role of local government in England. However, this was accompanied by the creation of a single national agency combining English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation – *Homes and Communities Agency* as the national housing and regeneration agency for England, with an annual investment budget of more than £5bn. This was at the same time as the equivalent national body in Scotland – Communities Scotland – was abolished, with concerns that this may limit future support available to local partners in housing and community regeneration.

Recommendation 4

The Small Towns Group should consider the lessons from the approach being taken in England that aims to strengthen the role of local government and its relationship with place whilst also establishing the Homes and Communities Agency.

The British Urban Regeneration Association (BURA) has made some useful observations on the approach being taken in England. In ‘*Local Government, New Localism and the Delivery of Regeneration*’ (2007) it noted ‘*New Localism*’ is a term that, albeit imperfectly defined, is the umbrella term given to the movement calling for the decentralisation of power from Westminster to local areas.’ BURA argued that central government retains responsibility for standard setting and inspection in public services, but devolves managerial control and accountability to the local level. However, the debate over decentralisation is no longer confined to its traditional boundaries about the correct balance of power between central and local government. It has expanded to include consideration of alternative forms of local service provision and community engagement. It has implications for how localities can be re-empowered to deliver development to best effect.

Whilst the Scottish Government has a commitment to further decentralise power from the centre and Local Government to local communities, principally through Community Councils, it remains to be seen how this commitment is to be put into practice and the implications this might have for the development of the small towns agenda.

Recommendation 5

The Small Towns Group should monitor the development of any proposals to decentralise power to Community Councils and consider the potential impact on small towns.

3. SUMMARY OF THE CHANGING POLICY ENVIRONMENT FOR TOWNS

This chapter provides an overview and summary of the comprehensive and detailed review of Government policies impacting upon towns which was carried out for this study. It shows that all the five Strategic themes or objectives adopted by the Scottish Government and almost all areas of Government and Government policy have an impact on the context for the development of towns in Scotland.

However, there has been no attempt by the current or previous Scottish Governments to produce a substantive strategy or policy for towns and few examples of the role of towns or the impact of policies on towns being identified explicitly in policies.

For example, the Climate Change Programme 2006, National Transport Strategy 2006, Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, Planning reforms 2006, Regeneration Statement 2006 and Local Government Act 2003 all make statutory demands on Community Planning Partners, Local Government and the wider public sector to deliver sustainable development. However, these strategies do not consider the needs of towns specifically.

Since Devolution in 1999 there has been no consideration of the needs of towns as a specific focus of policy intervention, though many national policies have implications for, or impact upon towns. Very few policies have considered their impact on towns in Scotland, there is thus a 'spatial gap' to policy making in Scotland; a gap which the Small Towns Group is well placed to press for being closed.

The policy context in Scotland has evolved substantially since 3 May 2007 with the publication of various Scottish Government policies and consultation papers including the consultation on housing policy, *'Firm Foundations'* (Oct 2007), the *Government Economic Strategy* (Nov 2007), and the *Scottish Budget Spending Review 2007* (Nov 2007).

Within these and other papers there is evidence of a growing focus by the Scottish Government on the 'built environment', though it can be argued that the spatial focus of Government policy remains relatively undeveloped.

Defining the 'built environment' requires a focus on the quality of buildings and public open space, but other policy drivers too. Policy for the built environment in Scotland is undeveloped, but references to the built environment are now appearing in Scottish Government documents, *Firm Foundations*, *SR07 and the Economic Strategy*.

The importance of the planning system to securing this agenda is revealed by the comment in the Scottish Government's *'Government Economic Strategy'* (2007) *'Achieving our purpose in government requires a planning framework that both protects the quality of Scotland's natural and built environment as an asset for sustainable economic growth'* How and where we live are seen as important and is seen as bound up with the five themes for Government action.

Quality places also require good design and strong, integrated communities, elements that have an important contribution to a better quality of life. High quality, well designed places and innovative public artwork support economic development

and regeneration, creating distinctive public spaces that improve quality of life, boost tourism and in turn encourage further investment.

Development to create a quality built environment and 'quality places' has become one of the key objectives for the Scottish Government and this could/ should have implications for the development of the small towns' agenda.

Developments that create a quality built environment require close links between policies on planning, health and the environment, together with an engagement with the streetscape aspects of transport. The policy issues for supporting the built environment and towns are interconnected with the Scottish Government's focus on the five Strategic themes for Government.

The links can be shown as follows:

- **wealthy and fair:** areas are regenerated to create attractive, connected places as part of a flourishing and diverse local economy, using planning and transport policies with programmes of funding and spatial intervention;
- **healthy:** health policies and investment in quality housing to create a sense of wellbeing;
- **safe and strong:** places that are safe and communities are empowered to improve their built environment;
- **smart:** education and learning policies that contribute to economic growth and establish skills for delivering regeneration;
- **green:** Policies for the urban environment support improved physical and environmental development, through planning and investment in attractive streetscapes.

The following summary of the comprehensive policy review undertaken for this study covers the following policy themes:

- Statistics, typologies and definitions of towns;
- Towns and economic policies;
- Regeneration policy for towns;
- Planning, land use development and the development of towns;
- Housing and Sustainable Communities;
- Transport;
- The Environment and sustainability of towns;
- Rural development and towns;
- Culture and tourism;
- Healthier and safer towns.

3.1 Statistics, Typologies and Definitions of Towns

The detailed policy review considered a range of issues arising from statistics and the typologies and definitions of towns including:

- National Statistics and High Level Summary of Statistics;
- Population Estimates for Localities;
- The Scottish Urban- Rural Classification 2007-2008;
- The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

National Statistics and High Level Summary of Statistics

The High Level Summary of Statistics was developed to present statistical trends on the main areas of Government activity in Scotland. Published for the first time in 2006 they provide a similar, concise format for each topic, presenting information graphically where possible and providing a route into more detailed statistics by listing relevant publications and related websites after each trend.

The High Level Statistics are provided for the full range of public policy areas including, Economy; Business; Labour Market; Transport and Travel; Life Long Learning; School Education; Tourism, Culture and Sport; Children; Health and Community Care; Crime and Justice; Housing; Social and Welfare; Agriculture and Fisheries; Environment; Population and Migration. However, with the exception of statistics for bus travel, there are currently no high level statistics for towns.

There is an issue for the Small Towns Group and COSLA in how the publication of the High Level Statistics aligns with the new focus on National Outcomes and Single Outcome Agreements.

Recommendation 6

The Small Towns Group should seek Scottish Government support for the development of and/ or support for an independent research resource that would provide evidence based information on Scotland's towns, improve the collection of relevant data, share best practice on performance standards and outcomes in relation to towns and identify and support opportunities for co-operation and joint working between towns. An immediate priority would be for the Scottish Government to support the development of High Level Statistics to enable the tracing of trends relating to the quality of 'place', at neighbourhood level or at the level of larger spatial units such as towns and cities. This would assist with the greater targeting of policy and the development of National and Local Indicators specific to towns that would be used to measure the outcomes from the new Towns Regeneration Fund.

Scottish Government Urban - Rural Classification

The classification distinguishes between urban, rural and remote areas within Scotland and includes two categories covering towns: 'Accessible and Remote Small Towns Settlements of between 3,000 and 10,000 people and within 30 minutes drive of a settlement of 10,000 or more.'

The Scottish Government Urban - Rural Classification derived from the desire to define Rural Scotland, not a desire to define areas which were towns; towns were merely seen as one element of the urban classification. The classification is problematic as it ignores small towns in the 2,000 – 20,000 range and therefore does not represent the settlement profile of Scotland.

Recommendation 7

The Small Towns Group should make the case to the Scottish Government for a revised Urban – Rural Classification that is based on a more graded settlement population threshold (500 – 2,000; 2,000 – 20,000; 20,000 to 50,000; 50,000 to 100,000; 100,000 to 300,000; and 300,000+) that would be a more representative profile of Scotland's settlement profile and give more sophistication to settlement planning.

The importance of these definitions has been demonstrated by how they informed policy choices taken by the last Scottish Executive to support its commitment to ensuring that rural and remote communities have their distinct needs reflected across

government policy and initiatives. However, the place of towns in a rural context was rarely considered.

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)

In developing an area-based measure of deprivation, the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation was the Scottish Executive's response to the August 2003 report 'Measuring Deprivation in Scotland: Developing a Long-Term Strategy'. SIMD was produced in 2004 and in 2006. The next update is due to take place in Autumn 2009.

The SIMD identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across Scotland. It allows effective targeting of policies and funding where the aim is to wholly or partly tackle or take account of area concentrations of multiple deprivation. The SIMD is presented at data zone level, enabling small pockets of deprivation to be identified. The data zones, which have a median population size of 769, are ranked from most deprived (1) to least deprived (6,505) on the overall SIMD and on each of the individual domains. The result is a comprehensive picture of relative area deprivation across Scotland.

The SIMD provides a *relative* measure of deprivation which means that the main output from SIMD - the SIMD ranks - can be used to compare data zones by providing a relative ranking from most deprived (rank 1) to least deprived (rank 6,505). The SIMD cannot be used to determine 'how much' more deprived one data zone is than another e.g. it is not possible to say that data zone X, ranked 50, is twice as deprived as data zone Y, ranked 100.

The SIMD can be used to identify Scotland's most deprived small areas on the overall index and each individual domain, commonly by applying a cut off such as 10%, 15% or 20%. The cut off should be informed by whether it aims to target areas with the very highest concentrations of deprivation or to be wider ranging.

However, for towns it is important to recognise that small areas of deprivation that may not be highlighted by the SIMD do exist and that they can have a major or disproportionate impact on the wellbeing of small towns.

Alongside its commitment to ending child poverty, the Scottish Government's Economic strategy solidarity golden rule is associated with the target of 'increasing overall income and the proportion of income earned by the three lowest deciles as a group by 2017. The third decile includes more pensioners and lower income working families. As was highlighted in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Findings Informing Change report, '*Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Scotland 2008* (November 2008) 'low paid workers' (defined as being paid less than £7 per hour) are spread fairly evenly through Scotland. In particular, about half are in the Central Belt region and Dundee and half are elsewhere. As a proportion of all workers employed, the areas with a relatively large proportion of low paid workers are the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway. This opens up the need to look more at deprivation and poverty in many small towns whose industrial structure pays low wages.

Recommendation 8

The Small Towns Group should consider pressing for the published form of the SIMD to go beyond the worst 15% to show the pattern of the changes in all data zones and the impact of low pay to reveal which might be areas facing decline. A comprehensive report would support the context analysis required when town health checks are conducted. (See also recommendation 34)

3.2 Towns and Economic Policies

This section reviews the place of towns within existing Scottish Government policies for economic growth and wealth creation, in particular the Scottish Government's Economic Strategy and draws comparison with the Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration in England.

The Scottish Government's Economic Strategy

The key policy objective for the Scottish Government is wealth creation and sustainable growth with the overall objectives will be driven by The Scottish Government's *Government Economic Strategy* (2007). This places an emphasis on 'place' and the important role of transport, housing and planning. It highlights the importance of regional growth and refers to towns and cities. It notes: *'The strength and quality of our cities, towns and rural areas is a huge asset. Harnessing the opportunities that our geography provides, through investment in our physical and electronic infrastructure and Scotland's planning, development and funding framework, is a critical role for government.'* However, it proposes no firm new actions to support towns and develop their economic potential.

Recommendation 9

The Small Towns Group should work through COSLA to press for the Scottish Government and Scottish Enterprise to identify the practical steps they plan to take to give life to the commitment to take a more strategic approach to the growth of Scotland's towns within the context of the Economic Strategy and to undertake special impact analysis of major policy proposals.

The recent Scottish Enterprise Report *'Understanding the role of places in city regions and rural Scotland'* (April 2008), which assesses the economic development of towns, is a good basis for considering the likely potential development of town economies based on past performance. But while the report is a useful first step it is not (nor did it claim to be) a comprehensive assessment of the state of Scotland's towns considering all economic, social and environmental factors impacting on towns, nor does it begin to consider the policy steps that may be needed to support towns to grow or arrest their decline.

While the Scottish Enterprise report on towns is a start to the process of examining the place of towns there is a need for a deeper, more comprehensive, analytical and policy response. It was also hoped that the second National Planning Framework might have gone some way to providing this overview but as section 3.4 shows, this has not happened.

Recommendation 10

The Small Towns Group should press the Scottish Government to commission 'A State of Scotland's Towns Report' to start the process of examining their needs, problems, economic and social trends as well as their potential in a more holistic and comprehensive manner.

The Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration for England

The approach taken to area development and the place of towns in England is *very* different, but has lessons for Scotland in how a more strategic approach can sit side by side with greater accountability in the process and in bringing together economic development and planning to secure improve outcomes.

The *Review of sub-national economic development and regeneration*, published by the UK Government in 2007 proposed a new clarity of roles and accountabilities, with clearer objectives, streamlined decision-making and rationalised strategies for economic development around four key themes for action:

- Empowering all local authorities to promote economic development and neighbourhood renewal;
- Supporting local authorities to work together at the sub-regional level;
- Strengthening the regional level;
- Reforming central government's relations with regions and localities.

3.3 Regeneration Policy for Towns

This section addresses regeneration policies supporting city and town redevelopment including:

- Community regeneration and Regeneration Outcome Agreements;
- Urban Regeneration Companies;
- Land constraints to regeneration;
- Possible lessons from the English Experience;
- Business Improvement Districts.

The Scottish Government has sought to renew degraded urban environments and create new economic opportunities using a variety of instruments, policies and funding. It has focused its interventions on a small number of strategic geographic priorities with targeted action to regenerate Scotland's most deprived neighbourhoods, together with funding for a wider programme of community regeneration in each Local Authority area. The Scottish Government has also acted to address land issues which can inhibit regeneration and to work to create mixed communities.

The Scottish Government has not sought to address the needs of towns specifically through these various programmes and strategies, though towns in Scotland have benefited from these interventions.

The reform of Scottish Enterprise that took place in 2008 has raised some concerns that it has created confusion and uncertainty about how local regeneration is to be supported, especially in the current climate of economic recession.

In an article entitled '*Confusion over Scottish Renewal*' in *Regeneration and Renewal* (14 November 2008) Allister Hayman reported that there is a growing feeling that the reform of Scottish Enterprise – devolving responsibility for local regeneration to local authorities – was 'botched' as it took place without adequate transfer of funding and assets and full agreement around the new split of responsibilities. He wrote:

"The Scottish Government's reform of its enterprise agency {Scottish Enterprise} has been 'botched' leaving the country's regeneration sector ill prepared to weather the economic downturn, key regeneration figures have

warned. The parties {Scottish Government and COSLA} did agree a deal for £12.5million of capital funding for local regeneration to be transferred to councils, but discussions are ongoing concerning the transfer of assets linked to projects”.

“At a private summit last week, senior regeneration figures said the ‘botched reform’ had caused confusion. ‘People don’t know who is responsible for what’ one source said. ‘You call Scottish Enterprise about a project and they say its not their responsibility, and you should go to x and y Council. Then you call the council and they say they are not sure because they are still trying to get to grips with things. This uncertainty is the last thing we want as we head into a recession”.

“Jim Mather, Scotland’s Enterprise minister said ‘There should be no confusion for anyone. The lead role for local regeneration now sits with local authorities”.

“A senior source at the COSLA admitted that ‘more needed to be done to provide clarity’. We need to be clearer in explaining who is responsible for what, as we can’t afford to further damage what is already happening in the real world’ the source said.”

This confusion provides an uncertain background against which local authorities are having to implement regeneration policy around towns.

Community Regeneration

The Scottish Government has a commitment to devolving power including the management and ownership of community facilities to communities. Together with the new approach to community engagement within the reformed planning system, communities will have a new suite of powers through which to consider how best their future needs might be addressed with new space for local regeneration activities. This has major implications for the process of community regeneration and potential for towns’ development.

One issue arising from the merger of Regeneration Outcome Agreements into Single Outcome Agreements is the need for clarity on how the regeneration objectives of the Scottish Government and the support that SOAs might provide for towns within this context could be developed.

Urban Regeneration Companies (URCs)

URCs are a formal partnership of key public agencies and representatives from the private sector who operate independently of central government to co-ordinate delivery of physical and economic regeneration in specific areas and attract investment. Six Pathfinder URCs have been established in Scotland; three in 2004 (Clydebank; Raploch in Stirling; and Craigmillar in Edinburgh) and three more following the 2006 Regeneration Policy Statement Irvine Bay in North Ayrshire; Riverside Inverclyde; and the Clyde Gateway). Each URC has received substantial funding support from the Scottish Government.

