

A Scotland of Better Places

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PART ONE: CONTEXT

Project Purpose and Approach

The David Hume Institute's Action Project investigates actions for Scotland to 'move faster towards a country that is more prosperous, sustainable, inclusive and fair'. Commencing in October 2020, the project engaged more than 4500 people from across Scotland, bringing a broad range of perspectives. Findings from the project were cross checked with independent survey data that reinforced the appetite for change across society that has emerged from the pandemic.

This report is not a systematic review of the extensive research evidence that exists regarding place policies in Scotland. Rather, the core purpose of the project has been to listen to individuals and institutions and then present a synthesised summary of their priorities and ideas for action.

This report focuses on potential place related actions. In addition to insights gained from the wider work of the project team, this report is based on 9 webinars with individuals, communities, investors, officials and experts between October 2020 and January 2021. These webinars included an initial framing discussion with Scottish and wider UK place policy experts and a succession of webinars on cities (city-regions), towns and rural areas¹. A series of 3 joint webinars with the ESRC's Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE) explored key place aspects of housing and neighbourhood policies in Scotland. That was followed by two further webinars (responding to requests made by participants in the earlier core discussions) on the development of policies, including '20 minute neighbourhoods' and on bigger picture city changes in the wake of Covid-19 and 'national' spatial planning that were delivered jointly with Policy Scotland.

The webinars involved over 600 participants from a variety of backgrounds and experience. Community perspectives in this part of the project came largely from community organisations rather than individuals. Elsewhere in The Action Project, individual and community voices were prioritised in conversations, informing the overall findings. We did not seek to engage Scottish and UK government officials in presenting within the webinars though significant numbers attended some sessions. We sought insights from beyond the 'usual suspects'.

Places and Policies: Meanings and Perspectives

Reflections about how to think about place policies evolved through the course of the webinar discussions and before reporting on policy actions proposed, the remainder of this introduction sets out the broad framing for place policies that emerged.

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Thinking Places

The central concern of this element of The Action Project is how Scotland can be more effective in dealing with the possibilities for, and problems of, places in public policy-making. Place is, technically, a geo-referenced point or spatial area. In social and economic terms, place is a locality of action and interaction, and often has no hard boundaries. In politics, and often misaligned with economic and social interaction spaces, place is a formally defined and bounded administrative or political space.

Explaining why particular points or areas (places) are changing or of significance in policymaking requires an appropriate intellectual framework. The density and proximity of people, organisations, and structures within places shapes complex, often small, connections between them. The nature and range of how such interactions occur at different scales of place (neighbourhood, city, region or nation) are also important. For instance, major economic systems such as the labour market and its associated housing market function, often, at metropolitan and sub-regional scales because flows of people shape a connected system over these geographic areas. However, some social systems, such as frequent non-work social contact operate at much more local or neighbourhood scales. In consequence, an effective place strategy for a politically defined city, such as Edinburgh, will require much place policy for the economy to have a city-region perspective and governance, whereas there are important areas of community investment and service provision where neighbourhoods matter more.

Understanding places must take on the perspective of city-region and neighbourhood actions. Dealing with place requires a systems perspective that looks for the connections and recursive relationships between people, institutions, property and the environment within places, and their connections with and spillovers to wider geographies.

Place-based perspectives do not often sit at the heart of government economic policy thinking at the broader scales of, for instance, Scotland or the UK. Even regional and urban economic policy formation explores relationships with a great deal of reductionism and largely sees change as driven by external events and processes rather than local creative capacities and flexibilities. For instance, there is much that appears to matter in shaping local economic development that disappears in Green Book evaluation processes; there is little sub-national application of modelling techniques used at the Scottish level, for instance, there is no econometric model of the Glasgow-City Region economy that nests readily within a well- functioning aggregate model of the Scottish or UK economies. There is the danger that national policy-making assumptions throw out nuanced growth influences that need to be considered at town and neighbourhood scales. And they invariably prioritise national over local objectives.

These observations apply not just to economic policymaking but to a wide range of national programme designs. Though much has changed for the better in Scotland in the last decade or two, there are still silos of policy scope and expertise. Siloes often lose the 'systemic' essence of place. For example, in announcing and delivering welcome programmes for affordable housing does the government reflect on how these programmes can create key community anchors, and their wider consequences for places: is that considered in the public spending assessment?

These top-down perspectives can lead to a presumption that places are largely shaped by wider external economic and policy processes. Cultural vitality, informal networks, the economic effects of social contact, the capacities of people and communities within places to be flexible and creative, all often disappear in 'big policy' thinking. However, there are policy issues where localities, or government agencies working locally, may be better informed about the effects of place policies than central government. In consequence, when the Scottish Government seeks to add 'place' as an important element in policy discussion, for instance in recent reports of the Scottish Infrastructure Commission and the Just Transitions Commission, it needs to focus upon how chosen action agents (local governments, non-profits, business, individuals) in localities work together to deliver 'place' nuance and synergies to improve outcomes.

Good ideas and good intentions for place policies may not be enough. A nation may be good at place thinking and poor at place policy delivery, and this concern arose in the conversations as being important across all of Scotland.

Place Capital

More effective design and delivery of place policies for Scotland critically require a more complex model of economic development than those prevailing in regional, city and town economic development policies. Most current Scottish discussions on the drivers of growth in places focus on skills, infrastructure (always omitting housing) and innovation processes as critical change drivers. And this may be relevant. However, there are elusive 'other' explanations of change and they may rest in the complex system or ecology of people-institution interactions that exist within a locality. These effects could be labelled, along with other locally fixed influences, as 'place capital'. Place capital is typically discarded at grander scales of policy formation.

