

RE: Scottish Government Informal Consultation: Town Centres and Local High Streets

The Scottish Government are currently holding an informal consultation on Town Centres and Local High Streets. This consultation is being held with key stakeholders and is being facilitated by the Centre for Scottish Public Policy (CSPP).

The Scottish Government are keen to engage with community councils, as key representatives of their local communities, to discuss and debate the issues facing Scotland's High Streets.

The Government have proposed to hold several meetings across Scotland at which these issues can be discussed. They have asked for one to be held in Inverness.

I am writing to invite you to attend this meeting which will be held in the Council Chamber in the main Council Office on Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on the 26th September 2008 from 2-4pm. Tea and coffee will be available from 1.30pm. Ross Martin who is the Director of Policy at the CSPP will facilitate the meeting.

I am very aware that for many of you a meeting in Inverness will be difficult to attend both in terms of time and cost and it should be noted that the Government are not prepared to pay travel expenses. I have raised this issue with the Government and to enable full participation written comments on the consultation will be accepted. There is a paper attached to this correspondence that outlines the key areas on which views are being sought. Details on how to respond can be found in the attached document and all responses should be received by Friday 3rd October.

Should you wish to attend the meeting on the 26th September, please email Andrew McCulloch on Andrew.mcculloch@highland.gov.uk or telephone 01463 702006 by Monday September 22nd.

If you should have any queries please feel free to contact me,

Yours sincerely



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Scotland's Town Centres and Local High Streets

Stakeholder Engagement exercise facilitated by Ross Martin, Director of Policy at the Centre for Scottish Public Policy (CSPP), on behalf of the Scottish Government

Issues Framework Briefing

The purpose of this engagement exercise is to gather the full range of views of all the key groups from across the public, private and voluntary sectors involved in the business of our town centres and local high streets, and in so doing to ascertain any potential policy changes that the Scottish Government may wish to consider in this area, in support of its central policy purpose of generating sustainable economic growth.

This active engagement exercise is being designed in partnership with individuals and organisations with a real stake in the future health of our high streets and town centres. The methodology employed to gather thoughts on how best government can respond to the challenges and opportunities for development and growth is being jointly designed with the stakeholders themselves to ensure maximum engaged input.

In order to best assimilate the wide range of views and interests likely to be communicated throughout this wide-ranging exercise, the following 'issues framework' has been developed from the preparatory discussions that have taken place with groups and individuals around the country.

The issues framework will be used as a structure on which to build any arguments for policy action that arise from this engagement, but any areas of concern or ideas for initiatives that may fall out with the issues framework will also be incorporated into the reporting phase of this exercise.

A key aspect of this initial exercise shall remain its inclusive nature, and a determination not to treat individual engagement events as being just another one of a series delivered as a response to a central template. There exists a real desire and determination to give voice to all those that wish to be heard throughout this process.

The findings of this exercise will be communicated directly to Ministers and shall form the basis of the conference "Vital & Vibrant Town Centres: the Challenges for our Town Centres & High Streets" to be held on Wednesday 19th November in the Stirling Management Centre, University of Stirling campus at which the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth will be the keynote speaker.

Issues framework

The first three policy areas that require consideration are those that fall within the remits of Planning, Economic Development and Transportation. These policy drivers help to determine the nature of a place, its character and its attractiveness to people.

In order to gather views on these policy areas, this issues framework encourages the consideration of the following broad themes and the more detailed aspects that underlie them;

1 Physical Planning – Sense of Place

Aspects such as the design of buildings, their relationship to the streetscape in which they sit, the first impressions of an area at its entrances, the sense of place that an area exudes are often elements that develop, for good or ill, over a period of time. They raise questions such as;

- Are the entry points to the town/high street attractive?
- Does the physical lay-out/design of the public realm encourage its use?
- Can the street signage be improved to assist with access for key groups?

2 Economic Identity – Global, National, Regional, Local

One of the key criticisms of our town centres and local high streets is that they have allowed the march of globalisation to destroy their individual character. This alleged identity fraud has been blamed for homogenising the hearts of local communities, raising issues such as;

- Is there a real sense of identity?
- Are there any obvious gaps in the local market?
- What are the strengths of this particular local offering?

3 Accessibility – How to get there, get in and move around

As town centres and local high streets have developed, often as a result of individual planning applications and not as part of a strategic, community centred plan, the ability of people to move around an area has been impaired. This raises questions of the type;

- Is this an easy destination to get to?
- Can people get around within the area easily?
- Are there barriers to moving in and out of the place?

Each of the policy areas above include a wide range of other issues that will almost certainly be brought into this discussion through the engagement exercise. The issues framework is designed to allow a focus on the key policy drivers whilst avoiding a more fundamental examination of their supporting governmental structures and delivery systems.

The second set of practical policy parameters to consider are those that enable the local market to function, including licensing & regulation, the balance between the public, private & voluntary sectors and the degree of intervention in the market that is deemed appropriate.

In order to assess these issues, we shall focus on the twin topics of choice and competition. In any marketplace, the balance that is struck between unbridled competition and the desire to deliver a degree of choice to consumers and service users is a critical aspect and this exercise would like to examine this issue as viewed by those involved in striking that balance.

One high profile aspect of the choice and competition debate is the development of out of town retail centres, and this exercise is keen to hear views on this particular aspect of policy (including the usefulness of sequential testing), how it has been implemented and any other changes that may be effected to improve the current situation.

1 Choice

- Is there sufficient choice on our high streets?
- What level of choice is required within our town centres?
- How can regulation impact on that choice? (e.g. Public House Licensing)

2 Competition

- Does competition drive standards of service?
- Is there too little/not enough competition for custom?
- How can competition be better regulated? (e.g. hot food take-away provision?)

The third set of issues requiring consideration is those that support the primary functions as detailed above. These supporting issues will include the provision of key services and the functionality of certain facilities, including;

1 Services

- Is public toilet provision adequate?
- Can public information be improved?
- How can public services be integrated in?

2 Facilities

- Are there adequate crèche facilities available?
- Can people with access difficulties be better supported?
- Does the market leave gaps in support services, such as places to take a break?

There will of course exist a wide range of other issues of concern to individuals and to groups, but it is hoped that many of these can be seen in the context of the initial issues framework in order that we can begin to develop a clear picture of coherent policy

change across the wide range of governmental responsibilities that impact upon the operation of Scotland's town centres and local high streets.

Any individual or group response to these issues is welcomed, and should be e-mailed to the facilitator, Ross Martin at info@cspp.org.uk. Other supporting material, not suitable for email should be posted to Ross at the Centre's address.

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