The six pathfinders are to operate for between seven and 15 years based on a business plan, with progress measured through annual reports and a monitoring framework. Their plans include increased new business start-ups, improving income, increasing property values and increasing the % of residents who feel their quality of life has improved.

The use of URCs was intended to try new approaches to regeneration covering different types of urban areas. There will be lessons to be learnt from the six pilot URCs, as they develop. The Scottish Government, COSLA and other agencies including the Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum should disseminate these lessons.

Recommendation 11

The Small Towns Group should consider working with one or more URC on the applicability of the lessons from the pilots to other towns.

Also, it should consider whether a package of mini URCs might be developed to tackle specific regeneration needs of towns with funding from the Scottish Government given its commitment to URCs (SR07) as its main source of support for regeneration activities. Mini URCs might be targeted on towns, bringing together best practice in regeneration with the design of the physical space.

Land constraints to regeneration

There are many land and property issues that inhibit development and regeneration. The real problems lie with misconceptions and poor information about the opportunities and returns available in deprived areas, poor business environment and infrastructure, and the fragmentation of land ownership which makes it difficult for developers to "parcel up"; and the need for the public sector to shoulder some of the risk of investment and development in deprived areas.

There can be weak market demand for commercial property development. The perception that rental returns and capital appreciation will be lower in deprived areas often discourages commercial developers from investing. Large-scale regeneration projects can be complex and costly. The high remediation and infrastructure costs associated with some brownfield sites can deter investment, while fragmented public sector funding streams and weak strategic coordination can make things worse.

Fragmented land ownership patterns make it more difficult to parcel up land for development and make effective partnership working difficult. And the planning system is seen as too slow and too cumbersome to deal effectively with commercial development and isn't used effectively to promote development in deprived areas.

The Scottish Executive's *People and Places: Regeneration Policy Statement* (2006) made a range of commitments to tackling many of the land and property issues referred to above and which can inhibit regeneration. Improving skills, capacity and streamlining the regulatory framework is critical. One outstanding area of work is to improve understanding of the process of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) for regeneration and to encouraging a more proactive approach to the use of CPOs that takes account of the often extensive negotiations that are required, the need to form partnerships and to find funding for 'back-to-back' deals.

Recommendation 12

The Small Towns Group should engage with the Scottish Government to ensure that the development of the work around Compulsory Purchase Orders supports development in towns. A town pilot might be offered to progress this work.

Possible lessons from the English experience

English Partnerships has worked with a range of local authorities, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and key stakeholders to bring forward regeneration strategies in a number of town centres particularly in the four growth areas identified

by government in its Sustainable Communities Plan; including, Basildon, Crawley, Harlow, Hatfield, Peterborough, Telford, Stevenage and Skelmersdale.

Revitalising town and city centres is viewed as a vital component in supporting government plans in England to build more new and affordable homes across the country. Many new towns are in high growth areas and will be the focus for larger populations that will need to be served by vibrant, well-thought-out town centres offering modern job opportunities as well as being at the heart of the local community.

There is no similar programme of support for Town Centres in Scotland. The Scottish Government response to the Town Centre Agenda has comprised revised planning advice (SPP 8: Town Centres and Retailing) and the establishment of Business Improvement Districts. Discrete projects are funded from a range of funding programmes though there is no specific programme of action to improve Town Centres.

Recommendation 13

The Small Towns Group should address the lack of a comprehensive approach to the regeneration of Towns and press the Scottish Government to consider supporting a programme of town centre regeneration following on from the 'State of Scotland's' Report.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)², which had their origins in Canada and were taken up in the USA, South Africa and England, and are seen as a useful tool to help regenerate town and city centres. The Planning (Scotland) Act 2006 enables areas to establish (BIDs) in town and city centres as means to support renewal and regeneration. BIDs are set up as partnership bodies involving a local authority and the local business community to develop and implement projects and services that benefit the trading environment and improve the public realm. BIDs are able to raise an additional levy on top of the business rates to generate funds which can be used as leverage to attract match funding.

Six Pilot BIDs have been agreed in Scotland for business parks in Alloa, Tillicoultry and Alva; town and Town and City centres in Bathgate, Edinburgh, Falkirk, Glasgow and Inverness. Seed corn funding has been provided by the Scottish Government (originally £15,000 and subsequently increased to £20,000).

The Association of Town Centre Managers (ATCM) was a key organisation in facilitating the transition from town centre management to BIDs and together with local Chambers of Commerce have been very keen to see BIDs extended across Scotland.

The concept of BIDs is closely tied to the development of Town Centre Management (introduced in Scotland in Falkirk in 1988) and Town Centre Partnerships. BIDs extend the ideas behind town centre management increasing stakeholder participation, formalise the arrangement and fix levies which provide the financial base for the improvement of an area. BIDs encourage businesses to take ownership of town centres and lead the change and have helped to generate enthusiasm to support and strengthen town centres.

² www.bids.scotland.com

The initial enthusiasm for BIDs may be tempered unless the Scottish Government funding for initial set up and the need for additional resources as match funding to sums raised from the local public – private sector partnerships can be found. There is a concern that local authorities may be forced into taking money from other towns/ areas in order to provide funding for BIDs, thereby prioritising one town's redevelopment over others

Recommendation 14

The Small Towns Group should monitor the progress of BIDs and in particular the impact of the limitations on local and central government funding. It should consider the relationship between the outcomes from the BIDs pilots and the development of the next phase of Single Outcome Agreements to secure a link between development, renewal and the contribution of other public agencies to sustainable town development.

3.4 Planning, Land Use Development and the Development of Towns

This section of the policy review considers how the modernising of the planning system and National Planning Framework might impact on towns and the potential significance of integrated place making and shaping.

Modernising the planning system

The planning system in Scotland has been completely reformed through the passage of the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006. Understanding and engaging with the development of this new system at both national and local level is fundamental for recognising how it will shape the future development of towns in Scotland.

The preparation of new Development Plans and maintaining their relevance and appropriateness is a major tool and opportunity for a systematic consideration of the future of the place of towns in Scotland. There is the potential to align the development plan process and the development of SOAs and Community Plans. The consideration of developing town action plans might fit within this process too, as a means to secure the community engagement necessary for the new planning system and to give added impetus to the Community Planning and added legitimacy to the consideration of the most appropriate SOAs.

The draft National Planning Framework 2 (NPF) contains many references to towns, but little analysis of the future of towns in Scotland. This is a major conceptual and analytical weakness given the intention underpinning the NPF is to guide policy responses and to shape future investment.

Recommendation 15

The Small Towns Group should consider making representation to the Scottish Government to ensure that the development of the National Planning Framework should secure a more comprehensive overview of the place and potential of towns in Scotland and consider more substantively their infrastructure needs, along side those of the cities and regions of Scotland.

A large number of the Planning Advice and Guidance Notes have a clear impact on the development of Scotland's towns but only SPP8 on Town Centres and Retailing and PAN 59 on Town Centres are specifically concerned with towns.

The policy detailed in SPP8 does not specifically protect small retailers from the multiples in town centres, judging that it is not for the planning system to restrict

competition, preserve existing commercial rights or prevent innovation. SPP8 supports the protection and enhancement of town centres and places greater emphasis on a broad range of land uses which contribute to the 'vitality and viability of a town centre'. The policy encourages local authorities to better reflect local circumstances when interpreting national policy. However, further guidance could be provided that would support towns and town centres. For example retail impact analysis should require jobs lost and jobs secured to different sectors to be considered. Also funding should be considered for longer term independent time series impact assessments to be carried out.

Recommendation 16

The Small Towns Group should consider whether there is further support that the Scottish Government should consider providing in Planning Advice Notes and Guidance to address the needs of towns, not just town centres, within the revised planning system, including whether there should be a new comprehensive PAN for towns.

Integrated place making and shaping

Good design is about achieving better public spaces and strong, integrated communities, elements that are now recognised for their important contribution to a better quality of life. High quality, well designed and innovative public artwork also has a role to play in regeneration, creating distinctive public spaces that improve quality of life, boosting tourism and encouraging further investment.

The Scottish Executive published the '*Designing Places*' policy statement in November 2001 with the aim improving urban and rural development, demonstrating how the value of design can contribute to the quality of our lives. This has been supplemented by a series of Planning Advice Notes (PANs) on design issues including the Conservation Area PAN which provides advice on the active management of conservation areas and complements existing national policy detailed in PAN 67 on Housing Quality (2003) and PAN 68 on Design Statements (2003). The Regeneration Statement '*People and Places*' (2006) noted that the Scottish Executive had begun to "*Support Architecture and Design Scotland (ADS) in its strategic role of enhancing the knowledge and skills of people involved in the development process, promoting best practice and assisting with design review and master planning.*" But it is clear that the Scottish Government sees the importance of design to securing wellbeing has much further to go.

SR07 stated: "*we will challenge the public and private sectors and communities themselves to drive up standards for planning and the design and maintenance of the built and natural environment. The goal is good quality, energy-efficient building set in well-managed, accessible green and open space – urban design good enough for future generations to thank us for delivering the conservation areas of the future.*"

Recommendation 17

The Small Towns Group should seek to engage with the planning and architecture schools, practitioners in architecture, landscape architecture and transport planning to develop design ideas and guidance for town development. For example, it might consider developing the relationship with Architecture and Design Scotland to help improve the accessibility of their advice and to promote the development of an urban design guide that goes beyond the design of buildings.

3.5 Housing and Sustainable Communities

This section considers housing policies and in particular the implications of the Scottish Government's consultation paper, *Firm Foundations* (2007).

The new focus of the Scottish Government on the 'built environment' is an opportunity to address the quality of the physical environment in an integrated way that has not been a major issue in the past.

In addition, the interest of the new Scottish Government in wellbeing and the link between health and housing within the structures of the Government will be critical to ensuring a *quality* built environment. But as with other policy areas, there is a general lack of focus on how the housing needs of specific towns are met, or what the consequence of investment in housing growth in particular areas will be on specific towns. For example the two framework policy documents for housing – 'Firm Foundations' (2008) and the Housing Statement '*Homes for Scotland's People*' (2005) – made few references to towns.

There are a number of policies designed to support investment in affordable rural housing to support the future of many rural communities, particularly through the retention of young people and first time buyers and to support rural economic development. However, the emphasis of rural housing policy is on housing in rural areas and makes little, if any, reference to the role of towns in supporting rural communities.

A number of the commitments in the Scottish Government consultation paper '*Firm Foundations*' (2007) will have an impact on town growth and development.

Firm Foundations attempted to respond to a set of pressures on housing provision including:

- Budget limits and the significant level of existing commitments;
- The aspiration of Local government to return to being a housing provider;
- The need to tackle homelessness;
- The need to strengthen environmental & housing quality standards;
- The need to enhance tenants rights;
- The need to increase affordability of ownership.

Firm Foundations sets a new vision for the future of housing in Scotland based on:

- An increased supply of housing across all tenures, delivered with higher environmental and design standards;
- More choice of housing that those on lower incomes can afford;
- Housing developments to contribute to the creation of sustainable mixed communities;
- Social housing that provides better value for public expenditure.

For the first time in a housing strategy document *Firm Foundations* makes references to the 'quality of place' and an expanded level of house building. There are major issues for towns in Scotland of where this growth might be directed.

Firm Foundations proposes to increase build levels and achieve the target of 25% affordable housing, together with the creation of new 'sustainable communities'. This is linked to the focus of the Scottish Government on a sustainable built environment. But there is a general lack of policy detail. The strategy does not make clear what a

sustainable community would look like, where they are proposed and what the impact on existing communities would be. Clear policy guidance is needed.

Also *Firm Foundations* needed to be more explicit about the local impact of population changes and the relative shift in population over the next 20 years on towns. *Firm Foundations* raises the need for assessment of the impact of new growth and the maintenance and renewal of existing public and social housing stock in existing towns and communities.

As *Firm Foundations* notes:

- *'For sustainability and economic reasons, new house-building should be within and around existing towns, cities and villages wherever possible, making best use of brownfield sites and existing infrastructure and thus minimising the need for commuting. But Scotland's housing supply needs are such that expanded or new, stand-alone settlements may well be a part of the solution in some areas.'* (P18)
- *'Where new settlements are part of the solution, they provide an opportunity to effect a step change in the quality and environmental standards of new communities, both within and outwith existing settlements. Housing can be developed for a range of tenures with decentralised heat and power and high energy efficiency standards and located so as to make optimum use of public transport and provide opportunities for walking and cycling. Design and build should reflect the best architectural and design traditions of Scottish towns and villages.'* (P18)

Once again, there was no indication of where it is anticipated these changes will impact. There is a need for clearer guidance on how this regional housing planning will address the needs of towns and retain high design standards and the integrity of existing settlements; particularly since *Firm Foundations* proposes a loosening of greenbelt protection which may lead to city 'creep' and the danger of sprawl. This could undermine the quality of life and distinctiveness of Scotland's towns, especially in the central belt.

The strategy proposes supporting Local Authorities in co-operating at the regional level in setting realistic housing targets through their local housing strategies and through planning system to release the land that the developers and builders need to deliver the houses needed. But, *Firm Foundations* does not identify where this build is to take place and how land release will not trigger sprawl and a diffusion of the distinctiveness of towns in Scotland.

Another key issue to be resolved is how the Scottish Government proposes that the necessary infrastructure of the new developments (water and sewerage, roads, schools and other facilities) will be funded.

Developing a Scottish approach to the establishment of sustainable communities and bringing policy together will take time, given that the new planning system will not be fully in place until mid-2008 and the new housing system not fully in place until mid-2009. There is a major opportunity for the Small Towns Group to explore the policy linkages between the drive for sustainable communities and towns' development and growth.

Recommendation 18

The Small Towns Group should monitor the outcome of the Firm Foundations consultation and consider whether/ how it should respond to ensure that the Scottish Government's housing strategy and policies take full account of the needs of towns and the desire to create and support sustainable communities, including towns.

3.6 Transport

This section of the policy review examines current transport policies for supporting connections across local areas and between towns and cities as laid out in the National Transport Strategy and guidance for Regional Transport Partnerships.

Transport policies have a significant relationship with area renewal, regeneration and a major impact on the quality of the built environment. Investment in transport is about more than large capital projects, it is also about how transport contributes to the viability of towns and supports town development.

As the Scottish Government's '*Reporting on 100 Days: Taking Scotland Forward*' records: '*We have included fast-track proposals to improve track and signals to allow a substantial cut in journey times from Aberdeen and Inverness to Edinburgh and Glasgow and to increase capacity and ease the commute on the main routes into our major towns and cities in the first ever Scottish High Level Output Specification for the rail network.*'

Furthermore, to achieve the Scottish Government's national growth objectives will require continued transport investment, to improve links and connections, all of which will add value to new areas. The challenge for towns will be how to capture this investment value and ensure towns benefit from the faster links between towns and town and city.

The *National Transport Strategy for Scotland* (2006) provides a comprehensive, national statement of the Scottish Government's transport priorities and plans. It also provides the context for the development of Regional Transport Strategies by the Regional Transport Partnerships which will guide transport investment across Scotland. The Transport Act 2004 required the development of Regional and National Transport Strategies and required that the strategies should be consistent with the land use plans prepared by Local Authorities.

The National Transport Strategy says little that is town policy specific and places most emphasis on connectivity between the cities.

As the Ministerial Foreword to the National Transport Strategy records:

"There are 3 key issues that will make a fundamental difference towards delivering a world class transport system:

- *Improved journey times and connections - making it quicker, easier and more reliable for passengers to travel between our towns and cities and across our global markets.*
- *Reduced emissions - making sure that Scotland takes a lead in the future of sustainable transport.*
- *Improved quality, accessibility and affordability - ensuring everyone across Scotland has high quality public transport choices."*

The Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 requires new Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) to draw up Regional Transport Strategies. The guidance for the Regional

Transport Strategy issued in 2006 states that the Executive expects all strategies to serve the following purposes:

- *“To provide a vision and objectives for transport in the region over a long-term (10-15-year) time horizon and communicate these to stakeholders and the wider community.*
- *To provide an analysis of the current situation, covering transport needs and problems in the region.*
- *To set out a programme of activities, projects and interventions by the RTP, its constituent councils and other stakeholders, that is prioritised and costed, and which will contribute to the achievement of regional transport objectives.”*

The Regional Transport Strategy guidance also emphasises meeting the need for efficient transport links between heavily populated places as *‘Cities, towns and other heavily populated areas also provide the homes, jobs, schools and services for the majority of Scotland’s people. Effective transport links play an essential role in the ability of cities to support economic growth, provide an attractive environment for business and a high-quality of life for urban residents’.*

The emphasis of both the National Transport Strategy and Regional Transport Strategies on connectivity between cities and towns needs to be balanced out with recognising the importance of towns as sustainable communities. That is, supporting towns to develop to their full potential as sustainable communities could reduce the reliance on cars for commuters and shoppers. Sustainable towns should make a major contribution to meeting the Scotland’s climate change obligations.