Disregarding 'place capital' may lead to a potentially serious mis-specifications in policy design, evaluations and actions. If place is seen as an inert vessel (with flows of trade and policy resources filling it), rather than as a petri dish of potentially creative interactions, then it is commonplace for place policies to be justified either on redistribution, to compensate for poor market performance (with policy resources often used unwillingly by finance officials concerned about displacement and no additionality), or serious market failure. Place policies are often then delivered by governments as palliative redistributions, because places have, essentially failed, rather than because there are creativity and flexibility mechanisms within places. Clearly some places fail as sustainable, viable places for economic activity and have to adjust. And some localities may not be creative or flexible. But whether kinds of places are seen as 'peripheral' or 'integral' to national futures depends on who is allowed to share in the policy thinking and what they understand as the drivers of change. There are clear dangers if all the resources for policy thinking and policy funding lie at the centre of a nation.

A nation, or region, comprises a connected set of local place systems. Policy thinking or measures that focus on one activity or policy silo and that disregard feedback effects across connected places

understate the importance of place-based policies in national and regional progress and may misconstrue the essential rationales of place policy.

The Sparks review of the Scottish Town Centre Partnerships Programme (2021) is a good illustration of how to understand the national importance of very local policies. The Government of Ireland's (2021) strategy for small towns and rural areas is also a clear example of how places that had come to be regarded as peripheral (socially and geographically) may come to be seen as central, indeed integral, to national recovery after Covid-19. Place policy may emphasise the local but it is not about thinking small; it is about shaping the best geography for policy and action to shape local and national progress.

Actions for connected ecosystems needs a focus on a specific place, but, at the same time, they demand collaborative and conjoint thinking and action across sectors and system levels. This, then, is the terrain for exploration in this theme of The Action Project. When the aim is to 'Create and Share Wealth and Grow Talent in Future Scotland' it is imperative to explore the theme from the perspectives of different scales of place and recognise the recursiveness of locality and nation.

Place is the arena where the policies of different orders and departments of government often first coincide, and with sometimes complementary or conflicting outcomes. Fiscal and monetary policies, with uneven spatial incidence, spatial policies (such as regional, rural, town and city policies), systems of local government finance and multiple sectoral policies, all have 'local' impacts. Effective policymaking requires both the alignment of the potential synergies of different order/sector policies and it also has to weigh the preferences and powers (autonomies) of local as well as wider governments. In an effective democracy this requires both collaboration in aims and coordination in delivery. Silos of government action and layers of power do not readily mesh with understanding and managing the complex 'ecosystems' of place and anything less than a collaborative approach that engages all levels of government and impacted communities will under-perform. As May 2021 approaches the absence of collaborative thinking in UK regional and place policies sets a poor tone and context for the best efforts to promote place recovery from Covid-19 across Scotland.

Multiple Scales of Place

'Local' involves multiple geographies of different scales. Scotland is a spatial system that is composed of neighbourhoods, towns, cities and regions that are often (but not inevitably) nested within and connected to each other. Place, identified at one or several of these geographic scales, is where ideas about and policy actions for Scotland, and Scots, are finally, and literally, grounded. The policy challenge is to implement actions that will lead to better management of places, both for individual localities and the nation, that will progress major policy goals. Policy analysis and implementation that is devoid of place dimensions, that is seen as operating at one spatial scale, that is sectoral in design and objectives, and that does not recognise the different autonomies and citizen preferences will not best serve national and local interests.

We have found through these webinars that when an ecosystem focus is made on places, whether sparse rural areas or dense city-regions, that decisions made at higher levels are widely regarded not

only as siloed but are revealed to be based in intellectual perspectives and policy procedures and processes that are by their nature reductionist about the nature of social and economic behaviour within places. The friendly gesture that sparks social capital that engenders trust and adds to place capital, that may shift productivity, is not part of the conversation or calculus of national decision takers. Nor is the mutual respect that encourages neighbours to guard nature and environment. Instead place or spatial policy is often focussed upon palliative redistribution to the poor in failing places. In consequence place policy is seen, often, as a redistributive add-on. A more appropriate emphasis amidst local ecosystems would be to see place policy as also fostering the creative links and synergies within communities (from neighbourhoods to city regions) that needs to be complemented or created.

Past Experiences

Over the last century there has been a long, deep, changing experience of place policies in Scotland. There has been mixed success. Some regional policy efforts, that focussed on inter-regional redistribution of growth and employment, have failed to embed mobile capital and firms into the Scottish economy for the long term; other place-oriented initiatives have been successful and there has been an effective remaking of some city economic bases since the 1980's.

The HIDB, subsequently HIE, set the pace on ideas for rural development from 1965 onwards, with an integrated social, economic and community remit. Since the 1970's the diverse economic renewal projects aimed at countering the effects of lost economic bases in cities, towns and coalfields have had mixed outcomes. In the major cities, some neighbourhoods have been revitalised and transformed by integrated, multi-sector regeneration projects and others have experienced repeated cycles of physical decline and multiple dis-advantage over two or three waves of renewal, and generations of families, with evidence of mixed success.

More and less integrated, better and poorer place policies have been important in changing Scotland over the last fifty years. It is worth noting this long, mixed record because it reminds us that an enthusiastic espousal of spatially redistributive or intendedly integrated policies has occurred in the past and that it has not always been successful. Lauding place policies can be popular and easy, delivering and implementing them is not.

There is presently a renewed, and welcome, Scottish Government interest in what is required to create and maintain good places for all. In 2020 the reports of the Scottish Infrastructure Commission and the Just Transitions Commission and the manifesto and proposed missions for the Scottish National Investment Bank have all emphasised the significance of shaping places that support the achievement of the aims of the National Performance Framework. These interests reinforce the growing significance of diverse place 'Deals', for cities, towns, rural regions and islands that have proliferated since the middle of the last decade. In addition, there is much debate about the regional and spatial policies that the UK Government will introduce to replace the EU regional policies that will end with Brexit. At the same time the Scottish Government, standing back from particular policy initiatives, have explored ideas of place and advocated, in collaboration with key place-making

professions and institutions, the development of 'Principles', 'Standards' and 'Practices' (that will improve place development and outcomes).

Scotland is a nation with much experience of and interest in place policies and there is much of merit to build on in addressing the difficult, uncertain times.

