

# SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 THINK PIECE – BLOG – TOWN CENTRES OF THE FUTURE

## Introduction

The Scottish Government is keen to bring together views and ideas from a wide range of sectors and to explore the priorities Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) should address.

In the twenty-sixth in a series of Think Pieces, Phil Prentice, the Chief Officer of Scotland's Towns Partnership, Scotland's national towns' collective, sets out his thoughts on Scotland2050 and specifically town centres of the future. The opinions expressed are that of the author and we hope that they will stimulate debate and discussion.

## The issues and opportunities

*What are the current issues and opportunities for your area of interest?*

Scotland is a nation of towns. These places invented much of the modern world and the heritage in our towns is a storybook of our journey as a nation; it's about folklore and myth, wars and kings, poets and parliaments, our churches, landmarks, languages, traditions and industry.

Today, town centres remain a key element of the economic and social fabric of Scotland and can be a central component of successful local economies, offering a base for small businesses and jobs. They are democratically accessible to everyone and are seen as the core of community life, offering spaces to meet and interact with access to facilities and services that people require.

Two thirds of our population and businesses reside in towns. At the national scale, they are nodes of labour, distinct local production and tourism. Across regions, networks of towns connect people and infrastructure at scale. Towns and neighbourhoods matter to the transformation of modern economies, promising value; blending local and global opportunities. But, the town narrative is less well articulated than cities. Towns suffer. Transformation is stalled. The promise of a networked urban system, with choices, to support an increasingly diverse society is not met with the support and investment to deliver the reality.

The problem of tackling declining town centres is complex and involves many stakeholders. It is critical that an evidential and holistic place based approach is deployed.

The issue in itself is relatively easy to understand; Traditional high street retail will continue to shrink and the delivery of public and retail services will continue to digitise. Our demographic is changing and ageing rapidly and the relationship between people and place is evolving.

This is not simply about growth, it's about prevention, early intervention, low carbon and inclusion. Do we have the right leadership, skills, ambition and willingness to start thinking and acting differently.

*What are the future issues and opportunities, looking ahead towards 2050?*

*Economy and Community, Climate and Environment. Digital and Technology. Culture and Heritage. Health and Housing.*

*How are these issues relevant to planning?*

*Planning should be encouraging the step change need for innovating new infrastructure, citizen and business behaviours, new housing and transport systems for changing demographic.*

*Are the issues different in different parts of Scotland?*

*There are common themes but each place has unique characteristics so a place based approach with local place plans are crucial.*

## **Planning solutions**

*What are the factors over which the planning system has the most influence?*

*Town Centres were not mentioned on the Planning Bill. It is important that planning authorities have a requirement to produce solid plans for all their town and neighbourhood centres*

*What might National Planning Framework 4 do to address these issues?*

*Recognise Towns and town centres as national economic and social infrastructure with a key remit related to employment and commerce, climate emergency, service provision, leisure and community.*

## **Summary**

*Short term (next 10 years) – what **will** happen?*

We will continue to see the repurposing of retail space and a rise in the return of independents and Town Centre Living

*Long term – what **could** happen?*

[Future Towns 1](#)

[Future Towns 2](#)

*Overall – what **should** happen?*

We should aspire to have attractive and accessible centres that are served by a planning system which encourages vibrancy and relevance to the local population

### **Biography**

Phil Prentice is Chief Officer of Scotland's Towns Partnership (STP) and National Programme Director of Scotland's Improvement Districts. STP is the go-to body for Scotland's towns and BIDS; a hub for developing collaborations, promoting good practice and sharing knowledge. It is funded by the Scottish Government to provide a national support mechanism.