Recommendation 19

The Small Towns Group should encourage the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland to consider whether national and regional transport strategies and other major influences such as the planning system support the needs of towns.

Recommendation 20

The Small Towns Group should engage with Transport Scotland and Regional Transport Partnerships to ensure that the guidance for the revised national and regional transport strategies takes full account of the needs for support for connections to and from towns, as well as the establishment of high quality streetscapes and green corridors within urban areas and their importance to community wellbeing.

Recommendation 21

The Small Towns Group should press for research and transport modelling into the transport needs of towns and their potential to contribute to securing significant operational improvements within the transport network and for the modal shift between private and public transport.

3.7 The Environment and Sustainability of Towns

This section considers the relationship between small towns and the environment and the concept of ‘Green Infrastructure’.

The Scottish Government sees the environment as being a central aspect of its strategic purpose and is a key link between its five themes. As SR07 states:

“We depend on our natural resources and our natural and built environments for creating wealth and economic opportunity ... We depend on the quality of the environment to support and protect public health and wellbeing, through the quality of our air, water and soils. We also depend on the built and natural environments as our core infrastructure, providing the places we live and work in and the connections between them.” (SR07 P41)

SR07 draws attention to the environmental quality of towns in Scotland, noting:

‘Our built environment has an impressive heritage, and we will work with our built and natural heritage partners to preserve this as part of the future fabric of Scottish towns and cities. Protecting and managing the environment in this way will ensure that people in Scotland can enjoy our historical, built and natural landscapes now and in the future. We will promote the responsible use and enjoyment of this asset, encouraging greater public access to and involvement in Scotland’s natural and built environments.’ (SR07 P 42)

However, little consideration has been given by the Scottish Government to the potential that small towns have to play in helping to meet climate change obligations (e.g. reducing the use of cars to take commuters to work and shoppers to out of town shopping centres; meeting demand for housing through bringing derelict properties back into use; and supporting ‘green infrastructure’).

As part of the Greener Scotland objective the Scottish Government is planning to issue a new policy statement on ‘Sustainable Places’, which will aim to draw the disparate strands of policy on sustainable places together. It is important that this recognises the contribution that small towns can make to the aim of achieving ‘sustainable communities’ and considers the support that may be required for them to achieve their potential.

Recommendation 22

The Small Towns Group should consider the potential to offer towns as pilots to build on the new focus on the built environment and ‘sustainable places’ in order to promote the potential of towns as sustainable communities and to explore what support may be required to help them achieve this potential.

Green Infrastructure

The concept of green infrastructure is a relatively new term that describes the physical environment within and between cities, towns and villages. Green infrastructure is seen as being a network of ‘multi-functional’ open spaces, including formal parks, gardens, woodlands, green corridors, street trees and open countryside.

It is a term that is being used increasingly in the planning system in England, though is not yet in common usage in the planning system or public sector policy community in Scotland. Green Infrastructure links different types of infrastructure and illustrates the importance of environmental management. For example, just as communities need to upgrade their physical infrastructure (roads, sewers, utilities), they also need to enhance and maintain their green infrastructure, the network of open space, woodlands, wildlife habitat, parks and other natural areas.

Green infrastructure is seen as being a way of providing an improved green structure for the landscape and also as a mechanism for more informed decision-making and more ‘joined-up’ thinking in relation to urban and regional environmental

planning. It is seen as a critical part of developing urban infrastructure and town centred planning.

The purpose of green infrastructure planning is seen as being to:

- Value existing green areas and prevent deterioration;
- Improve the quality and diversity of these areas to better serve local needs;
- Connect green areas to present a strategic whole.

The five broad sets of green infrastructures are seen as including:

- Sustainable resource management, such as pollution control, climatic amelioration and increased porosity of land cover;
- Biodiversity;
- Recreation, such as greenways and the use of non-car routes to support public health and quality of life issues;
- Landscape;
- Regional development and promotion, utilising environmental quality and quality of life.

Recommendation 23

The Small Towns Group should consider how to develop the importance of quality 'green' environment in terms of attracting investment, improving health and improving the quality of life of towns and groups of towns in Scotland. It should consider working with others with an interest in this issue (e.g. Greenspace Scotland and the Paths for All Partnership) to commission research to support the development of quality 'green' environment and the 'green infrastructure' concept as it relates to towns.

3.8 Rural Development and Towns

This section examines the place of towns within current rural policies, including planning policy and the funding programmes that have been made available in recent years for rural development.

Rural Scotland: A New Approach

In 2000 the Scottish Executive put in place an overarching rural policy to ensure that the particular needs of rural areas are taken into account in formulating policy in these areas. Its strategy for rural policy was set out in some detail in '*Rural Scotland: A New Approach*' (2000). This stated that Scottish Executive's vision was "a rural Scotland where everyone matters: every community, every family, every rural Scot."

This strategy prioritised four key outcomes for maintaining strong, prosperous and growing rural communities:

- A strong and diverse rural economy, harnessing traditional strengths and with an appetite for change;
- Thriving rural communities where everyone can enjoy a decent quality of life, where the young are not forced to leave their communities to get on and where the vulnerable are no longer excluded;
- Strong, community focused public services that are accessible, of the highest possible quality and with the greatest possible choice;

- A rural Scotland whose natural and cultural heritage flourishes in all its diversity.

Implicit in the strategy was recognition of the diversity of rural areas, and that different rural areas have different problems and priorities for action. Much of the remaining parts of the strategy outlined how the Executive's existing initiatives contributed to this vision and the determination of the Executive to play its role in delivering a new and sustainable future for rural Scotland.

Its sole comments on the place of towns within the rural economy were the references to eradicating homelessness and spending on sports facilities in rural areas as well as towns and cities.

The previous Scottish Executive committed to supporting rural life, rural communities and the rural economy. It claimed to have 'mainstreamed' the needs of rural Scotland within all of its policies by asking its policy makers to consider 'How do policies address the particular needs of those living in rural or remote communities?' While this may have been done, there is little evidence that the specific needs of rural towns, or towns in a rural context were ever considered.

Rural Scotland: A New Approach remains the framework for Scottish Government work in rural areas, supplemented by networks, research and the exchange of best practice.

The recent report '*OECD Rural Policy Reviews - Scotland, UK: Assessment and Recommendations*' (Feb 2008), drawn up with the involvement of the Scottish Government makes no mention of towns.

Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) 15: Planning for Rural Development (Feb 2005) supports the vision for rural areas outlined in *Rural Scotland - A New Approach*. It addresses the needs of rural Scotland - countryside and settlements of 3000 or less, though the guidance has a wider relevance as the links between rural areas, small towns and urban areas are important.

SPP 15 covers how councils should deal with economic development, rural diversification, housing and infrastructure, while maintaining a balance with the environment. It states that:

- There is more scope for sensitively sited and well designed development to support rural development, diversification and regeneration to maintain the character of the countryside, and appropriate to the location and circumstances of the area;
- Councils and other agencies should be more proactive in identifying opportunities for development in rural areas;
- Rural diversification, recognising the differing economic ambitions of businesses, should be supported.

Rural development funding programmes

The Scottish Rural Partnership Fund (SRPF) was an annual competitive grants scheme which ran from 1997 – 2004 to support communities across rural Scotland take forward rural development activities and help communities to find local solutions to local problems. The scheme closed with award of grants for 05/06 in January 2005. Around £3.7 million was awarded to 98 projects in rural communities from the 2004/2005 round.

The EU Structural Funds have supported economic development activities in Scotland for many years and played an important role in supporting development in towns and other urban areas. The substantial reduction in EU funding available for the period 2007 – 2013 means that their importance as a source of funding for rural development and potentially also town development is now declining.

There has been a reduction in the scope of activities that the funds can support. The new EU regulations are more prescriptive in setting out eligible activities, meaning that large-scale infrastructure projects in transport, tourism and economic development generally cannot be supported, especially in the Competitiveness programmes (i.e. the Lowlands & Uplands Programme), which will reduce the usefulness of these programmes for supporting town specific activities.

The Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) 2007-13 is very different from its predecessor. It set Scottish Ministers' goals for sustainable rural development and the types of support that will be available to help achieve these goals over the next seven years. It includes measures to address economic and social goals as well as environmental measures. It is outcome-focused and primarily aims to deliver a Greener Scotland and to promote a Wealthier and Fairer rural Scotland. It will contribute to the Government's Healthier and Smarter objectives and aims to help to strengthen rural communities.

The SRDP brings together a wide range of formerly separate support schemes including those covering the farming, forestry and primary processing sectors, rural enterprise and business development, diversification and rural tourism. It includes measures to support and encourage rural communities and delivers the LEADER initiative for local innovation in rural areas.

Funding will be targeted to where they will provide the greatest public benefits through adopting local solutions, with each region setting its own priorities, to delivering national outcomes.

The SRDP is worth c. £685 million over the plan period 2007 – 2013 (£435 million from the Executive, £235 million from EU). Each of the 11 Regions for SRDP established a set of 'Regional Priorities' to contribute to the five key SRDP outcomes:

- Improving business viability and competitiveness;
- Protection and enhancement of biodiversity and the landscape;
- Improving water quality;
- Adaptation to, and mitigation of climate change;
- Supporting thriving and sustainable rural communities.

Measures will be delivered through a range of schemes including the Crofting Counties Agricultural Grant Scheme; Food Processing, Marketing and Co-operation Grant Scheme; and Rural Development Contracts.

LEADER accounts for 5% of the total SRDP allocation (around £38m). The LEADER initiative uses a bottom-up approach to build stronger, richer local communities and business networks. Through building human capital, innovation and co-operation Local Action Group's (LAG) (including representatives from public, private and thirds sectors) aim to tackle local community development objectives to achieve "local empowerment through innovative approaches and rural capacity building".

The above summary of current rural policies and funding programmes suggests that the Scottish Government (and previously the Scottish Executive) placed a significant level of priority to rural development in contrast to small towns' development. For example, although the population of small towns is substantially greater than of rural areas and they face similar problems of de-population and deprivation rural policy the levels of funding provided for rural initiatives provides a more strategic approach to rural development than has been evident towards small towns.

In addition, in the rural policy, planning policies for rural development and rural funding programmes the Scottish Government has failed to consider the role that towns have in supporting rural communities.

Recommendation 24

The Small Towns Group should ensure that a 'State of Scotland's Towns' Report considers the role that towns play in supporting rural communities and whether there are any policy models or funding mechanisms for supporting rural communities that could inform the development of similar support for supporting Town development.

3.9 Culture and Tourism

Culture and tourism are important to Scotland's towns both from the perspective of providing a high quality of life and contributing to the economic wellbeing through providing jobs and income from visitors.

As the SR07 noted:

"If Scotland is to derive full benefit from its highly educated and skilled workforce, we also need to build on and broaden areas of comparative advantage in the global economy. This means expanding established areas of success (e.g. financial services and energy) and facilitating and accelerating emerging areas (e.g. creative industries and life sciences). To support this dynamism, we will establish a programme of activity to boost and promote Scotland's creative industries and hubs for cultural activity, developing Scotland's towns and cities as key drivers of cultural and economic growth." (SR07 p.13)

Tourism is worth around £4 billion per annum to the Scottish economy and sustains approximately 200,000 jobs in 20,000 diverse businesses and accounts for around 8% of employment in Scotland. *Scottish Tourism: The Next Decade - A Tourism Framework for Change* (2006) aims to grow the value of tourism revenues by 50% by 2015.

VisitScotland. Scotland's National Tourism Organisation, has the strategic role to develop Scottish tourism in order to get the maximum economic benefit for Scotland. It supports the development of the tourism industry in Scotland and to market Scotland as a quality destination.

VisitScotland is committed to ensuring that it works in partnership with local authorities to demonstrate that their resources are being put to good use. It sees this local action as working within the umbrella of the national strategy and local authorities have an important role in deciding VisitScotland's work in their area as local variety is important. However, there is concern that it focuses too much on promoting 'Scotland the Brand' and products such as the Edinburgh Festivals and

'Homecoming Scotland' and it directs insufficient resources to support and promote tourism in Scotland's towns.

It is striking that, while there have been positive comments in documents such as the Spending Review about the importance of culture and tourism there are very few references to towns or proposals for action to support towns to reach their full potential in relation to culture and tourism.

Recommendations 25

The Small Towns Group should consider pressing for a more systematic assessment of the tourism and cultural potential of Scotland's towns as part of the 'State of Scotland's Towns' Report.

3.10 Healthier and Safer Towns

Healthier Towns

All aspects of lifestyles and life circumstances impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. The Scottish Government is committed to improving the health of individuals and communities using Community Planning as a mechanism in improving service delivery in Scotland to help lead to healthier, safer and more vibrant communities. But it makes few commitments that relate health issues to towns.

Health is influenced by a range of factors. Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) can contribute to improving health and reducing inequalities through targeting the wider determinants of health, decent housing, good transport, easy access to local facilities and services.

The quality of the built environment has a central role to play in contributing to achieving health improvement objectives, reducing inequalities and improving life circumstances. The commitment to combine health, housing and regeneration to secure good health and wellbeing may precipitate a shift in emphasis in health and housing policy. Consideration of the relationship between health and towns might be considered in more depth.

Good health is central to the wellbeing of people and communities. Research shows poor health in deprived areas is often a barrier to accessing employment and hinders the economic potential of the region's disadvantaged communities. This has led to health interventions focused on urban areas, particularly in Scotland's cities.

However, there is very good detailed information about health at small community level³ and this can be used to target interventions and policies to tackle health inequalities and improve community health and wellbeing.

Recommendation 26

A 'State of Scotland's Towns' Report should include analysis of health and wellbeing in Scotland's towns to identify both where communities are relatively healthy and where there remain areas of health inequalities, and the reasons for these situations.

³ <http://www.scotpho.org.uk>

Safer Towns

Crime and antisocial behaviour have an impact on towns and are often highlighted as areas of concern in surveys of residents.

As the Scottish Government noted in SR07: 'We must break the link between alcohol, violence and disorder. Far too many of our town and city centres are blighted by violence and disorder which is often fuelled by the over-consumption of alcohol. We will take steps to end the culture of deep-discounting and irresponsible promotions, and we will consider the feasibility of minimum pricing. These early actions will provide a platform for a long-term alcohol strategy that will seek to change the culture of alcohol consumption in Scotland'. (SR07 P35)

The Government has funded Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) in all council areas to take this forward at the local level based on collaboration between Councils and the eight Scottish Police Forces. This is a programme that focuses on the achievement of specific crime reduction and community safety outcomes, alongside links to antisocial behaviour strategies, identified in plans prepared for 2005-8.

Recommendation 27

The Small Towns Group should consider collaboration with the Scottish Community Safety Network to secure recognition of the need for safer town centres within overall town development policies and to press the Scottish Government for research into the impact of crime on towns and whether there are opportunities for piloting new anti-crime responses on a town basis.

4. NEW TOOLS AND APPROACHES TO SUPPORT THE TOWNS AGENDA

This chapter explores the following issues that could provide new tools and approaches to support the towns' agenda:

- The National Performance Framework;
- The enhanced role for Local Government and Community Planning;
- Strengthening the relationship between SOAs and towns, town specific Performance Indicators and A State of Scotland's Towns Report;
- Lessons from the strategies and processes adopted in England including new tools for Town Assessment; Quality of Life Assessment, Market Town Health Checks and the Renaissance Towns & Cities Programme;
- The Spatial Assessment of Scottish Government Policy;
- Financing Town Development.

4.1 The National Performance Framework

The Scottish Government now has a single Purpose *'to create a more successful country where all of Scotland can flourish through increasing sustainable economic growth'* and aims to ensure that all of the Government's resources and policies are focused on its achievement.

Scotland Performs is the Scottish Government website that provides the latest information on how Scotland is 'performing' in achieving this central purpose and the five strategic objectives that support this purpose. It describes the outcomes the Scottish Government wants to achieve and how well Scotland is progressing in key areas – health and wellbeing; justice and communities; the environment; the economy; and education and skills.

The Scottish Government vision for a successful Scotland has four parts which support and reinforce each other:

- The Government's Purpose and its associated 11 targets;
- Five Strategic Objectives where the Scottish Government will focus its actions;
- 15 National Outcomes that describe what the Government wants to achieve;
- 45 National Indicators that enable progress to be tracked.