Do We Need to Say More?

Given this plethora of welcome, place related policy and practice initiatives on the part of government it is important to ask whether the DHI Action Project has anything to add to emerging ideas and initiatives. Or should we give two or three cheers for the Scottish Government, wish them well and put our shoulders to the wheel?

From time to time there are critiques, usually by economists (Glaeser, 2014; SERC, 2010) of the relevance of area or place policies that emphasise the primacy of sectoral and 'people' policies. No such critique is offered here as the place versus people policy dichotomy is in essence both false and unnecessary (Maclennan, 2002; Maclennan, 2015). It stems from a reductionist approach to both places and policies.

The intended action is, rather, to urgently strengthen the interest of governments in Scotland understanding the nature of places, facilitating their connections, enhancing their creative capacities, recognising their autonomies, listening to their voices and preferences. We advocate that they relax and remove the very strong hierarchical, top-down and centralising conceptions of spatial and local government policies that have typified the Scottish and British approach to localities. Devolution to Scotland, to Holyrood, has fashioned positive change but after two decades it has not promoted significant further devolution within the nation. It is clear that the unprecedented public health crisis and negative economic shock, at least over the last century, of Covid-19 has had, and will continue to have, adverse social and economic effects on Scots and most severely on particular kinds of places. If that were the only consideration then the place policies and perspectives that are now emerging may well meet policy priorities. The core argument of this report is that Covid-19, in its incidence (with the worst infection and age specific death rates in poorer places) has revealed, or unburied, the pre-existing inequalities and exclusion that existed before January 2020, and emphasised the importance sharply reducing negative effects on global warming and reducing biodiversity.

It also, and less immediately, emphasises how the political economy paradigm for policy-making, at international, national and local scales, that has prevailed since the 1980's is now changing. Remaking coherent policymaking in advanced democracies may also require structures and systems of government that will reverse the long-term, steadily declining public trust in politicians and political systems that has prevailed over much of the OECD in this millennium. We make a case here that an understanding of the role of place and how places are governed will provide significantly different routes to countering political disengagement by key, and usually poor, communities (place and non-place). It is not just 'economics' that has changed, but 'politics' and in emerging political economy avoiding the wrath or revenge of left behind communities has a new standing. Community and place require more attention.

With that perspective in mind, what follows offers a significant reinforcement of and addition to current 'place' policy arguments in Scotland. It is full of national and local actions for change. It is based on the views of hundreds of participants in the webinars that discussed 'place' topics. The ideas offered reach well beyond the redistributive role of place policies. Reframed and coherent, creative place policies will be essential to meeting Scotland's main goals. Places, and what we do in and to them, are central to how Scotland creates resources for the future and better shapes fairer and greener outcomes.

In section 2, of the report, five 'Big Propositions' for change that occurred at all the spatial scales in the webinars are drawn out. In subsequent sections (3 to 6), key action points proposed at National, City-Region, Town and Rural scales are reported.

PART TWO: SIX BIG PLACE-BASED POLICY PROPOSITIONS

Context

In this research, 9 place-oriented webinars took the views of around 600 participants. They involved community group leaders, local and central government officials, quango and agency interests as well as researchers and other commentators. Many of them have much expertise in place and community-based work in Scotland and elsewhere.

Participants in the webinars conveyed a sense of urgency to improve policies for the management of places and the engagement of communities in Scotland. There was a recognition that longstanding place policies in Scotland had still not adequately reduced place exclusion and the number of 'left behind' communities in Scotland.

Further, new neighbourhoods were often still not well configured for social and economic changes occurring. There was a sense that long-term changes in the economic and population geographies of Scotland at regional and inter-regional scales had not been strategically grasped.

Now Covid-19 has re-exposed the yawning gaps in income and wellbeing between neighbourhoods and communities within our towns, cities and rural areas too. At the same time, the imperative for better environmental actions and outcomes is changing perceptions of how homes and places, including city centres and high streets, will be constructed, valued and used in the future. There were open-minded discussions for change in the webinars with different views of how to move forward but there was a pervasive sense of optimism that Scotland could do better and a real commitment to discuss real solutions to real problems.

Longer reports prepared have synthesised around 80 potential actions for change, ranging from immediate and local to strategic, longer-term, Scotland wide changes.

Here, 6 high level 'place' policy directions are outlined.

Reconnecting Scottish Government with Changing Communities

Scotland has a diverse structure of settlements and communities, reflecting history and geography, that range from two mid-sized major cities and metropolitan areas (the Edinburgh and Glasgow city-regions), through a spectrum of small cities and diverse town sizes to small and sometimes remote settlements. Growth and decline processes operate at all these settlement scales. Income inequalities across neighbourhoods within cities and towns are greater than between them. Scotland, then, faces a considerable challenge in managing places. It has chosen to do so by a particularly centralised form of government. Not only is public expenditure per capita as a share of GDP high by OECD standards but the level of centralised control over programmes and taxes to fund them is

particularly high (as is the rest of the UK). Over the last decade the balance of spending control and fiscal resources available has shifted from local to national levels of government.

Scottish municipal governments, by international standards, are large in scale and small in their fiscal autonomies. Scottish Governments, in the decade after devolution, scrapped the national housing agency, then its Communities agency and severely curtailed and frequently reorganised its national economic development agency. Yet there has been a growing (welcome) emphasis in government strategies and actions, most recently the Just Transition and Infrastructure Commissions, on the importance of place and community. There is much that is innovative in community economic development, land and housing delivery in Scotland but community actions, that engage and inspire as well as provide and invest, are the thistles of Scotland today. They thrive, in isolated patches, and there is no widespread bloom of community in provision. There is a critical task to rebuild the government and governance infrastructures of Scotland to effectively deliver place creativity. In the next Parliament the Government should consider what was lost when Communities Scotland was disbanded. Conversations highlighted a need to galvanise change in the cities, towns and rural places of Scotland going beyond primarily housing and infrastructure to engage with wider community ownership, environmental, infrastructure and wealth issues and to foster partnerships for, build capacities within and develop institutions to invest in and catalyse provision for Scotland's communities. A simple recommendation would be to create a new public body however that risks communities being someone's else's responsibility and what is needed is more joining up and cross silo working. NPF4 is an opportunity but all public bodies need to join up to ensure it is not just the most able communities that benefit.