Government's Purpose Targets

The 11 targets associated with the central Government purpose are:

Economic Growth (GDP)

- To raise the GDP growth rate to the UK level by 2011
- To match the GDP growth rate of the small independent EU countries by 2017

Productivity

- To rank in the top quartile for productivity against our key trading partners in the OECD by 2017

Participation

- To maintain our position on labour market participation as the top performing country in the UK
- To close the gap with the top five OECD economies by 2017

Population

- To match average European (EU15) population growth over the period from 2007 to 2017
- Supported by increased healthy life expectancy in Scotland over the period from 2007 to 2017

Solidarity

- To increase overall income and the proportion of income earned by the three lowest income deciles as a group by 2017

Cohesion

- To narrow the gap in participation between Scotland's best and worst performing regions by 2017

Sustainability

- To reduce emissions over the period to 2011
- To reduce emissions by 80 percent by 2050

National Outcomes

All 15 National Outcomes will impact upon towns. However, one of the national Outcomes could be seen as being directly relevant to towns: *'We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need.'*

Though towns are not mentioned specifically in this Outcome it is clearly a significant hook on which the development of the small towns agenda can be hung and on which it can be tied to a specific Scottish Government priority.

It is worth quoting the relevant explanatory text relating to this National Outcome.

"Well-designed, sustainable places, both urban and rural, support people's physical and mental wellbeing. They are places in which people want to live. They provide ease of access to the workplaces and services we need by locating these conveniently with high quality housing as part of a mixed community. Mixed communities, providing a range of services, housing types and people, promote interaction and integration - and create positive, diverse neighbourhoods. They are places designed around people, not cars, encouraging activity and social interaction by providing easy access to both amenities and green space. They improve safety by increasing the number of people who use local facilities and generating a real sense of community. And they are sustainable places – both environmentally (harnessing new technologies such as lower carbon buildings) and socially (providing a diverse mix of people and services which allows the community to flourish and grow).

“Well-designed, sustainable places also contribute to sustainable economic growth – our reputation for high quality urban and rural environments is an important factor in attracting and retaining people with the skills and talent we need to build a successful Scotland. Improved transport and telecommunications connections will make Scotland more attractive to business and enhance its attractiveness as a place to live and work. The promotion of more sustainable modes of transport will cut emissions and improve air quality.”

The Scottish Government has also stated that the influences of this National Outcome will be:

“The development of well-designed, sustainable places will only happen through effective partnerships – between central and local government, and between the public, private and third sectors (including charities, voluntary and local community groups) and, most crucially, with the individuals who live in those places and keep them vibrant. Government must create the right environment for investment and increased housing supply; taking targeted action in the most disadvantaged communities and devolving power to the local level so that communities can have more influence and ownership. Community Planning Partnerships have a key role to play. Working together it will be possible to provide the right supply of housing to rent and buy in order to create sustainable, mixed communities”.

The Scottish Government has outlined its role in developing sustainable communities.

“We are committed to creating successful, sustainable communities across Scotland. To do so we will need to work in a broad partnership with developers, local authorities and local communities to deliver a range of economic, physical, social and environmental improvements. We will develop a housing policy which supports sustainable economic growth. We will challenge local authorities, developers and builders to increase the rate of new housing to at least 35,000 homes a year by the middle of the next decade. By increasing the supply of good quality, affordable housing we will meet the current and future needs of Scotland, allowing labour to move effectively and creating sustainable, mixed communities in which people can live full and productive lives. We will provide a fair deal for first-time buyers, tenants and taxpayers - investing over £1.4 billion over the next three years in new and better housing across Scotland”.

“We will ensure that planning policy encourages the development of sustainable, mixed communities - drawing together the various elements required to achieve that goal. Direct action will be taken to promote regeneration in some of Scotland's most deprived areas - with over £60m provided to Scotland's Pathfinder Urban Regeneration Companies to allow comprehensive regeneration of those areas, guided by the communities themselves. Our emphasis on preventing homelessness will be increased by working with local government to ensure that all unintentionally homeless households have an entitlement to settled accommodation by 2012”.

This text shows the scale of the challenge facing the Small Towns Group to influence thinking within the Scottish Government to secure consideration of the place of towns as a specific aspect of these outcomes.

The National Indicators

None of the 45 National Indicators are exclusively focused on the needs of towns, though several have the potential to have a particular impact on them, including:

- Increase the rate of new house building;
- Increase the percentage of adults who rate their neighbourhood as a good place to live;
- Improve the state of Scotland's Historic Buildings, monuments and environment.

Recommendation 28

The Small Towns Group should consider the most appropriate indicators for using at the local level that relate to the delivery of the national outcomes and whether the national outcomes adopted so far are supportive of the aspirations of the Group for sustainable town growth.

4.2 The Enhanced Role for Local Government and Community Planning

The essential elements of the key changes to the relationship between the Scottish Government and Local Government following the election on 3 May 2007 were covered in Chapter 2. They include the emphasis that is now being placed on forging a new partnership and a greater level of devolved responsibility for Local Government.

Local Government's central role in planning, housing, transport, parks and environmental stewardship is being developed and enhanced through the adoption of the Concordat and related developments – reducing ring-fenced funding, developing Single Outcome Agreements (SOA), and devolving some powers and responsibilities from former Government agencies and NDPBs such as Communities Scotland and Scottish Enterprise. These developments are covered in more detail in the relevant sections of this report.

Crucially, Local Government continues to have the lead role in the development of the Community Planning process.

Legislation is not prescriptive about *how* Community Planning should be carried out recognising that what is appropriate will depend on *local circumstances*. Councils have the lead role for facilitating and leading on Community Planning, working with key agencies and the voluntary and community sectors to develop a common vision. The challenge remains for Community Planning to put these visions into practice and help to achieve a tangible improvement in services across Scotland.

Effective and genuine engagement of communities is at the heart of Community Planning (and the development of the new Development Plans for the planning system). There is a wide range of communities and the means of engagement should reflect the circumstances of those communities and seek to involve those who do not normally participate.

Community Planning is seen as crucial to improving public services by bringing together different public bodies around one common vision. It has facilitated the

development of shared services and collaboration between Community Planning Partnerships such as through the Clyde Valley City Region Plan.

The new relationship which the Scottish Government is attempting to forge with local government is in part concerned with injecting new energy into the Community Planning process as well as enhancing the local leadership role of local government through the SOA process.

By bringing together the various public sector agencies that have a role to play in supporting the development of towns and communities Community Planning should be a key instrument in supporting the small towns agenda. The development of Community Planning at the community level – bottom up rather than merely top down – and the engagement of communities in the Community Planning process (and potentially the development of SOAs) is potentially very significant for the development of the small towns' agenda.

Community engagement

Community engagement is seen as central to the establishment of the new Development Plans and the Community Planning process. Community engagement is also central to ensuring that the new SOAs have a legitimacy that derives from local involvement in their preparation.

As the *Small Towns Report* (2006) noted, it is a community driven, bottom up and partnership led approach to regeneration, as exemplified in the Market Towns Initiative in England, that should itself be applied to Town development. This is an approach that has been supported in previous Scottish Executive strategies, though the new SOA process presents an opportunity for closer, cross agency alignment of policies and delivery, area by area. What is currently lacking, at both a national and local level, is an explicit acknowledgement that the focus of Community Planning (and SOAs) at a town level could be a major tool in focusing public policy on meeting the needs of towns.

The 2006 *People and Places: Regeneration Policy Statement* records:

“Experience of regeneration in Scotland and elsewhere shows clearly that there are sound reasons for ensuring effective community engagement in planning and delivering services. Some of the regeneration mistakes of the past can be attributed to imposing a particular approach to regeneration on local people, or to spending inadequate time and effort on building local capacity to be fully involved in the design and implementation of regeneration plans.” (P.55)

The same is true for the development of sustainable towns and for seeking to improve the fabric of the built environment.

Recommendation 29

The Community Voices Network and Scottish Community Development Centre might be considered as potential partners for the Small Towns Group in working to provide specific advice and guidance on community engagement and empowerment of towns and the potential adoption of Town Health Checks and Town Action Plans.

The Department for Communities and Local Government for England have published a range of useful advice on working with communities and the tools that exist for

building community assets. As the *Quirk Review: Making assets work* (DCLG May 2007) shows community organisations can realise tremendous potential by taking on the management and ownership of community assets. This review looked at the barriers which may be standing in the way of more communities managing and owning assets and recommends ways to create an environment to encourage more community management and ownership of assets. As the Local Government Association has noted, the Quirk Review needs to focus on wider public sector asset management:

- The focus should be on the outcome of creating sustainable, robust and revenue balanced community organisations that are able to carry out their functions locally; not on the process of asset transfer;
- Capacity building support is needed for the third sector on issues to include: asset management, business planning and financial management;
- More revenue funding is needed to support asset transfer. Time limited funding streams also need to develop realistic exit strategies to support sustainable funding bases in the third sector.

The Scottish Government is committed to devolve responsibility for assets to communities and local government (as set out in the SNP Manifesto),

The previous Scottish Executive had established a short life Working Group (which first met in May 2007) to consider of the review of Community Councils, Scottish Ministers decided to form a short life Working Group to produce a Model Community Council Scheme for Local Authorities, good practice guidance and a Code of Conduct for Community Councillors.

Following the election of the new Government in May 2007, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth asked the Working Group to examine potential expanded roles and responsibilities which could be undertaken by Community Councils.

Bodies such as Development Trusts provide possible models for oversight and ensuring effective asset management. How to address the long term maintenance of community assets through possible models that might be piloted, or new approaches that might be supported by the Scottish Government with a view to more widespread application, is a matter for discussion with bodies like the Development Trusts Association.

This approach might also involve an assessment of whether the Highlands and Islands Enterprise managed community land fund⁴ to enable urban and suburban communities to develop capital assets such as land, recreation areas or buildings to support community enterprise and community infrastructure for the benefit of the wider community, could be used as a model applicable to 'lowland' towns.

The *Scottish Centre for Regeneration* (SCR) (formally within Communities Scotland but now within the Scottish Government) has a wealth of experience in developing

⁴ This follows the Big Lottery Fund announcement in March 2006 that it will implement a Growing Community Assets investment theme to extend the principles behind the existing land fund to cover the whole of Scotland. This has provided £50m over three years to develop community assets.

practical support material which could be relevant to developing skills for town development.

Recommendation 30

The Small Towns Group might collaborate with the Scottish Centre for Regeneration (SCR) in the development of practical guidance, training and skills development material for practitioners. This might also include collaboration with Higher and Further Education and developing hands on experience, secondments and job experience across the community groups involved in the agenda.

4.3 Strengthening the Relationship between Single Outcome Agreements and Towns

The Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) that were developed fairly hastily following the SR07 and the Concordat between COSLA and the Scottish Government were based on a menu of draft Local Indicators developed by the Improvement Service for Scottish Local Government.

Very few references to towns or towns' development were made in the SOAs that have been agreed between Scotland's 32 Councils and the Scottish Government. One such reference was made in the East Ayrshire SOA: *"Regenerating our towns and villages is seen as an essential component if we are to strengthen and grow our local economy."* Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders SOAs also included references to towns.

SOAs have been developed on a whole Council area basis. However, future SOAs might usefully give consideration to a number of approaches and national 'asks' that would assist to draw out the particular needs of towns. For example:

- The current list of local indicators might be developed further to enable a specific focus on towns, though many of the data sets relate to towns and other urban areas;
- Whether whole council SOAs are too high a level for moving to a whole town approach which might combine the Development Plan, Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement;
- Consideration of how the SOA might be aligned with the development of the new Development Plan to ensure and secure consistency of approaches. This would be useful given that the same partners are involved in the same processes and there is public consultation on the objectives and content of the new Development Plans. It makes sense to consider policy choices, outcomes and spatial impacts together;
- Consideration of whether there might be scope within SOAs to support the development of 'whole town action plans' (see below, p.49);
- Consideration of what national policies might be needed or refocused to arrest decline or build successful sustainable growing towns by considering the state of Scotland's towns and the development of a specific policy understanding of their needs.

Recommendation 31

The Small Towns Group should engage with the Improvement Service with a view to the development of tools that will address the issue of how to monitor the impact and effectiveness of town development through SOAs. In particular this should include consideration of whether there might be scope within SOAs to support the development of 'whole town action plans' and what national policies might be needed or refocused to arrest decline or build successful sustainable growing towns by considering the state of Scotland's towns and the development of a specific policy understanding of their needs.

4.3.1 Town Specific Performance Indicators

With the move to devolve new powers and responsibilities to local government there will be a need for communities to be able to assess progress through outcome measures or performance indicators.

The English experience of performance indicators could provide a useful model for developing area based baseline assessments.

The Audit Commission has developed *Area Profiles* to provide guidance on how to create a picture of the quality of life and public services in an area. They provide a wide range of data and assessments about an area and how it compares to others. Area profiling assists councils and their local partners. The performance indicators developed by the Audit Commission fall within a set of integrated groupings:

- *People and place* - Population dynamics (size, density, household composition, commuting and seasonal migration patterns and longer-term changes) and diversity (age, gender, ethnicity and religion). A context for understanding the sense of place and how people live and work in the area;
- *Community involvement and cohesion* - Community activities that encourage pride and ownership of the area and the degree to which diverse communities enjoy positive relationships and have influence over local decisions affecting the area;
- *Economic wellbeing* - Levels of deprivation, employment, wages, seasonality of work, household income, economic inactivity, benefit payments and the number and type of businesses in the area;
- *Housing* - Ownership, types of tenure, supply and affordability of housing and homelessness. It also covers sustainability issues, including decency standards, and minimising resource use and location;
- *Environment* - The quality of the built (including redevelopment of derelict land) and natural (including biodiversity) environments, pollution, including air and water quality, water, energy and waste management;
- *Transport and access* - Public transport, road provision, maintenance, use and congestion, walking, cycling, mode of travel and distance to work. It also covers access to key services and technology, such as the internet;
- *Community safety* - Feelings of safety, levels of crime of different sorts, including anti-social behaviour and disorder and drug-related offences, accidents in homes, at work and on the roads and fire safety;
- *Health & social wellbeing* - Birth and death rates, life expectancy, public health measures, people with long-term conditions, support for carers and access to quality health and social services;

- *Education and lifelong learning* - School attendance and attainment, education and skills levels in the resident population, adult education services, employer-provided training and broader development opportunities, such as volunteering;
- *Culture and leisure* - The arts, museums and heritage, archives, libraries, tourism, children's play, sport, recreation, parks and public open spaces.

The approach taken in England may not be fully replicable in Scotland given the different policy and legislative context. However, the adoption of an outcome based approach around SOAs does provide the opportunity to consider the development of outcome measures or indicators that are related to the sustainability and development of towns. These could be based around Area Profiles for towns.

Recommendation 32

There is a potential role for the Small Towns Group working with the Improvement Service to develop a suite of Performance Indicators that can trace the development of towns, support the development of SOAs and underpin the use of Town Health Checks and Town Action Plans based on Area profiles.

Recommendation 33

The Small Towns Group might also seek to press the Scottish Government's Analytical Services Division to consider the development of a towns' 'quality of life' indicator for use within the Statistical Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) to form part of the small area (750 homes), assessment. This would help to develop baseline assessments against which progress over time might be assessed as part of SOAs. (See also recommendation 8)

4.3.2. A State of Scotland's Towns Report

The lesson from the Cities Review is that it is possible to analyse the current context experienced by Scotland's towns and to consider the different options that exist for their future success. The policy choices may include being explicit that policies should seek to specifically address the needs of towns in Scotland, closing policy gaps, rather than launching a new strategy for towns per se.

Most important of all will be to close the evident gap in assessing the contribution that towns have to play in the delivery of the National Purpose and National Outcomes.

It is difficult to identify what new strategies, policies and funding programmes to support towns might achieve when the state of Scotland's towns is unknown. There is currently a very incomplete picture of what is happening in each town.

Recommendation 10 (see p.19) suggests that the Small Towns Group should press the Scottish Government to commission 'A State of Scotland's Towns Report' to start the process of examining their needs, problems, economic and social trends as well as their potential in more holistic and comprehensive manner.

There is an urgent need to address the statistical basis for policy, by identifying the current situation, to establish a base case and thus to consider what the objectives of new programmes might be.

A 'State of Scotland's Towns Report' might cover a number of issues including:

- The importance of towns, why they matter, what sort of towns we want and why;
- Town typologies and demographics covering questions of decline and shift;
- Towns as places to work covering economic progress, city/ hinterland performance, competitiveness, labour markets and skills, innovation, property and place;
- Towns as places to live covering quality of life, housing choices, crime and neighbourhoods;
- Culture and tourism covering tourism, the town centre and the public realm, arts and culture;
- Towns and transport covering transport links between towns and across regions;
- Towns and environment covering sustainable towns, town planning, town design and management;
- Shaping Town's future covering the use of Community Planning, Single Outcome Agreements and towns, Whole Town Plans and the shared 'vision' for our towns, funding routes and ensuring successful delivery.