Infrastructure in Place, Elastic Space

The system for supplying better places, whether renovating and changing the function of existing spaces and infrastructures or creating new homes, neighbourhoods and places, is fragmented and slow moving with poorly understood supply chains. Within governments the closely connected public actions of planning, operating in land markets and delivering adequate and appropriate infrastructure (including housing) are separated into different departments, silos and often professional competences. Further, since the removal of the regional layer of government, and reinforced by an acute decade of austerity for municipal governments these strategic functions for change are not now backed by adequate local staff capabilities whilst more challenges to meet change are downloaded from national government, for example shaping inclusive growth and fast carbon reduction. Long term goals are often sacrificed to short-term politics and this is well reflected in the party manifestos for the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections. These manifestos are full of good ideas, with a surprising commonality of aims across parties but they show no inclination to take a long view, to indicate a commitment to a strategic prioritisation of places (given severe resource constraints) and to better integrate actions across all levels of government.

In the absence of, or as alternative to a national agency, at the city-region/regional partnership scales there is a strong case to establish an 'infrastructure in place approach' by creating a regional infrastructure, land ownership/assembly and planning agency/vehicle. That vehicle would have a cross-sectoral and diverse board, play a strong role in regional information and analysis systems (with analytical capacity being decentralised from the Scottish Government and linked to 'a regional observatory'), and have a capacity to facilitate regional infrastructure investors to access low cost private 'green finance' for housing and other community investments. The agency, where city-region/region deal governance structures exist, could report to these bodies.

Reversing Fiscal Resource Centralisation

Proposal 1 puts more power in the hands of local communities to promote community action. Proposal 2 facilitates both strategic and local infrastructure support within regions and neighbourhoods (and indeed such an agency could usefully pilot 20 minute, or better served, neighbourhood initiatives). Proposals 1 and 2 are not aimed to disempower local authorities but to allow strategic and enabling actions for councils to act as a group of councils, and with the non-profit and private sectors. Such action will only occur, and long-awaited service reform delivered, if the Scottish Government raises the fiscal capacities of local governments by, for example: refreshing or replacing the council tax, replacing Land and Buildings tax with a Land Tax shared with municipalities, or promoting much wider uses of charges for using space and fossil fuels.

The default setting in public policy in Scotland is to identify a problem of shortage, look for Scottish Government investment to alleviate needs and control prices, without any long-term investment strategies (involving the use of taxes and charges) that may reduce difficulties (without making poorer households worse off). Councils need to be able to incentivise better outcomes for their residents and businesses and to have appropriate tax and charge powers to do so. Reforming local government finance in Scotland will be easier if Scottish level government reduces its distinctive strangle-hold on local governments. That action will take more than a parliament to deliver. It needs to start now.

Making Land Work Effectively

Whether aimed at community, municipal, city-region or Scottish levels there needs, reinforcing the paragraphs above, to be a reform of taxation of land and housing in Scotland that is comprehensive and coherent. Cases for using compulsory land purchases need to be revisited and there is widespread belief that there should be both taxation of land and although planning may be made more flexible and faster it also needs to be used strongly to extract unearned land value development gains to support community and local development. A growing proportion of Scotland's wealth, for 'median' income home-owners as well wealthy rural estate owners, is not created by effort and entrepreneurship but by owning land and homes. The more Scotland has proclaimed it has become an entrepreneurial economy it has become a 'rentier' nation. That individuals progress through creating ideas or fashioning trade that benefits others but by making some other, usually younger,

Scots worse off. Younger Scots and poorer communities are voicing concerns about these issues. A range of actions, a mission ensuring an elastic supply of developed land and property that curtails the role of property speculation in the Scottish economy and that rewards and supports innovation and effort is required. The Scottish Government have recognised this issue but this is an agenda that needs to be developed and strengthened through the new parliament too.

Building Homes, Community Capacities and Skills

As a complement to Proposals 1 to 3 and as a test of their efficacy, it is proposed that the Scottish Government should, in the context of historically low (and likely prolonged) interest rates and demand deficiency in the economy, double (at a minimum) the proposed forward affordable housing programme and focus it on future homes (green in design, well-connected for tele-service provision and household connection to work and play) for lower income households. Some, or most, of resources intended for the greening of home-owner properties should be diverted to the affordable rental sector, with owners funding their upgrading via an effective equity release scheme tapping into past housing equity gains. Accelerating affordable rental investment would involve having at least one community-based non-profit mixed housing provider acting as a local agent for change in every town and its rural hinterland. Investments would be aligned with economic opportunities wherever possible and there would be joint working with local economic development and training bodies to ensure local labour was engaged and trained in the projects envisaged. This would be lasting 'community wealth', better and greener homes, stronger neighbourhoods and a step-change in actually engaging with communities.

Thinking Enterprise

The Scottish Government, and other political parties, have supported the development of community wealth building, largely through localising the procurement activities in local public spending. This approach may be important in areas where there is persistent high unemployment. In the webinars, where there was some support for community wealth approaches, there was a more recurrent theme that government economic development and skills agencies paid insufficient attention to the range of supports needed to launch, mentor and grow small businesses. With a likely greater localisation of work at home in small, sometimes multi-activity businesses, there needed to be a step-up in support. These cases were articulated in cities and towns but had particular resonance in rural areas of Scotland and require early action in the Parliament.

PART THREE: ACTIONS AT SCOTLAND LEVEL

Beyond Business as Usual

The Scottish Government are focussed on containing Covid-19, mitigating its impacts on households and businesses throughout Scotland and progressing a vaccination campaign that aims for some normality in social and economic behaviours by the end of 2021. The 'building forward better' efforts of places are already being framed and the challenges of dealing with the downsides and opportunities of Brexit, constitutional change, new automation technologies and, most urgently, carbon reduction will dominate policy action.

There was a collective feeling that Scotland should not waste a good crisis: the disruption to every level of Scottish life has shown that rapid and effective change is possible.

Some of the actions that webinar participants suggested can be implemented quickly and others are triggers for what might be longer and fundamental changes. What is presented below is a long list of 'place' policy actions to consider and sift. They are not a costed and timed place policy changes but recurring actions mentioned in discussion.

Places as Creative Ecosystems

The webinars were clear emphatic that the Scottish Government should see place policies as creative catalysts for galvanising local communities and economies to meet core policy goals for income/wellbeing, sustainability/carbon reduction and fairness/inclusion. They should not be seen as palliative, redistributive gestures that fail to shape positive change. This action will need policy thinking, at Scottish Government level, with better understanding of how local economies and communities in Scotland function, as well as better policy design, project monitoring metrics and project evaluation principles and processes that puts values on the goals that policy has espoused.

The first proposed **ACTION (1)** is that the Scottish Government should act urgently to strengthen the creativity and economic dimensions of its recently established (and widely praised) Place Principles. And this requires, for principles to be reflected in place investment priorities, **ACTION (2)** - to ensure that the spirit and substance of the principles and they should be aligned with significantly revised 'Green and Magenta Books' that underpin appraisals of projects that change places.

Wider Visions, Less Clarity

Across all of the place webinars, but particularly in discussion at city-region scales where participants have been shaping and delivering City Deals and rethinking evaluation frameworks, there was a sense that the traditional 'place policy' emphases and evaluation processes within the Scottish Government

have been left behind as governments have embraced carbon reduction and other complex policy objectives.

Public policy decisions about place policies and effects are now more difficult and have to address new trade-offs. Understanding Scottish Government objectives, other than the measured explicit goal of net zero by 2035 (no measured and timebound productivity or poverty reduction targets), has been hampered by a multiplicity of policy rhetoric on inclusion, wellbeing, community wealth, productivity and sustainability. These all embed widely accepted policy aspirations and directions of travel but seldom indicate clarity of targets and trade-offs between key goals. Lack of clarity at Holyrood means few clear steers to those who manage cities, towns and rural areas. The business sector participants in the webinars, and particularly for those who spoke from and for the SME sector concurred with that view.

This requires, for the Scottish Government, a pressing **ACTION (3)** - to quickly articulate a consolidated policy narrative, not least for economic policy, and relate it clearly to a revised and expanded National Performance Framework that municipalities and communities can readily translate into local understandings and objectives.

Great ideas and heroic missions need to be defined and tracked at the Scotland scale. However, to achieve change requires sub-national **ACTION (4)** - Scottish Government and local governments need to work urgently to put in place consistent, compatible and locally adaptable performance frameworks to large (city-regions) and smaller places (towns, neighbourhoods). Such a system is not in place and it reflects a propensity to 'talk a good game' rather than deliver, measured progress.

Scotland's place policymakers, within Government, need to be applauded for the willingness to think about new approaches such as '20 Minute Neighbourhoods' and the idea of 'Community Wealth Building' which were widely welcomed by place practitioners. The webinars produced a review of the pros and cons of the ideas that is separately available. But it was also clear that the Scottish Government had not bottomed out the ideas, and their likely costs, with practitioners, planners and academics working on neighbourhood and local economic development issues.

There is needed Scottish Government **ACTION (5)** - to build on the knowledge of good practice within Scotland when embracing 'innovations' and they also need to give immediate thought to why good 'in principle' ideas in place development and management are not actually implemented through more rigorous evaluation.

There was a widespread theme in all our webinars that there is a wide implementation deficit between the good ideas of Scottish Governments and progressive place change within towns and neighbourhoods. One experienced, and respected, commentator observed that '20 Minute Neighbourhoods' might just be the new language to bury the concerns of disadvantaged communities. Another suggested that the cost of providing, within a decade, the social and physical infrastructure required to provide quality '20 minute' neighbourhoods in the Glasgow metropolitan area may run at triple the annual investment requirement of the current Glasgow City-Region Deal.

Participants from the Edinburgh Poverty Commission argued, cogently, that affordable housing investment (that the Scottish Government has sustained longer and more intensely than other parts of the UK) needed to run at triple the planned rate to make a dent in poverty in Scotland's capital.

Community voices in our webinars noted an important **ACTION (6)** for Scottish Government and all political actors when promising policy innovation: There needs to be greater transparency on the limits of policies in transforming communities. Political rhetoric can be misleading and in particular can be damaging to Scotland's poorest communities. A better balance between hope and reality should be used.

A Long History of Bad Applied Geography

Participants in the webinars, from all locality scales, and from outside of Scotland, emphasised the relatively casual and imprecise approach to describing and structuring place policies and institutional boundaries within Scotland. Scotland's policy rhetoric describes cities as 'powerhouses of the economy' and on official websites and in policy discussions implicitly transfers this imagery to 7 cities. The recently published interim paper on Strategic Transport projects also refers to the importance of the '7 cities'. Royal Prerogative and Partisan Politics have shaped that list rather than professional place-policymaker standards.

Does it matter that there are 8 towns that have a population scale greater than the 5th biggest city, and the 7th sized city is the 20th largest settlement in Scotland? Arguably it does.

If a more appropriate regional or a metropolitan/city region focus is adopted then Scotland has, in effect, two middle-sized cities with significant metropolitan areas (Glasgow and Edinburgh City-Regions) and 2 smaller metro regions (Aberdeen and Dundee) with the remainder essentially towns. Glasgow and Edinburgh do need a different discussion, not to favour them, but to recognise they offer different economic and social possibilities, with different environmental outcomes from freestanding towns. It also does a disservice to the significantly large towns that have not made the 'cities' list. Ayr and Falkirk are of no lesser scale and policy significance than Stirling, for example.