A 'State of Scotland's Towns Report' might be used to inform the development of, and close the gaps in, a number of policies that have a direct bearing on the future of towns in Scotland, including:

- Revised Economic Policy – giving it a sharper regional and local focus;
- Planning – ensuring that the next NPF and the development of the new City Region and Development Plans take full account of the needs of towns and how to secure their future success;
- Housing – to assist with the identification of new growth areas and their infrastructure needs;
- Transport – meeting the needs of towns as part of the updating of the Regional Transport Strategies.

There will be a need to consider how a 'State of Scotland's Towns Report' should be undertaken, by whom and how the wide range of stakeholders that would be affected should be involved in the process.

4.4 Lessons from Strategies and Processes Adopted in England

The development of Community Planning and SOAs in Scotland mirrors many of the developments that have taken place in England in recent years.

While some terminology differs between Scotland and England, the objectives of the process are similar – value for money, accountability and community engagement – but what is very striking is how much emphasis has been placed on integrating different processes and the shift to area assessments by central government in England. These approaches are worth exploring in detail to identify the practice which might be applicable in Scotland in support of town development within Community Plans, Development Plans and SOAs.

In October 2006 DCLG published '*Strong and Prosperous Communities*' a White Paper on the future of Local Government in England which aimed to give people and

communities more say on public services and action in their area. It also proposed to reduce central government control and make sure local services go on getting better and become more joined up.

The White Paper set out measures to change the way English Local Government works and the way Central Government works with it. A key aspect of the new approach is that local partners will have more space to respond to local needs and citizens more say in the services they receive and what happens in their area.

Community empowerment was the central aim of the White Paper. It set out to give local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives; creating strong, prosperous communities and delivering better public services through a rebalancing of the relationship between central government, local government and local communities. It proposed:

- More choice for local people in the way local services are designed and delivered, including the developed of Participatory Budgeting;
- A new duty for councils and other best value authorities to 'inform, consult, involve and devolve';
- People will have more and better information about their local services and how their public authorities are performing;
- More neighbourhood management;
- More opportunities for communities to take on the management and ownership of local facilities and assets, with a new fund to encourage them;
- More co-coordinated support for citizens and community groups to help them take advantage of empowerment opportunities.

4.4.1 Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs)

The UK Government believes that where agencies pool their experience and expertise more gets done ensuring that the right actions are taken and right services delivered. In England this is done through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), which is similar in structure and remit to Community Planning Partnerships. LSPs are non-statutory partnerships that:

- Bring together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as the private, business, community and voluntary sectors so that different initiatives and services support each other and work together;
- Provide a single overarching local co-ordination framework within which other partnerships can operate;
- Are responsible for developing and driving the implementation of Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements (similar to SOAs);
- Areas that received Neighbourhood Renewal Funds or its replacement Working Neighbourhood Fund are responsible for agreeing the allocation of this funding and helping to 'narrow the gap' and improve the quality of life for those living in the most disadvantaged areas by tackling.

Local Area Agreements (LAAs) set out the priorities for a local area agreed between central government and a local area (the local authority and Local Strategic Partnership) and other key partners at the local level. LAAs simplify some central

funding, help join up public services more effectively and allow greater flexibility for local solutions to local circumstances.

4.4.2 Comprehensive Area Assessment

The new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) process in England will differ from the old Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) in that it will be area focused and apply to all Agencies, not just Local Government. As with SOAs, the new CAA in England will be more outcome focussed than previous performance frameworks.

The CAA will not focus on just the performance of individual institutions and local authorities. It will focus on the outcomes for the area as a whole and its people. It will take into account the experience and views of citizens in the area.

While the first round of SOAs were prepared in-house, with little or no public or partner consultation, one of the strengths of the Local Area Agreements forged in England is the openness and transparency of their process of preparation.

For the SOAs to develop along these lines would require a shift in emphasis to include an element of community engagement that has so far been lacking and a greater emphasis on the needs of 'place', including towns.

4.4.3 New Tools for Town Assessment

As part of the Local Strategic Partnership/ Local Area Agreement process in England a number of assessment tools have been developed which specifically address towns.

Quality of Life Assessments, Town Health Checks and Action Plans have been prepared by many towns in England as means to identify their best future and the means to attain it.

Recommendation 34

The Small Towns Group should promote tools such as Town Health Checks and Action Plans as a means by which the Community Planning process, SOAs and Development Plans might be closely aligned and directed to secure the future potential of towns.

Quality of Life Assessment

The Quality of Life Assessment has been developed by three English government agencies – Natural England, English Heritage, and the Environment Agency. It is an approach and technique for undertaking sustainability appraisals and maximising environmental, economic and social benefits as part of any land-use planning or management decision.

The Assessment identifies 'what matters and why' for guiding decisions on the management, development and use of land. It considers social, economic and environmental aspects of quality of life, including the less tangible factors which relate to people's own values.

It is a tool that aims to assist with those decisions which appear to set different social, economic and environmental goals against each other; e.g. where should new development be accommodated.

Market Town Health Checks⁵

For centuries, market towns have been the focus of social and commercial activity for many rural areas. However, since the Second World War, this function has been under constant pressure from changes in the social, agricultural and industrial fabric of the country with the result that, today, many small towns are seen to be struggling to survive and keep their identities.

The DEFRA Rural White Paper (2000) identified the need to take action to assist small rural towns in retaining and growing their function as rural service centres or 'hubs'. The Countryside Agency introduced the Market Towns Initiative in April 2001, to provide practical guidance for the revitalisation of market towns designed to be accessible to individuals and partnerships through access to a web-based 'toolkit', handbook and resource documents. Over 200 towns have since carried out health checks.

Health Checks were initially promoted by the Countryside Agency as a tool to enable market towns to understand and tackle the problems and challenges they face now and in the future. Initially they formed part of a joint Countryside Agency and Regional Development Agencies £37million programme to revitalise England's market towns. The programme also included the Countryside Agency Vital Villages project which provided funding and advice for rural communities to improve their services and the Countryside Agency supported Action for Market Towns, a national network for smaller towns. Work on the Market Towns Initiative transferred to Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and Government Offices on 1 April 2005.

The Countryside Agency's information on how to carry out a health check and create an action plan were part of its market towns toolkit, which also contained advice about community participation, funding for projects, training, transport and business support. The market town health check process was seen primarily as a tool that would lead to a local action plan (see next section) to guide and plot practical regeneration activity. However, there is scope for the health check process itself to be used to involve communities and strengthen community/ agency relationships.

The Market Towns Toolkit contains a Market Towns Health Check in two parts:

a) The Health Check Handbook which outlines the stages required for developing a partnership approach to identifying a town's strengths and weaknesses and drawing up a plan of action including:

- Setting up a representative Market Town partnership;
- Gaining Community Commitment;
- Completing Health check Worksheets (questionnaires);
- Creating a "Vision" for the town;
- Preparing an Action Plan;
- Putting the Plan into action.

The handbook advocates that the Health Check is undertaken by a partnership to ensure strong community involvement in deciding which aspects of the town could be

⁵ See <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk>

improved and developing an action plan for its future regeneration, ensuring “ownership” of the process. This is fundamental to securing external funding and other resources.

b) A series of worksheets on issues which affect the quality of life in market towns. The worksheets were designed as practical checklists to help local people establish factual information about the town. They provide a robust and structured framework by which communities can conduct a SWOT analysis on four separate but interrelated aspects of life in and around their town. The aim is to get a wide spectrum of opinion about the needs and aspirations of the community. The worksheets cover four main topic areas:

- Environment;
- Economic Development;
- Social and Community issues;
- Transport issues.

The Health Check helps local people to create a vision for the future through an action plan. The action plan identifies projects to achieve the vision, which are then promoted for funding from a number of public bodies.

The worksheets usually involve volunteers from towns or villages of between 2,000 - 20,000 people, where a number of facilities and services are available, and which draw in people from the surrounding rural areas.

A summary of the findings from the Health Check and consultation and participation is next prepared, overall aims, or Vision for the town agreed, and an Action Plan determined. Funding and active partners then need to be sought to ensure that the projects identified in action plans can be implemented in order to achieve the Vision for the town. Securing the implementation of the Plan is usually the responsibility of the Town Partnership, which will include the Town or Parish Council and people who represent the main interests or organizations in the community.

The process of conducting a health check has acted as powerful stimulus in directing action by a range of public bodies and Local Authorities in England to supporting town development in an integrated way.

The Rural Commission (in England) published an analysis of the market towns Health Checks *'Messages from Parish Plans and Market Town Health Checks'* (2005). This research report categorised and reflected upon the key issues contained in 80 Parish Plans and 40 Market Town Health Checks from across rural England. It concluded that bespoke resources made a difference to engaging communities and implementation.

The study examined in detail 76 out of the 120 towns that were involved in the Market Towns Initiative (MTI) who responded to a questionnaire survey in summer 2002. The findings provided a snapshot of what had been achieved in the first year of the MTI, particularly in four key areas – establishing partnerships; community involvement; getting the best out of the Health Check, vision and action plan; and project successes.

The report concluded that a ‘healthy’ market town needs a whole range of factors: economic, such as attracting and retaining investment and a skilled workforce; environmental - conserving and creating high-quality landscapes and historic buildings; and social, such as bolstering civic pride and confidence.

From Town Health Checks to Town Action Plans

In England, work on supporting towns has now progressed from conducting Health Checks to preparing action plans to take forward steps to secure the growth of towns or to arrest their decline. Recently completed Town Action Plans aim to influence the Local Strategic Plan and the Development Framework (the equivalent to the Scottish Development Plan).

The following are examples of Town Action Plans.

Cheadle Action Plan

The Cheadle Action plan developed as a part of the 'Better Welcome programme' led by the 'Action for Market Towns Initiative' (AMTi), published in May 2008. Under the 'Better Welcome' towns in the Advantage West Midlands (AWM) region – the RDA for the West Midlands - have benefited from a programme of activities, designed to deliver a better understanding and evidence on which to base future action plans.

The Action for Market Towns Initiative (AMTi) is a membership organisation dedicated to promoting the vitality and viability of small towns by taking an integrated approach. AMTi has led a team of research and tourism experts in delivering a comprehensive assessment programme of the towns in the study. The programme included:

- A Tourism Product Audit;
- Tourism Information Provision Survey;
- A Local Business Survey;
- Visioning Workshop with town representatives;
- Face-to-face Visitor Survey;
- Signage Audit;
- SWOT analysis;
- Action Planning Workshop.

The Cheadle Action Plan used these data sources in its development. The Action Plan includes a section on projects to bring to the town in the future that are market led and aim to benefit the town in attracting more visitors.

The Ampthill Town Action Plan

The Town Plan for Ampthill completed in 2006 sets out a vision for the community's future and identifies the actions needed to tackle issues of concern. It was up to the community to decide what was most important to them. Following a grant of £5,000 in 2004 the Town Plan Steering Group:

- Identified local problems and opportunities;
- Set out an achievable and long term vision for the future;
- Prepared a Plan of Action to achieve this vision.

The Action Plan is based on information from surveys, research and community participation. Various subject Focus Groups examined the future of the Town considering:

- Business and Retail Development;
- Ampthill Farmers' Market;
- Housing;
- Education, Training and Employment;

- Sports, Social, Leisure and Entertainment, Youth and Community Facilities
- Tourism;
- Highways and Public Transport;
- Health and Social Services;
- Police, Other Emergency Services and Community Safety;
- Environmental Issues.

The Plan provides a foundation for lobbying various authorities that affect the Town and shaping the Mid Bedfordshire Strategic Plan to secure the needs of Ampthill.

SusSET

In Scotland the Town Action Plan model has been piloted by Aberdeenshire Council with funding from the SusSET EU Interreg 3C programme. The Sustainable Small Expanding Towns (SusSET) project aimed to find the best 'coping strategies' for small traditional, yet expanding towns. Three towns in Aberdeenshire (Ellon, Inverurie and Stonehaven) that took part in the project which covered 12 towns in Scotland, Sweden, Poland and Greece. The project sought to determine whether a single model, or models, can exist to help such towns cope with future issues and to regain positions of strength.⁶

Recommendation 35

The Small Towns Group should promote the development of the Town Action Plan model within the Scottish context as has been developed by Aberdeenshire Council. In particular to identify whether there are specific features of the approach that might be assisted by the Scottish Government promoting a closer relationship between Community Planning, the development of SOAs and the preparation of the new Development Plans.

The CPRE Town Health Check 2004

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) conducted a 'health check' survey of over 100 towns between March and October 2003. The CPRE report published in March 2004 suggested that the character of England's market towns was still being lost to new development, commuters and out-of-town superstores.

The CPRE report called on planners to make careful decisions about developments in market towns. It found serious traffic congestion and over-stretched services in many towns, caused by new building. More people are being encouraged to commute to work threatening to turn towns into dormitories. And it shows that life is being 'sucked' from high streets by shopping developments built outside towns or in bigger neighbouring towns.

CPRE urged planners to act to retain and develop market towns' character. It says planning policies must keep economic and retail developments inside market towns and encourage the use of already developed land to save the countryside for those living in the towns and to attract visitors.

In addition, the CPRE noted that scarcity of local materials or styles in designs for new buildings and the lack of local produce in shops is also a danger to a market town's distinctiveness. This erosion of character and attractiveness matters according to the conservation group because distinctive market towns are part of the lifeblood of the English countryside.

⁶ <http://www.britnett-carver.co.uk/susset/index.html>

Despite identifying a series of problems affecting towns the CPRE report also listed a top 20 of successful towns which have built on a good setting and well-conserved heritage, as well as demonstrating community spirit and civic pride, local markets, festivals and good planning.

Town Health Checks and Planning

A number of Councils in England have sought to align their Town Health Checks with the planning process as a way to secure policy integration and delivery of common outcomes.

In England the alignment of the Town Health Check with the planning process is seen as significant. Councils are currently in the process of preparing their Local Development Framework (LDF) and Community Strategies – the equivalent of the Development Plan and Community Plan in Scotland.

The LDF sets out guidelines for spatial development which replace Local Plans. Each Council in England is required to produce a Local Development Framework (LDF) following the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The LDF is closely linked to the Community Strategy for each District and is a mechanism for delivering the aspirations of the community.

Recommendation 36

The Small Towns Group should propose to the Scottish Government the use of Town Health Checks as a first step in the establishment of the new Development Plans as a means of ensuring that active consideration of the future needs of towns is not lost.

4.4.4 The Renaissance Towns and Cities Programme

Yorkshire Forward's '*Renaissance Towns and Cities Programme*⁷' which was launched in 2001 is an example of the sort of programme which the Small Towns Group might seek to promote for adoption in Scotland.

The objective for the 'Renaissance Towns and Cities Programme' is to ensure that towns and cities are well-designed, connected and accessible for people to use and enjoy and that they offer an attractive blend of housing, services, facilities and social activities. Places which are lively, well-functioning, clean and safe attract people; their skills and enterprise add to prosperity. The programme stresses that an attractive economy thrives by drawing and retaining people and by enabling them to fulfil their ambitions.

The programme has its origins in "place" and the built environment, using urban design as a process and a product for building sustainable communities. The programme has achieved considerable success, introducing the highest quality urban expertise to work alongside community 'town teams' involving local communities, amenity, business and political interests in the development of long term visions.

The programme worked to create a long-term 25 year vision in nineteen urban towns and the City of Leeds; helping to define new approaches to regeneration based on 'quality of place'. The initial aim was to help local authorities and other interested

⁷ <http://www.yorkshire-forward.com/improving-places/renaissance> and <http://www.rmtportal.com/>

parties rethink the purpose and physical form of their towns. Lead panellists were appointed to work with each Town Team, developing the vision and working with the community. All nineteen towns have completed their visions and masterplans are now developing implementation plans, which will include the identification of a portfolio of prioritised projects with defined delivery mechanisms and timescales.

The process is split into three distinct phases:

- Rethinking – working with people and partners to ‘imagine’ what might be;
- Remaking – moulding and shaping ideas into delivering real projects;
- Regaining – holding and sustaining the Renaissance – physical and beyond.

Yorkshire Forward’s role within the Renaissance Programme involves enabling others to achieve the Renaissance of their own town and cities. The Strategic Development Framework, (SDF), for each town is the document that is owned and shared by all those involved in the process and it is this that drives each Renaissance. The role of the partners engaged within Renaissance is to champion, pursue and deliver each of the SDFs.

Yorkshire Forward’s strategic approach to delivering the urban renaissance agenda is based on creating world-class urban centres, attracting and retaining businesses, people and jobs. Yorkshire Forward has committed to delivering an ambitious investment in urban renaissance over the next four years through the sub regional investment planning.

Yorkshire Forward’s Urban Renaissance Panel is working with local communities through recently formed Town Teams to create long term environmental, social and economic renaissance strategies for the region’s towns and cities built upon rising aspirations and enhanced skills in citizenship and civic leadership. Town teams involve local residents, business people, local authorities and members of Yorkshire Forward’s Urban Renaissance Panel of international experts to draw up long-term "visions" for each town.

Recommendation 37

The Small Towns Group should consider exploring the potential for a design led Renaissance Towns programme for Scotland jointly with Architecture and Design Scotland.

4.5 The Spatial Assessment of Scottish Government Policy

One of the conclusions from the review of current policies influencing towns is of the existing ‘spatial’ gap in Scottish public policy.

There is a need to press for more systematic analysis of the spatial impact of new policies. This would help to enable an earlier understanding of the likely impact of new policy on towns. This is particularly important for economic development, regeneration, planning, housing and transport

Most of the Directorates of the Scottish Government guide existing policies which impact on Scotland’s towns including:

- Rural and economic policies including culture and tourism policies;
- Regeneration policies supporting town redevelopment;

- Planning policies bringing together SPP and PANs for Town Centres, housing, transport and the range of land use and growth considerations;
- Housing policies that support investment in towns;
- Transport supporting connections cross local areas and to cities;
- Justice policies to support safety in the night realm including town centres;
- Health and wellbeing.

As the development and delivery of the new Single Outcome Agreements progresses, they will evolve. One opportunity to explore will be how they might be linked to provide an effective local area focus to the regional strategies for transport, planning, housing and economic development and National Planning Framework priorities.

This link between regional and local action would start to close the spatial gap. It would provide a means to integrate and coordinate the delivery of the five strategic themes and join it with local and national service delivery at the level of each individual community (or groups of common, or functionally related communities) while addressing local needs, priorities and potential which have been identified and confirmed by that community.

This would also help to close the current gap between local action and regional plans. There is a need for a clear and explicit requirement for regional action in the planning, regeneration, transport and housing fields to support for towns. One way to do this would be to develop a regional strategic spatial framework for the small town regeneration strategy to provide the focus for coordinating, integrating and prioritising resources across public, private and voluntary sectors. This would help to ensure that regional action did contribute to national growth. For towns to be ignored as they are at present is to ignore their potential.

4.6 Financing Town Development

The context for a new approach to funding the development of town policy is becoming more difficult. The current financial downturn is reducing the finance available for private sector partners' investment in business estates, town centre development and housing investment, even where a demonstrable demand exists.

The proposal for a 'State of Scotland's Towns Report' is to start the process of preparing the arguments to support a programme of specific engagement in Town Development that is informed by facts and a clear baseline against which progress can be assessed.

Much of the investment in towns has come from specific ring fenced funds such as the *Better Neighbourhood Renewal Fund* and the *City Growth Fund* established in 2002 to support the implementation of the City Visions which were provided by the Scottish Government to tackle social inclusion, economic and area renewal. Both the Better Neighbourhood and City Growth Funds have now been merged into the new general funding for local government that accompanies the agreement of SOAs from April 2008.

SR07 devolves a number of these programmes down to local government as part of a merged Single Fund approach tied to SOAs and the ending of ring fenced funding. This will put the onus on each local authority to determine how the single fund, including its share of the previously ring fenced project funds, is used at a local level.

Some funds have been devolved to Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) under the new Fairer Scotland Fund.⁸

The Fairer Scotland Fund is allocated to CPPs to help them achieve sustainable economic growth by:

- Regenerating disadvantaged communities;
- Tackling poverty by helping vulnerable people and groups;
- Overcoming barriers to employment.

The fund totals £435m over three years. CPPs can use the fund to tackle local issues related to poverty and disadvantage in the most effective way. CPPs are aiming to use the fund as a catalyst to accelerate the achievement of real outcomes for the most disadvantaged areas and vulnerable people. The Scottish Government expects the results / outcomes of the funding to be tracked through SOAs.

The following funds have been replaced by the Fairer Scotland Fund:

- Community Regeneration Fund;
- Community Voices Fund;
- Working for Families;
- Workforce Plus;
- More Choices More Chances;
- Financial Inclusion;
- Changing Children's Services Fund.

With the new emphasis on the quality of the built environment from the new Scottish Government, the 'place making' or 'place shaping' role of local government could be a key feature of the development of local government in Scotland in coming years, though much will depend on resourcing.

A specific area in which the Small Towns Group might seek to exert influence at both the central and local government level is in relation funding decisions. Are issues of town development taken into account within the range of Scottish Government funded grant programmes and is there scope to reduce overlaps, duplication and complexity across such programmes to support town growth in a more focused way than hitherto?

Recommendation 38

A key issue for the Small Towns Group will be to consider whether/ how it should attempt to influence COSLA's submissions to the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

While sources for funding town development are becoming more limited, as the retrenchment of Scottish Government support for regeneration to URCS and BIDs and reduced structural funds support amongst others, new instruments are being considered at the UK level that may become relevant.

The development of a 'State of Scotland's Towns Report' may lead to a credible analytical case for the establishment of a 'Town growth development fund'. As this report shows there is a policy gap concerning towns' development within Scottish Government policies, but more importantly there is a lack of knowledge as to what is happening within towns which needs to be addressed first.

⁸ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/fairer-scotland-fund>

For example, what is the actual level of public spending on towns? In Scotland it is difficult to see how area spending by Agencies and NDPBs might be traced. As a first step this gap in the knowledge base needs to be addressed. Without addressing how spending is traced it is difficult to see how area based targets and outcomes might be secured.

One source of resources for Town development might be the return of landfill tax receipts to Local Authorities in support of their work to tackle climate change. This is a position adopted by the LGA in discussion with the UK Government.

Other new financial developments being considered in England might be relevant.

The report from PricewaterhouseCoopers and the Centre for Cities '*Financial Devolution for Local Growth*' (Feb 2008) explores how new financial tools can unlock greater funding for England's towns and cities. Financial Devolution for Local Growth is an independent survey of public and private sector leaders' views on new funding tools for urban investment. It also reviews the potential for Business Rates Supplements and Local Asset Backed Vehicles to support regeneration activities in response to growing demand across all sectors and regions for greater investment in local infrastructure.

The DCLG reviewed the *Role of city development companies in English cities and city-regions* (2007). The development of city development companies (CDCs) is part of the evolution of local delivery vehicles (LDVs) over many years to promote local economic development in the light of changing circumstances and local needs. Company structures such as URCs and CDCs are seen as having value in helping council-led economic partnerships deliver on their shared objectives across council boundaries. They give legal certainty about the obligations of the partners and provide a mechanism for taking decisions. Companies have also proved a useful way of demonstrating to private sector partners that the public sector can work in a speedy, un-bureaucratic way within structures that firms can understand.

The LGA has called on government to focus on encouraging and supporting such initiatives and the spread of best practice rather than seeking a role in approving or regulating companies established by local councils and their partners.

The LGA also notes that England's sub-regional economies are not confined to cities or city regions and that all towns, cities and shire areas participate in sub regional markets for labour, housing and goods and services. The LGA is looking for the development of the URC concept to cover a wider geographical area, a broader range of functions and leverage over greater budgets and not just "City and City-Regional Economies".

This is an important, unresolved, debate that needs to be monitored by the Small Towns Group, with an eye to assessing its application to Scotland and its potential benefit to towns' development.

Recommendation 39

The Small Towns Group should consider with COSLA the potential benefit to town development of new financial instruments being considered at the UK level such as the consideration by the Treasury of Business Rate Supplements and Local Asset-Backed vehicles.

5. PRESENTING ARGUMENTS TO SECURE INFLUENCE

This chapter considers how best to build support for the case for towns with Government and within Parliament including:

- Influencing – developing an advocacy strategy;
- Building understanding of the case for Scotland’s small towns;
- Establishing an Alliance for Scotland’s Towns;
- Using the Parliament effectively to promote the small towns agenda;
- Engaging with Political Parties and the Political Groups in the Scottish Parliament.

5.1 Influencing – Developing an Advocacy Strategy

Securing influence takes time and sustained engagement. One-off submissions, meetings and correspondence rarely secure the sort of influence necessary to influence or change policy.

The key determinant for influence is showing that the issues presented matter and are significant for Scotland, either a particular area, for public policy in general or the economy in particular.

There are passive and active forms of engagement.

Passive engagement is reactive and minimal. Essentially it is presenting the views of the group and the need for towns to be fully considered in public policy through responding to consultations on draft strategies and policies.

Active engagement involves using access effectively and particularly developing a relationship with Government and Parliament that enables objectives to be pursued effectively. Effective active engagement involves understanding the Government processes, working with others and using the channels of influence presented through the Scottish Parliament.

Direct active relationships are difficult for a number of reasons:

- a) Securing a systematic relationship with Government is challenging. This is due to the changing structures and priorities of departments which are governed by annual Business Plans and shifting Ministerial priorities. But, the new Government has been more consistent and ‘joined up’ than its predecessors presenting the possibility of engaging with the themes of the new Government in the knowledge that the themes will last at least during of the current Parliament, through to May 2011.
- b) Engaging with the sweep of government and presenting the need for towns to be considered across Government takes time. Meeting with officials, responding to different policy proposals from different departments, making the case for consideration within new policy rather than just presenting the case for an overarching town policy is slow, but tends to lead to greater buy in at the different levels of Government.

Indirect influence is achievable and important. It creates the conditions through which direct active relationships can be more effective and have greater impact:

- Of most significant is working with COSLA under the auspices of the new Concordat;
- In alliance with others. Collaboration is the best way to show that there is an issue or idea which Government or Parliamentarians should take seriously;
- Engaging with the Parliament is one real way to influence policy.

Securing the full support of COSLA would be critical to the development of the Small Towns Group's advocacy strategy. COSLA has had a long standing relationship with Government, but has now secured a more substantial position of influence. Engagement with COSLA on the policy issues relating to towns such as planning, climate change etc and in relationship to matters such as the development of Single Outcome Agreements to ensure the distinctive needs of towns are presented alongside more generic sector views.

Building a credible influence with Government stems from a mix of the following:

- Demonstrable knowledge of an issue;
- Being representative of an area or topic;
- Being a key player that cannot be ignored;
- Having cross sectoral links – an Alliance that has a clear case; (section 5.3)
- Making regular contributions on a theme gets noticed;
- Making clear contributions that are easily understood and highlight a problem, an unintended consequence, a social ill, or matter that needs addressing that is not being addressed.

Recommendation 40

The Small Towns Group should agree an Advocacy Strategy with short, medium and long term priorities for engagement with decision makers.

This report suggests that the primary objectives for an advocacy strategy for the Small Towns Group would be to:

- Raise the profile of the Small Towns Group and towns issues across the Scottish Government and within the Scottish Parliament;
- Build awareness and recognition of the needs and opportunities in Scottish towns;
- Secure consensus on how these needs should be met and the opportunities realised through engaging with national agencies, representative bodies and national and local elected representatives who share the aim of supporting the development of small towns;
- Realise the ambitions of the Small Towns Group to become a stakeholder for government.

This Advocacy Strategy for the Small Towns Group proposes:

- Building understanding by the Scottish Government of the case for Scotland's small towns;

- Develop the case for establishing an Alliance for Scotland's Towns;
- Using the Scottish Parliament effectively to promote the small towns agenda;
- Engaging with the political parties and the political groups in the Scottish Parliament.

5.2 Building Understanding of the Case for Scotland's Towns

Central to securing influence is to understand how the administration works; both at the political level and the administrative level. Where are the potential sources of influence and engagement?

Systematic engagement is essential to secure policy intervention as more than one Directorate have policies that impact upon Scottish towns. These include:

- Housing policies identifying the areas for growth and the nature of a sustainable community;
- Regeneration policies supporting physical development and town centre redevelopment;
- Planning policies bringing together the range of land use and growth considerations;
- Transport supporting connections across local areas and with cities;
- The economy and public finance including culture and tourism policies.

Securing a systematic relationship with Government is challenging. This is due to the changing structures and priorities of departments which are governed by annual Business Plans and Ministerial priorities. There is a culture that sees policy in terms of specific strategies, prepared by officials who then move on to other work. Rarely is there a sense of policy continuity, except for the broad sweep of policy.

While the Government's programme lacks detail and has obvious policy gaps, there are a set of clear potential opportunities for engagement by the Small Towns Group.

Many of the SNP manifesto commitments create an opportunity for the Small Towns Group to present ideas and proposals that show how the developing policies to create and support sustainable towns will contribute towards achieving the Scottish Government's primary purpose and Strategic Objectives. For example; towns could be a natural basis for pilots to test the practicalities of implementing the SNP commitments to 'devolving power to local government' and 'devolving power to communities'.

The relationship with Ministers and civil servants that the Small Towns Group needs to secure must be systematic, sustained and substantial across the key portfolios not partial, ad-hoc and short term. The Small Towns Group should not rely on one allocated person or single portfolio entry into the Scottish Government. Most of the Directorates of the Scottish Government have an impact on Scotland's towns. The key Directorates that will need to be engaged with are:

- Rural and Environment
- Health and Housing
- Finance, Economy and Transport.

Recommendation 41

In seeking to engage with the Scottish Government, the Small Towns Group needs to present clear, crisp and succinct arguments that

- Show clearly why Scottish towns matter for the future of Scotland;
- Show the relationship to the five Strategic themes established by the Scottish Government and the cross portfolio links, showing why towns matter to policy success and the delivery of Government policy;
- Show why the policy gaps should be closed and the difference that supporting towns would make to them and to Scotland.

Recommendation 42

The Small Towns Group should aim to put itself on the political and policy map. To start this process it should consider organising a programme of briefings, meetings and presentations with key Executive Ministers and Scottish Government officials. A set of systematic ministerial visits might be secured for each recess across all portfolios and study tours for civil servants and other public sector agencies organised.

Responding to Scottish Government consultations is important. The responses get analysed and published and these studies are then used to inform the development of policy and briefing Ministers.

Recommendation 43

The Small Towns Group should consider how best it might respond to the most relevant consultations as a Group representing local authorities with a common interest in and policy platform for creating and supporting sustainable towns.

The Scottish Government will be consulting on a number of key policy areas over the coming period. Submitting appropriate responses to consultation papers, even those that may not be directly related to towns provides an opportunity for the Small Towns Group to identify the links between town development and the Scottish Government's objectives. Astute use of consultations can be used to promote the case for towns as a positive factor within all areas of public policy in Scotland and across the whole public sector.

While the likelihood of consultations on policy matters as specific as town development is slim, the opportunity exists to press for different portfolios to take account of the needs of towns, or the policy impact on towns more systematically. For example, the consultation on the regulations to support the preparation of the new Development Plans (Oct 2007) would have been an opportunity to press the case for towns being a specific factor that should be taken in to account in any subsequent guidance.

Recommendation 44

The Small Towns Group could press for Scottish Government research programmes to take account of the need to increase the knowledge base around towns, assess the impact of towns on policy and the impact of policies on towns.

Recommendation 45

The Small Towns Group should press for agreement with the Scottish Government to a set of measures to support Scottish towns including:

- Commissioning a 'State of Scotland's Towns' Report to provide a rigorous analysis to underpin the development of new policy;
- A new SPP/PAN to support towns growth, together with the adoption of new planning policies to define and protect towns;
- The next National Planning Framework NP3 to place more of an emphasis on supporting towns and cities;
- A clear statement from the Scottish Government elaborating what the new emphasis on the 'Built Environment' rather than Regeneration means for towns;
- Policies and programmes to more explicitly consider their spatial impact on towns; in particular, transport, health, housing and regeneration policies.

A 'State of Scotland's Towns' Report would enable a more credible case to be made for new resources and tailored programmes of intervention to support their growth in the next Comprehensive Spending Review. While the Scottish Government has currently only limited financial room for manoeuvre and new funding programmes are unlikely within the tight budget settlement of SR07, it is likely to respond positively to creative ideas for action, which are backed up by a strong evidence base.

Using the media, through articles and comments on key issues from the perspective of Scotland's towns would be a useful way to show leading politicians of all parties why towns matter and to develop their analysis and understanding of their problems, importance and potential. This might be in the mainstream Scottish media, but also in the more specialist press such as the Holyrood magazine, New Start and Regeneration & Renewal. This can have impact as Government Ministers receive press cuttings on a daily basis. 'The cuts' tend to be interpreted in two ways; a) which issues are a problem that have to be fixed? and, b) how is Scotland being presented? Understanding this highlights the opportunity for indirect influence.