There is an important **ACTION (7)** for Scottish Government and their agencies: Place policies in Scotland need to start from a better standard of policy geography in which social and economic functioning drives classifications and which connections to hinterlands of towns and rural areas receive as much attention as localised boundaries. Cities and large towns need to be seen as key nodes of household, business and information networks.

What matters in the 21st century is the connections between people and places and not 19th century administrative boundaries. It was clear in all the webinars that outdated, casual geography gets in the way of clear vision and action. **ACTION (8) proposes:** that the Scottish Government evolve the Scottish Cities Alliance, that now has primarily marketing and policy innovation networking roles, into

a Scottish Places Alliance that embraces towns and cities and, working with the Scottish Towns Partnership, become a repository for and sponsor of good place practice.

In rural, town and city-region webinars, there were multiple references to the patchwork of boundaries that Scottish Governments have allowed to emerge within public bodies, agencies and quangos. If there is to be a better and more coherent articulation of place policies between the Scottish Government and other orders of governments, communities and the private sector urgent **ACTION (9)** is required to ensure that: the boundaries of all of Scotland's agencies and quangos should re-aligned to coincide with those of Regional Economic Partnerships (that may also require some adjustment).

Strengthening and Broadening Regional Economic Partnerships

Within the webinar sessions there were multiple arguments, but most strongly from the city-region level, to strengthen the governance and broaden the roles of Regional Economic Partnerships. The REP's, suitably strengthened, were seen as an important locus for the Scottish Government to share powers, resources and ideas with more local strategic interests and to facilitate the alignment of quango actions with local government strategic interests. In some City-Region deals there had been an extensive development of partnerships in higher education, housing and business (notably in Edinburgh), less so in others.

If collaborative partnership working is to develop much more rapidly and consistently, as webinar participants agreed, the Scottish (and UK) governments should undertake three actions to:

- Review how business, community and other stakeholder partnerships with local and national government improved key outcomes (**ACTION 10**).
- Identify successful approaches to be developed across all Regional Partnerships to develop a stronger framework for delivering place- based policies (**ACTION 11**).
- Consider allocation of a portion of sub-national resources to be prioritised and distributed by Regional Partnerships to incentivise cross-local authority collaboration. The Regional Partnership level, suitably resourced, could serve as a useful strategic basis for Scottish places to bid into the new the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and to engage more effectively with the emerging 'levelling-up' agenda of the UK government (**ACTION 12**). That said, the UK government's selection and promotion of the various strands of leveling-up efforts has been presented as creating a revitalised direct link with Scottish councils (on a council by council basis) and that seems a regressive action, fragmenting the structures for city-region governance incentivised by the city deals by the previous Conservative UK government and flying in the face of the development of devolved government in the UK. These are past actions that need to be undone.

It is also at regional scales similar to the city-region that the framing of strategic place and planning strategies is most effectively done. Links to other city regions become apparent and wider

inter-regional actions could be considered. Such approaches have been more widely progressed in England in the last decade, with some strategic infrastructure gains. It is important to counter tendencies to think 'too small'.

To strengthen such, now non-statutory planning, two further actions are required:

- Regional Economic, Social and Environmental Intelligence Hubs (building on the Glasgow City Initiative) need to be quickly established and impart a new impetus to using GIS and other data in framing and monitoring place and planning policies (**ACTION 13**).
- Strategy formulation requires thought as well as data, and with public sector analytical capacity now concentrated into Scottish Government, there is a strong case for shared national regional/national data and analysis (**ACTION 14**).

In the webinars housing sector experts were critical of the proposed centralisation of housing market analysis away from localities and back to Scottish Government, not least as it ignored the importance of local expertise in wider policy discussions.

Many of the academic commentators involved in our discussions noted that new emphases on knowledge exchange in their posts was not often turned into greater collaboration with governments in Scotland.

There needs to be action to ensure that regional intelligence hubs act as a platform for stronger collaborations on place processes and policies between officials and researchers from higher and further education and the private sector (**ACTION 15**).

Monitoring regional performance in relation to both the National Performance Framework and the National Planning Framework would be a key activity of Regional Intelligence Hubs. Consideration should be given to potential roles for Regional List MSPs in the governance and reporting structures of the Regional Partnerships and in working with Regional Intelligence Hubs.

These changes could lead to important action to secure better integrated and faster implementation of major city-region investment projects, (**ACTION 16**): With strengthened roles and innovative, intelligence hubs an 'integrated planning and infrastructure in place' should be embedded at regional scales with spatial plans for the region backed by indicative budgets for major spending programmes and set within explicit programme monitoring frameworks to track the regional 'mission' for change.

The actions set out in Actions 9-16 could be commenced in the short-term. However, they are governance changes that may serve as government addresses the fundamental issues of structures and funding of local government in Scotland.

There was a strong sentiment in the rural and towns webinars that most Scottish local authorities are too small to grasp strategic tasks in delivering key economic and environmental goals but at the same time are too large to deliver community and inclusion objectives. It was a recurrent theme that

played through all our discussions of place. Although change may be in the longer term the Scottish Government needs to adopt the long-view and take **ACTION (17)**: Make a genuine commitment to assess the dysfunctionalities of the present system of local government in Scotland and establish a high-level, expert Commission to produce proposals for discussion by the end of 2024.

A wide range of criticisms were presented not for partisan political reasons nor distrust of politics but simply because the existing structures no longer seemed to address both wider strategic issues and the very local, but complex, challenges and possibilities of smaller localities, whether communities, villages or smaller towns. Participants voiced concerns about working with the year by year survival strategies of stressed municipalities with little resource to restructure or deliver the widely agreed 'Christie' agenda for local government service changes in Scotland.

This was associated with a widely perceived need, that is more urgently felt than structural reform, to replace council tax with a wider land tax. Similarly, there is an urgent need to address the acute vertical fiscal imbalances that face growing municipalities and that take-away local capabilities to address infrastructure shortages but leave pressured places at the mercy of Scottish Government allocations of infrastructure, housing and other funds. These debates are not new but Scotland's bigger places feel they are now being asked to stride into the future with strong fiscal shackles in place (see below).