Recommendation 46

The Small Towns Group should look to place articles in COSLA Connections which goes to all Councillors, MSPs and other bodies; and in Holyrood magazine which has a political reach that is not to be underestimated.

5.3 Establishing an Alliance for Scotland's Towns

Collaboration is the best way to show that there is an issue or idea which Government or Parliamentarians should take seriously. Building an Alliance beyond the current Small Towns Group and Local Government is vital if the case for supporting Scotland's towns is to be made effectively.

At the national level, the alliance might usefully involve the Small Towns Group working with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Natural Heritage.

There are a number of other bodies which share many of the Small Towns Group's concerns and could be effective partners with which to explore a joint approach, including the Association of Town Centre Managers, the Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Business. Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and the Association of Scottish Community Councils may also be willing participants in an Alliance. Other organisations, such as the Development Trust Association and national forums with a particular interest in specific aspects of towns related policies such as the environment, transport and regeneration should also be approached; for

example, organisations such as Greenspace Scotland, Living Streets Scotland and the Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum.

Particularly where the Community Plan Partnership is working through Whole Town Action Plans to influence the development of the Single Outcome Agreement and the new Development Plans, engagement with community organisations and Community Councils will be crucial.

Recommendation 47

The Small Towns Group should identify and engage with potential allies in making the case for small towns to the Scottish Government with a view to establishing an Alliance for Scotland's Towns.

5.4 Using the Scottish Parliament to Promote the Case for Towns

Engaging with the Scottish Parliament can have a real impact on policy.

The Scottish Government pays attention to what Parliament says – reports on draft Bills, Parliamentary Questions that are tabled for answering, Members' debates, Committee studies and reports on key issues. For example, the Smoking Ban and the Anti-Social Behaviour legislation arose through MSPs applying pressure on the Scottish Executive through these various means.

With the current Parliamentary arithmetic the importance of the Scottish Parliament as a forum has increased. This has increased the significance of the Committees and the role of back-benchers.

Recognising that MSPs are busy and have a myriad of pressures on their time, getting noticed can be a challenge. One way to start to be noticed is to adopt a title for the Small Towns Group, with a strap line that succinctly sums up what the group is about, a logo that captures the essence of the group. The Group should always include a statement of the group's aims and what it is primarily aiming to achieve. Most importantly, why does it matter and why should MSPs be interested?

Traditionally, interest groups contact their local MSPs or list MSPs to raise a point of concern, to lodge Parliamentary Questions to raise their concerns, to co-ordinate meetings with Government Ministers and to press for enquiries by Committee. Even a single question to a Minister can lead to work within Scottish Government and their impact should not be underestimated.

Being listened to by politicians is ultimately all about showing relevance to their concerns. Showing why towns matter for constituency and list MSPs would be the key starting point for developing a closer relationship with Parliamentary representatives. It is important for the Small Towns Group to take up all the opportunities that are presented, including:

- Provide speaking notes for Member debates with briefings on town's policy and proposals;
- Draft questions for MSPs to lodge;
- Write briefings for MSPs to consider, though be aware that there needs to be a strong constituency relationship for the briefing to be noticed amongst the other correspondence and briefing material received.

Working with and influencing MSPs requires care as there is a need to recognise the distinction between advocacy and lobbying. The Small Towns Group can quite legitimately work to inform and assist their understanding, so creating champions across the parties.

To date, while many questions and members' debates focus on the need to tackle a local issue, it is still relatively rare for there to be a concerted effort to highlight an issue that affects large areas of Scotland. There is currently no lobby for towns.

If the Alliance for Scotland's Towns as recommended above is created then it could play the lead role in forging the relationship with MSPs.

One more systematic way to progress issues is to secure an MSP champion who will co-ordinate a cross party group. There are a number of such groups that meet to consider topics beyond the Party dogfight or the scrutiny of Government policy and legislation.

The Association of Town Centre Managers (ATCM) is working with MSPs to establish a Cross Party Group on Town Centres.

Recommendation 48

The Small Towns Group should liaise with the Association of Town Centre Managers to ensure that the Towns Centre Cross Party Group of MSPs has a broad enough remit to cover all town development issues and should join the Group.

The Cross Party Group would be a powerful forum for collaboration with other partners such as the ATCM. The Cross Party MSP Group would receive regular presentations and updates on Towns issues, including:

- Briefings on town's issues;
- Summaries of reports and studies;
- Promotions and campaigns;
- Questions to table to Ministers and Early Day Motions;
- Hold a series of receptions for members of the group and other Parliamentarians.

The group might meet with representatives of the Small Towns Group on a regular basis, possibly 2-3 meetings each session of Parliament – (i.e. possibly six meetings per year) with a formal issue based work programme, with external speakers to explore specific themes so that there are clear outcomes for the work of the group, rather than a set of meetings for meetings sake. As with other Cross Party Groups, the Minister and appropriate Civil Servants would also be invited to contribute, though would not be the sole focus for interaction.

Whether or not a Cross Party Group is established, a regular briefing cycle for MSPs is critical to raise the profile of the Small Towns Group and the issue it is promoting.

5.4.1 Using the Scottish Parliament Committee system effectively

There are two types of committees of the Scottish Parliament, Mandatory committees and Subject committees.

Mandatory committees have remits set out in the Parliament's Standing Orders. They are:

- Audit;
- Equal Opportunities;
- European and External Relations;
- Finance;
- Public Petitions;
- Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments.

Subject committee remits are based on the responsibilities of Government Ministers. Currently they are:

- Economy, Energy and Tourism;
- Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture;
- Health and Sport;
- Justice;
- Local Government and Communities;
- Rural Affairs and Environment;
- Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change.

Committees consider the detail of Scottish Government Bills and MSP Bills, but also initiate reviews and enquiries into current issues. They can be a useful conduit through which to influence the policy debate.

Committees have recently undertaken a series of inquiries that would be of interest to the Small Towns Group; for example:

- The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee conducted an inquiry into tourism and the feasibility of achieving 50% growth in tourist revenue by 2015. It is conducting an inquiry into Scotland's energy future;
- The Justice Committee has conducted a Community Policing inquiry to follow up on its inquiry into the effective use of police resources;
- The Local Government and Communities Committee has considered the need for Affordable Housing and considered the National Planning Framework and Urban and Town Centre Regeneration.

The Committee is planning to hold an inquiry into Urban and Town Centre Regeneration in early 2009. It has noted that:

“The Scottish Government's principal objective for regeneration policy is to promote the successful and sustainable transformation of communities across Scotland by creating the right environment for private and public investment. Work in this area would consider how Government regeneration will assist town centre renewal as well as urban regeneration through Urban Regeneration Companies. It would take into account the different regeneration needs of cities, urban towns and rural towns’.

The Small Towns Group will wish to establish early contact with the Committee clerk in order to be alerted when the call for evidence is issued.

Recommendation 49

The Small Towns Group should consider raising the awareness of the Scotland's towns within the Committees of the Scottish Parliament by:

- Contributing evidence to Committee enquiries;
- Developing a relationship with the committee clerks; as these are the people who help shape the agendas and determine who might be invited to give evidence;
- Pressing for enquiries on issues of significance to towns.

5.5 Engaging with Political Parties in the Scottish Parliament

With the Scottish Parliament Labour Group and Liberal Democrats having recently elected new Leaders their policy positions adopted and presented as the 2007 Manifestos are likely to be reviewed. However, the 2007 Manifestos remain the guide to current party policies for those parties outside Government. Appendix 1 provides details of the extensive commitments to towns included in opposition party manifestos at the May 2007 election:

New leaders of the Labour and Lib Dem groups will take time to review current policy commitments and refresh the approach. But, it is highly likely that towns will continue to feature as policy commitments of both parties, though the specific policy proposals can be expected to evolve. The three largest opposition parties, Labour, Conservative and Lib Dem can be expected to all try to renew their policy positions and revisit their 2007 Manifesto commitments over the next two years. This presents an opportunity to build support for the aims and objectives of the Small Towns Group.

Statements of support by MSPs cannot be taken as a commitment to action by a political party were it to attain Government office as there are clear processes for the adoption of policy by parties. MSP comments need to be regarded as a statement of interest and a good basis for creating a ground swell of interest.

The previous Manifesto of each party is a clear guide to party positions but will change. Policy positions and commitments are influenced by ideology, policy consistency, historical objectives, perceived (and tested) party advantage and finally, the likely impact on the key seat battleground.

Policy development in political parties follows an opaque process meaning that engagement with Political Parties in the framing of manifesto commitments is very difficult to secure systematically. Most Manifestos are the result of either a policy development process, or the compilation of conference resolutions. Usually the process is tightly controlled and not an open transparent one with easy engagement.

Manifesto preparation is usually an internal process drawing on leading party members and Conference resolutions. The best means to engage is via MSPs of each party and to feed papers/draft resolutions through to Party Headquarters.

Some political parties will actively seek views from external bodies – such as trade groups, Non Governmental Organisations, professional associations – though this is rarely comprehensive, structured or public. The best way to seek to access this is to send a text setting out why towns matter to Scotland to the Party General Secretary and propose a meeting to talk through the issues. But there is no guarantee of access or the offer being taken up.

Cross Party Groups are a good way in which to try to influence policy debate within political groups and parties, with a view ultimately to influence manifestos.

However, the Small Towns Group will need to exercise care in this political engagement in order to ensure that it maintains cross party support and is not seen to be supporting one particular political party stance over another.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The report contains 49 recommendations some of which are linked; for example, five recommendations refer to a 'State of Small Towns' Report and eight relate to the Small Towns Group developing an Advocacy Strategy.

All the recommendations are for the Small Towns Group to take forward. The report does not make recommendations for other bodies. However, several recommendations specifically suggest that the Group should lobby or work with other organisations in order to further the case for Scotland's small towns.

The recommendations are re-presented in this chapter under four broad headings and with an indication of the priority that the Small Towns Group might attach to each one. The four broad headings are:

- Improving the information base for the case for Scotland's small towns and developing innovative approaches and good practice;
- National Outcomes, Single Outcome Agreements and small towns;
- Government policy and guidance (including funding);
- Advocacy and building an Alliance for Scotland's Towns.

The recommendations have been accorded one of three levels of priority – High, Medium or Low – based on factors such as importance and significance to developing the Small Towns Group's agenda, timescale and relevance. The recommendations given a 'High' priority are those which the Small Towns Group need to prioritise in order to have the greatest potential impact.

In order to provide a clearer indication of the priority attached to the recommendations the recommendations have also been presented in a table format.

Improving the information base for the case for Scotland's small towns and developing innovative approaches and good practice

High Priority

Recommendations relating to a 'State of Scotland's Towns' Report

Recommendation 10

The Small Towns Group should press the Scottish Government to commission 'A State of Scotland's Towns' Report to start the process of examining their needs, problems, economic and social trends as well as their potential in a more holistic and comprehensive manner.

Recommendation 24

The Small Towns Group should ensure that a 'State of Scotland's Towns' Report considers the role that towns play in supporting rural communities and whether there are any policy models or funding mechanisms for supporting rural communities that could inform the development of similar support for supporting Town development.

Recommendations 25

The Small Towns Group should consider pressing for a more systematic assessment of the tourism and cultural potential of Scotland's towns as part of the 'State of Scotland's Towns' Report.

Recommendation 26

A 'State of Scotland's Towns' Report should include analysis of health and wellbeing in Scotland's towns to identify both where communities are relatively healthy and where there remain areas of health inequalities, and the reasons for these situations.

*Recommendations relating to Town Health Checks and Action Plans***Recommendation 32**

There is a potential role for the Small Towns Group working with the Improvement Service to develop a suite of Performance Indicators that can trace the development of towns, support the development of SOAs and underpin the use of Town Health Checks and Town Action Plans based on Area profiles.

Recommendation 34

The Small Towns Group should promote tools such as Town Health Checks and Action Plans as a means by which the Community Planning process, SOAs and Development Plans might be closely aligned and directed to secure the future potential of towns.

Recommendation 35

The Small Towns Group should promote the development of the Town Action Plan model within the Scottish context as has been developed by Aberdeenshire Council. It should consider the work that has begun at Scottish Borders Council to develop a Whole Town Action Plan and to identify those lessons that may have a wider application and replication across Scotland. In particular to identify whether there are specific features of the approach that might be assisted by the Scottish Government promoting a closer relationship between Community Planning, the development of SOAs and the preparation of the new Development Plans.

Recommendation 36

The Small Towns Group should propose to the Scottish Government the use of Town Health Checks as a first step in the establishment of the new Development Plans as a means of ensuring that active consideration of the future needs of towns is not lost.

Medium Priority**Recommendation 11**

The Small Towns Group should consider working with one or more URC on the applicability of the lessons from the pilots to other towns.

Also, it should consider whether a package of mini URCs might be developed to tackle specific regeneration needs of towns with funding from the Scottish Government given its commitment to URCs (SR07) as its main source of support for regeneration activities. Mini URCs might be targeted on towns, bringing together best practice in regeneration with the design of the physical space.

Recommendation 23

The Small Towns Group should consider how to develop the importance of quality 'green' environment in terms of attracting investment, improving health and improving the quality of life of towns and groups of towns in Scotland. It should consider working with others with an interest in this issue (e.g. Green space Scotland and the Paths for All Partnership) to commission research to support the development of quality 'green' environment and the 'green infrastructure' concept as it relates to towns.

Low Priority

Recommendation 4

The Small Towns Group should consider the lessons from the approach being taken in England that aims to strengthen the role of local government and its relationship with place whilst also establishing the Homes and Communities Agency.

Recommendation 21

The Small Towns Group should press for research and transport modelling into the transport needs of towns and their potential to contribute to securing significant operational improvements within the transport network and for the modal shift between private and public transport.

National Outcomes, Single Outcome Agreements and small towns

High Priority

Recommendation 2

Whilst support for town development is not a primary outcome indicator, there is an opportunity for the Small Towns Group to influence the content of the menu of outcomes to be agreed for the future. This should focus on showing that developing sustainable towns can be a focal point for contributing to meeting the five themes and some of the national outcomes; for example, showing how SOAs impact on, and support, Town Growth, reinforce the collaboration underway through the Community Planning process and also relate to the preparation of the new Development Plans (see Chapter 4 Tools for further details) Good practice examples of how SOAs have included outcomes and indicators that support the small towns agenda should be disseminated through the Small Towns Group.

Recommendation 31

The Small Towns Group should engage with the Improvement Service with a view to the development of tools that will address the issue of how to monitor the impact and effectiveness of town development through SOAs. In particular this should include consideration of whether there might be scope within SOAs to support the development of 'whole town action plans' and what national policies might be needed or refocused to arrest decline or build successful sustainable growing towns by considering the state of Scotland's towns and the development of a specific policy understanding of their needs.

Medium Priority

Recommendation 1

The Small Towns Group should aim to influence the nature and content of the negotiations that might take place between the Scottish Government and local authorities to ensure that the needs and interests of towns are taken into account in future revisions of National Outcomes and Indicators.

Recommendation 6

The Small Towns Group should seek Scottish Government support for the development of and/ or support for an independent research resource that would provide evidence based information on Scotland's towns, improve the collection of relevant data, share best practice on performance standards and outcomes in relation to towns and identify and support opportunities for co-operation and joint working between towns. An immediate priority would be for the Scottish Government

to support the development of High Level Statistics to enable the tracing of trends relating to the quality of 'place', at neighbourhood level or at the level of larger spatial units such as towns and cities. This would assist with the greater targeting of policy and the development of National and Local Indicators specific to towns that would be used to measure the outcomes from the new Towns Regeneration fund.

Recommendation 44

The Small Towns Group could press for Scottish Government research programmes to take account of the need to increase the knowledge base around towns, assess the impact of towns on policy and the impact of policies on towns.

Recommendation 14

The Small Towns Group should monitor the progress of Bids and in particular the impact of the limitations on local and central government funding. It should consider the relationship between the outcomes from the Bids pilots and the development of the next phase of Single Outcome Agreements to secure a link between development, renewal and the contribution of other public agencies to sustainable town development.

Recommendation 28

The Small Towns Group should consider the most appropriate indicators for using at the local level that relate to the delivery of the national outcomes and whether the national outcomes adopted so far are supportive of the aspirations of the Group for sustainable town growth.