The evidence is clear. Relative to other advanced, and smaller economies, Scotland has very large local authorities, fiscal controls on current and capital spending are extremely centralised. There are well rehearsed arguments for land taxes as effective replacements of the council tax and multiple examples of successful implementation.

ACTION (18) is required: To establish (in tandem with Action 17), either separately in an independent Commission or as an extension of the work of the Scottish Fiscal Commission, but with more urgent timelines, to review potential tax bases for sub-national governments; the options could include a recurrent annual tax on land, property turnover taxes (Land and Buildings Tax), development gains taxes, or carbon related taxes (or a mix thereof) and how they might better attain environmental and land/housing goals as well as provide revenue to local governments.

Before and since devolution those who have governed Scotland have failed to deliver a fair and efficient system of local government finance and centralisation. Fixes and distortions within that system have weakened the financial and creative capacities of the local governments of Scotland's places. Scottish Government must continue to work on a better fiscal system for Scotland's places. In the meantime, until they do, it will be important to have more effective targeting and delivery of place-crucial programmes. Scottish Governments worry about how they are rated internationally on educational performance and productivity but seem immune to international comparative statistics about size, tax base and minimal financial power and discretion for sub-national governments. It is time to start to act.

With more effective use of Regional Partnerships as platforms for collaborative governance between communities and all the orders of government in Scotland there may be a substantial improvement in integrating siloed Scottish level actions into more integrated and community responsive actions.

If that is unlikely then, the Scottish Government, until more appropriate structures of community-oriented local government emerge, should consider **ACTION (19)**: what was lost when Communities Scotland was disbanded. Conversations highlighted a need to galvanise change in the cities, towns and rural places of Scotland going beyond primarily housing and infrastructure to engage with wider community ownership, environmental, infrastructure and wealth issues and to foster partnerships for, build capacities within and develop institutions to invest in and catalyse provision for Scotland's communities. A simple recommendation would be to create a new public body however that risks communities being someone's else's responsibility and what is needed is more joining up and cross silo working. NPF4 is an opportunity but all public bodies need to join up to ensure it is not just the communities most able to navigate the system that benefit.

Scotland needs to build capacities and organisations to train and listen to community voices; to deliver creative community-led change; to facilitate communities to participate with a strong voice in city and regional deals; to establish and use community assets, whether held by housing associations, development trusts or arms-length council vehicles, that go well beyond affordable housing and that ensure not-for-profit actions in employment, training, environment, digital and other locality actions have support levels that are presently largely absent. With not-for-profit core businesses they may also have transparent for -profit subsidiaries. The new agency would work closely with the Scottish National Investment Bank and the Scottish Futures Trust to develop effective means of financing green, inclusion and wellbeing projects that offer investors 'ethical investments' with reliable returns.

The Economic Distinctiveness of Real Cities

Effective territorial management, in essence the organisation of policy, strategy and delivery for a place or set of places, requires a well-designed set of public infrastructures, including boundaries, institutions of government and governance. It also requires an understanding of the social, economic and environmental flows, structures and systems that operate within and between places. It was noted above that action is required to urgently revise the crude and casual applications of notion of places, and their interactions, embedded in Scottish policies and politics. Before moving to a more detailed discussion of actions for cities and towns in Scotland it is important to note there are key dimensions of 'urbanity' or 'cityness' that matter in shaping policy:

- **City size matters**, with size best defined by travel to work and residential mobility flows. Size (other things being equal) shapes the range of consumer goods and administrative services that are likely to be economically provided within the place (traditional 'central place' roles).
- **Connectivity is crucial**. Scale meets population and demand thresholds for large scale public infrastructure provision, and usually then implies stronger integration into inter-regional and international networks, most obviously transport.
- **Density characterises cities**, particularly in their core areas, and are likely to have higher densities of jobs, homes and other activities. These densities may shape both positive (work and play access with lower carbon footprints) and negative (transmission effects of pandemics) spillovers. Cities are widely argued to have 'thickness', with consequent agglomeration-based productivity advantages, in innovation systems and labour markets that are unlikely to be enjoyed in smaller cities and larger towns.
- **Spatial Structures of cities (and larger towns)** are well defined geographic patterns with residential and non-residential uses often separated and with different income, age and socio-economic groups separated into different neighbourhoods (partly on the basis of their density).
- **Congestion and Deprivation Costs Matter**. Cities may manifest congestion costs in traffic and housing systems when growth outstrips capacities. When economic decline is apparent, the negative effects of concentrated disadvantage when 'neighbourhood' effects exacerbate wider shocks. Towns may suffer similar difficulties.

In consequence, larger cities will usually be localities with 'higher order' goods, facilitate key 'external connections, have significant internal spillover effects and well-defined spatial structures that may exacerbate exclusion but raise productivity and lower carbon footprints per capita. The imperative to 'build forward better' from Covid-19 has often emphasised the importance of local measures as priorities for action (20-minute neighbourhoods and community wealth-building, for example). That emphasis has meshed well with major policy shifts focussing on reshaping capitalism/globalism to promote sustainability and inclusion (that have permeated much of the OECD since 2010).

It is important to highlight that thinking 'locally' does not mean that places can drop their interest in, or guard against, the competitive pressures and external shocks of 'globalism'. A measure of local autarky in public procurement systems, to reinforce multiplier effects and build wealth in disadvantaged communities has been recognised as a potentially important strategic tool for promoting inclusion in local labour markets. It's restricted use has partly reflected UK and EU procurement rules that have, in the UK context, now been relaxed or removed. Some advocates of community wealth building aim for the grander target of rebuilding 'Leviathan' and significantly building the share of public ownership and production in Scotland. That view was not widely shared in our webinars and the mainstream policy framing assumption is that Scotland will continue to be an open, trade-based economy with, of course, new policies aiming for significantly better environmental and inclusion outcomes from such processes.