Recommendation 33

The Small Towns Group might also seek to press the Scottish Government's Analytical Services Division to consider the development of a towns' 'quality of life' indicator for use within the Statistical Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) to form part of the small area (750 homes), assessment. This would help to develop baseline assessments against which progress over time might be assessed as part of SOAs. (See also recommendation 8)

Government policy and guidance (including funding)

High Priority

Recommendation 15

The Small Towns Group should consider making representation to the Scottish Government to ensure that the development of the National Planning Framework should secure a more comprehensive overview of the place and potential of towns in Scotland and consider more substantively their infrastructure needs, along side those of the cities and regions of Scotland.

Recommendation 45

The Small Towns Group should press for agreement with the Scottish Government to a set of measures to support Scottish towns including:

- Commissioning a 'State of Scotland's Towns' Report to provide a rigorous analysis to underpin the development of new policy;
- A new SPP/PAN to support towns growth, together with the adoption of new planning policies to define and protect towns;
- The next National Planning Framework NP3 to place more of an emphasis on supporting towns and cities;

- A clear statement from the Scottish Government elaborating what the new emphasis on the 'Built Environment' rather than Regeneration means for towns;
- Policies and programmes to more explicitly consider their spatial impact on towns; in particular, transport, health, housing and regeneration policies.

Medium Priority

Recommendation 3

In presenting the case for Government action to support towns it will be essential to show what blockages the Small Towns Group is looking to have removed and the scale of action it has attempted through the application of Community Planning, the application of Single Outcome Agreements and Town Action Plans etc.

Recommendation 7

The Small Towns Group should make the case to the Scottish Government for a revised Urban – Rural Classification that is based on a more graded settlement population threshold (500 – 2,000; 2,000 – 20,000; 20,000 to 50,000; 50,000 to 100,000; 100,000 to 300,000; and 300,000+) that would be a more representative profile of Scotland's settlement profile and give more sophistication to settlement planning.

Recommendation 8

The Small Towns Group should consider pressing for the published form of the SIMD to go beyond the worst 15% to show the pattern of the changes in all data zones and the impact of low pay to reveal which might be areas facing decline. A comprehensive report would support the context analysis required when town health checks are conducted. (see also recommendation 34)

Recommendation 9

The Small Towns Group should work through COSLA to press for the Scottish Government and Scottish Enterprise to identify the practical steps they plan to take to give life to the commitment to take a more strategic approach to the growth of Scotland's towns within the context of the Economic Strategy and to undertake special impact analysis of major policy proposals.

Recommendation 13

The Small Towns Group should address the lack of a comprehensive approach to the regeneration of towns and press the Scottish Government to consider supporting a programme of Town Centre regeneration following on from the 'State of Scotland's' Report.

Recommendation 16

The Small Towns Group should lobby the Scottish Government to consider providing further advice in Planning Advice Notes and Guidance to address the needs of towns, not just town centres, within the revised planning system, including whether there should be a comprehensive PAN for towns.

Recommendation 38

A key issue for the Small Towns Group will be to consider whether/ how it should attempt to influence COSLA's submissions to the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

Low Priority

Recommendation 5

The Small Towns Group should monitor the development of any proposals to decentralise power to Community Councils and consider the potential impact on small towns.

Recommendation 12

The Small Towns Group should engage with the Scottish Government to ensure that the development of the work around Compulsory Purchase Orders supports development in towns. A towns' pilot might be offered to progress this work.

Recommendation 17

The Small Towns Group should seek to engage with the planning and architecture schools, practitioners in architecture, landscape architecture and transport planning to develop design ideas and guidance for town development. For example, it might consider developing the relationship with Architecture and Design Scotland to help improve the accessibility of their advice and to promote the development of an urban design guide that goes beyond the design of buildings.

Recommendation 18

The Small Towns Group should monitor the outcome of the Firm Foundations consultation and consider whether/ how it should respond to ensure that the Scottish Government's housing strategy and policies take full account of the needs of towns and the desire to create and support sustainable communities, including towns.

Recommendation 19

The Small Towns Group should encourage the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland to consider whether national and regional transport strategies and other major influences such as the planning system support the needs of towns.

Recommendation 20

The Small Towns Group should engage with Transport Scotland and Regional Transport Partnerships to ensure that the guidance for the revised national and regional transport strategies takes full account of the needs for support for connections to and from towns, as well as the establishment of high quality streetscapes and green corridors within urban areas and their importance to community wellbeing.

Recommendation 22

The Small Towns Group should consider the potential to offer towns as pilots to build on the new focus on the built environment and 'sustainable places' in order to promote the potential of towns as sustainable communities and to explore what support may be required to help them achieve this potential.

Recommendation 39

The Small Towns Group should consider with COSLA the potential benefit to town development of new financial instruments being considered at the UK level such as the consideration by the Treasury of Business Rate Supplements and Local Asset-Backed vehicles

Advocacy and Building an Alliance for Scottish Towns

High Priority

Recommendations relating to a Small Towns Group Advocacy Strategy

Recommendation 40

The Small Towns Group needs to agree an Advocacy Strategy.

This report suggests that the primary objectives for an advocacy strategy for the Small Towns Group would be to:

- Raise the profile of the Small Towns Group and towns issues across the Scottish Government and within the Scottish Parliament;
- Build awareness and recognition of the needs and opportunities in Scottish towns;
- Secure consensus on how these needs should be met and the opportunities realised through engaging with national agencies, representative bodies and national and local elected representatives who share the aim of supporting the development of small towns;
- Realise the ambitions of the Small Towns Group to become a stakeholder for government.

Recommendation 41

In seeking to engage with the Scottish Government, the Small Towns Group needs to present clear, crisp and succinct arguments that

- Show clearly why Scottish towns matter for the future of Scotland;
- Show the relationship to the five Strategic themes established by the Scottish Government and the cross portfolio links, showing why towns matter to policy success and the delivery of Government policy;
- Show why the policy gaps should be closed and the difference that supporting towns would make to them and to Scotland.

Recommendation 42

The Small Towns Group should aim to put itself on the political and policy map. To start this process it should consider organising a programme of briefings, meetings and presentations with key Executive Ministers and Scottish Government officials. A set of systematic ministerial visits might be secured for each recess across all portfolios and study tours for civil servants and other public sector agencies organised.

Recommendation 43

The Small Towns Group should consider how best it might respond to the most relevant consultations as a Group representing local authorities with a common interest in and policy platform for creating and supporting sustainable towns.

Recommendation 46

The Small Towns Group should look to place articles in COSLA Connections which goes to all Councillors, MSPs and other bodies; and in Holyrood magazine which has a political reach that is not to be underestimated.

Recommendation 47

The Small Towns Group should identify and engage with potential allies in making the case for small towns to the Scottish Government with a view to establishing an Alliance for Scotland's towns.

Recommendation 48

The Small Towns Group should liaise with the Association of Town Centre Managers to ensure that the Towns Centre Cross Party Group of MSPs has a broad enough remit to cover all towns' development issues and should join the Group.

Recommendation 49

The Small Towns Group should consider raising the awareness of the Scotland's towns within the Committees of the Scottish Parliament by:

- Contributing evidence to Committee enquiries;
- Developing a relationship with the committee clerks; as these are the people who help shape the agendas and determine who might be invited to give evidence;
- Pressing for enquiries on issues of significance to towns.

Medium Priority**Recommendation 29**

The Community Voices Network and Scottish Community Development Centre might be considered as potential partners for the Small Towns Group in working to provide specific advice and guidance on community engagement and empowerment of towns and the potential adoption of Town Health Checks and Town Action Plans.

Low Priority**Recommendation 27**

The Small Towns Group should consider collaboration with the Scottish Community Safety Network to secure recognition of the need for safer town centres within overall town development policies and to press the Scottish Government for research into the impact of crime on towns and whether there are opportunities for piloting new anti-crime responses on a town basis.

Recommendation 30

The Small Towns Group might collaborate with the Scottish Centre for Regeneration (SCR) in the development of practical guidance, training and skills development material for practitioners. This might also include collaboration with Higher and Further Education and developing hands on experience, secondments and job experience across the community groups involved in the agenda.

Recommendation 37

The Small Towns Group should consider exploring the potential for a design led Renaissance Towns programme for Scotland jointly with the Architecture and Design Scotland.

Prioritisation of Recommendations

Recommendation	Area of Work	Priority		
		High	Medium	Low
1	Outcomes		•	
2	Outcomes	•		
3	Govt. Policy		•	
4	Information			•
5	Govt. Policy			•
6	Outcomes		•	
7	Govt. Policy		•	
8	Govt. Policy		•	
9	Govt. Policy		•	
10	Information	•		
11	Information		•	
12	Govt. Policy			•
13	Govt. Policy		•	
14	Outcomes		•	
15	Govt. Policy	•		
16	Govt. Policy		•	
17	Govt. Policy			•
18	Govt. Policy			•
19	Govt. Policy			•
20	Govt. Policy			•
21	Information			•
22	Govt. Policy			•
23	Information		•	
24	Information	•		
25	Information	•		
26	Information	•		
27	Advocacy			•
28	Outcomes		•	
29	Govt. Policy		•	
30	Advocacy			•
31	Outcomes	•		
32	Information	•		
33	Outcomes		•	
34	Information	•		
35	Information	•		
36	Information	•		
37	Advocacy			•
38	Govt. Policy		•	
39	Govt. Policy			•
40	Advocacy	•		
41	Advocacy	•		
42	Advocacy	•		
43	Advocacy	•		
44	Outcomes		•	
45	Govt. Policy	•		
46	Advocacy	•		
47	Advocacy	•		
48	Advocacy	•		
49	Advocacy	•		

Appendix 1: Towns Commitments Included in Opposition Parties' May 2007 Manifestos

The Green Party

P3 We will introduce a Sustainable Communities Bill to:

- Establish planning guidelines that inhibit the growth of 'clone towns' and protect retail diversity;
- Replace top-down Regeneration Outcome Agreements with Community Service Agreements to provide local residents with a meaningful say in determining mainstream service priorities;
- Introduce a 'best value' framework for public authorities that creates incentives to buy from local suppliers and social enterprises;
- Introduce a local business tax regeneration credit for firms operating in community planning areas;
- Reform the Scottish Enterprise 'Business Gateway' to support new ways of stimulating business formation and growth (including social enterprise) in disadvantaged communities;
- Require that at least 5–10% of land in regeneration areas is kept in some form of community ownership;

P4

- We will revise the business rating system to allow small in-town businesses to compete with out-of-town developments on a fairer basis;
- Scottish Enterprise and the Local Enterprise Companies should focus more attention on small and local business, and their remit should be expanded to cover social and cultural aspects of development in a similar way to Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

P 20 Communities need more power to demand speed limits, traffic calming and prioritisation of road space. Local authorities should work with communities to develop comprehensive speed management plans for all of our cities, towns and villages.

P21 We will work with bus companies to improve services, develop integrated bus and coach networks for longer journeys. We will encourage integration of rural buses with other public transport and with business transportation such as couriers, regular shop deliveries, etc.

- We will carry out an inquiry into rural bus services and pricing;
- We will encourage the use of out-of-town coach interchanges that reduce congestion and journey times.

The Scottish Liberal Democrat Party

P21 Support the roll out of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) across Scotland which allow businesses to come together to vote to invest collectively in local improvements in the area.

P22 To get more people and businesses connected and provide coverage across whole towns and cities, I will introduce a WiFi Towns and Cities Fund.

P30 Establish a Carbon Challenge Demonstration Fund to support innovative low carbon developments and help towns and cities in Scotland achieve measures to do just that.

P64 To make Scotland a cycling nation, we will start with a new Cycling Demonstration Town Fund.... We will support increased investment in safe

segregated cycle paths, requiring major towns and cities to develop a core network of routes from residential areas to town centres, linking in to Cycle Resource Centres.

P76 Towns, suburbs, and public spaces

It is time to bring renewed life and purpose back to Scotland's small towns and suburban centres. I believe we need to invest in local neighbourhoods and breathe new life into towns, burghs and communities. Small businesses are the lifeblood of many of Scotland's communities. Yet we increasingly see small independent shops moving out of towns and suburban centres, leading to the 'ghost town' and 'clone town' phenomena. A small number of multinational stores control an increasing share of the market, and local traders are often damaged as a result. I believe we need to tilt the balance much more in favour of small retailers and established centres. I will introduce a Small Retailers Support Fund. This will allow local authorities to extend discretionary rates relief to 100 per cent for small, independent shops designated as having a vital community benefit. This will build on the existing discretionary relief available in rural areas. In addition to our plans to double small business rates relief, this will offer real support to smaller shops. I believe we need to invest in our small towns, with a regeneration fund to breathe new life into small towns. We seem to have lost the knack of creating great shared public space – places that bring people together rather than segregate, exclude or drive them apart. By empowering people to initiate improvements to their local neighbourhoods place by place, we can invigorate our communities. These small steps to enliven streets, parks, and other public spaces are the building blocks of a thriving community. In the end the small steps will add up to major strides. Of course it's still important to take a strategic view, to have a masterplan for a city or a region. But the danger is that this will always become a centralised approach unless it's matched by action at the very local level, place by place, street by street. I want to see local people given the power to decide what happens in and around their streets.

P77 Pilot the idea of a Neighbourhood Standard where local communities are empowered to look for high standards of design, safety and support in their local city, town or suburban centres, supported by neighbourhood wardens.

P78 I want to see Scotland's towns and cities create major new parks, with high quality facilities, not broken swings or closed cafes.

P77 Strong, effective and efficient local councils with an independent local mandate, but councils, in turn, should empower local communities to run their own village, town or suburban areas.

The Conservative Party 2007

P7. The lack of affordable homes is a major issue all over Scotland. Politicians frequently pay lip-service to the problem, but the barriers to home ownership remain in place. We believe it's time to stop talking, and start acting. To a significant degree, the lack of affordable homes has been a symptom of Scotland's outdated planning system. The supply of available land has been reduced, which means that fewer houses have been built. Consequently, local shops have fewer customers, local transport has become less viable through lack of use, local schools are under threat because of a lack of pupils, and local people are forced to leave their villages and towns in search of homes elsewhere.

P22. Scotland's town centres, especially in rural areas, are finding it difficult to compete with larger chains and superstores which benefit from economies of scale in their pricing structure. Whilst we support local people making the choice to benefit

from lower prices wherever they can find them, we do believe that small towns need a bustling High Street to maintain their distinctive character. To help them, we will establish a Town Centre Regeneration Fund, worth £20m every year. In order to benefit, towns would decide on a regeneration project and apply directly to the Scottish Executive for consideration. This will provide a timely boost not only to struggling Scottish towns, but to the nation's prosperity as a whole.

P36. Just like people who live in the cities, the people of Scotland's countryside are not getting value for money from the taxes they pay. For their substantial tax bills they deserve better provision of education, health services, and housing, a greater level of safety in their villages and towns, and more guarantees over the future of basic services like their Post Office.

P38. The natural beauty of Scotland's rural environment goes a long way to securing the tourist trade, and our proposals on business rates and local regeneration, especially our Town Centre Regeneration Fund, will further support tourism.

The Scottish Labour Party

P21/22. Scottish Labour will ensure that the economic growth and renaissance we have brought to our cities is shared across Scotland's towns.

The town centre is the focal point of any town and a central part of people lives. It is where we shop, do business, meet others, socialise, and spend leisure time. It is important that people feel their town centre is clean, successful and safe. We will work to make Scotland's towns a place to live in, work and enjoy.

Labour will re-invigorate Scotland's town centres by creating new partnerships between public agencies and the small businesses at the heart of our town centres, with powers and resources to act. Town Centre Strategies will harness the ideas and innovation of local people. Wigtown has re-invented itself as a book town. West Kilbride is earning a reputation as a craft town.

Scottish Labour will:

- Establish Town Centre Trusts comprising key national and local stakeholders which will be tasked with developing local plans for town centre regeneration.
- Set up a new Town Centre Turnaround Fund. It will be administered like the Land Fund ...so local communities can take ownership of derelict or rundown properties or land to refurbish or turn into new safe green space. It will refocus derelict building and contaminated land funds, Lottery funds, and historic and townscape heritage funds, to pump more investment into Scotland's small towns;
- Invest an initial £50 million into the Town Centre Turnaround, as a primer to attract other public and private funding;
- Give Trusts legal powers to initiate compulsory purchase orders, so CPOs can be used more easily and effectively to bring about dramatic change in town centres and high streets;
- Trusts will have the responsibility for small town Business Improvement Districts, in their town centres;
- Consult on extending the community right to buy to urban areas;
- Rebalance powers between landlord and tenants of small high streets shops to make it easier for an individual with a good business idea to set up in our high streets;
- Create new soft loan schemes for entrepreneurs and double small business rates relief which will support small shops and businesses in town centres.

P73. We will continue the Woods In & Around Towns Initiative, and develop more urban forests for recreation, health and biodiversity.

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