Scotland will face a bleak future, (whether that future is defined in narrow GDP or preferably along broader wellbeing terms), if regional, European and global connection is not emphasised as a central concern in relation to flows of goods, ideas, talent and capital.

Post Covid-19 and with the continuing disruptions of Brexit there is an imperative **ACTION (20)**: that the Scottish Government working cities, towns and rural regions should audit how global connections have been damaged and diminished since 2019 and urgently put in place resources and mechanisms to strengthen global perceptions of Scotland as a place to visit, trade with and work, study, invest and live-in.

As Covid-19 has shifted location demands for offices and homes and framed new decentralised work-home possibilities it is clear that such shifts may be reshaping the ways core cities share the possibilities of agglomeration gains in different ways, suggesting 'fields' of potential productivity effects rather than concentrated zones or points. Scotland, and its large cities, need to lead rethinking of these new forms of spatial economic relationships and how best to support them through infrastructure, technology and training programmes.

There is an important, urgent **ACTION (21)** for the Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise, the Scottish Futures Trust, the Regional Partnerships and the large cities to understand how new geographies of working, living and commuting are emerging in, around and between Scotland major cities and towns (no segmented thinking will do) and how this may impact current city and local economic development strategies. It may well be 2022 before likely, stable future spatial patterns of housing, retail and labour market activity can be identified.

It is worth noting that the cities as 'economic powerhouses based on agglomeration economy/productivity effects' arguments have been used in Scottish cities policy rhetoric since the mid-1990's without one serious piece of empirical research on where such effects occur, for what sectors/functions and with what productivity effects. It is time for better professional economic-geographic advice to Scottish Ministers.

More widely, place policies must not be founded on, organised or implemented by arbitrary labels, but a thorough data-based tagging of each place of significance in terms of these key system attributes. We should not see hard boundaries of thinking and policy design between action for cities and towns in Scotland but deal with current realities rather than the 12th and 21st century boundaries. Further the connections between places may matter as much as internal scales and structures if we are to understand how places might reduce their carbon footprints or share prosperity.

In moving to conclude the NPF4 cycle, that has seen useful, extensive and recursive exchanges between Scottish and local governments and others, the urgent **ACTION (22)**: that the Scottish Government should identify, systematically, these synoptic indicators of the key place/space features of Scotland's, say, for the 50 largest 'settlements' (as defined by the National Records Office in 2018) and produce a basic, GIS based analysis of Scotland's spatiality.

Scotland is not the United States, nor the Soviet Union. It is a small country with a well- educated population and strong applied spatial research communities. **ACTION (23)** requires that modern methods and data should be used to underpin key policy and planning discussions about cities and towns, their reach and connection and how Scotland works as an open multi-place system. ONS have been working with Whitehall Departments to establish stronger, integrated spatially referenced databases to link economic and social behaviours and outcomes more effectively and a similar approach is needed in Scotland.

Covid-19 and Scotland Cities

There was wide agreement in the webinar that Covid-19 had changed the economic geography of Scotland's major cities. Three particular changes were noted impacts on city cores, changing housing market choices and effects on disadvantaged places.

Covid-19 has had a pronounced negative effect on the Central Business Districts (CBDs) of the major cities.

In Glasgow the CBD, in late 2019, was the locus of 150,000 jobs, generated about a third of the city's GDP and attracted 100,000 daily commuters with 70,000 weekend leisure users. The core city also was the key focus for 40,000 students, an increasing share of them from overseas. More widely, the 'consumption economy' of Scotland's cities is estimated to have lost 300,000 jobs through 2020. The major city cores are, on account of their centrality, the major locations for Scotland's retail, culture and entertainment activities as well as office-based activities. Similar patterns apply in Edinburgh, although there is a now well-established counter narrative (that appears to ignore job prospects and incomes for younger and less skilled workers) that Edinburgh should not seek to fully reinvigorate some of its festivals, tourism and cultural activities as it makes the city 'too busy'. Such worries are not apparent in Glasgow, and indeed Dundee and Aberdeen, nor in smaller cities and larger towns.

As Scotland builds forward there is an **ACTION (24)** for the Scottish Cities Alliance, as presently constituted, to establish by end 2021 whether any of the tourism, cultural and related activities that Edinburgh might seek to cut-back can be accommodated effectively in Scotland's other cities and major towns.

There are significant questions to answer about whether the occupational and land use shifts that have affected city cores are likely to be permanent and significant in scale. Some will be. CBD slump has been associated with the more general contraction in economic activity through 2020 (of around 12% in Scottish GDP) but there are questions emerging as to whether new ways of online shopping and working, and shifting requirements of staff to have or use centrally located offices, as opposed to working from home have arisen. Research in Scottish and other cities suggests that there may well be a permanent reduction in corporate office space by up to 30% (from 2019 levels) as new technologies and new organisational arrangements within firms (and governments) have sharply accelerated home-working, at least for manual and skilled and semi-skilled workers.

In each of the major cities, working in partnership with Scottish Enterprise there is an urgent **ACTION (25)** required to establish a CBD futures task forces for larger cities that liaises closely with, and is informed by, new actions to rejuvenate Scotland's Town Centres (as suggested in February 2021 by the Town Centre Partnerships Review, and that our towns webinar widely supported as important and imaginative); a city by city response may induce wasteful competition at this point in the recovery process.

Covid-19 has underpinned shifts in housing demand in and around Scotland's Cities

The webinars on cities and housing heard clear evidence that price pressure indicators reveal some clear shifts in housing preferences and demand (for those with incomes and job security to make the choices). There is a shift in preferences to larger houses and to non-flat homes, preferably with gardens. Lockdown life has sharpened demands for domestic space, not least because of the economy now beginning at home for growing numbers of households. Similarly, the reduced need to travel to work, on a daily basis, as online work and shopping grows has encouraged some households to decentralise away from office/work locations. In consequence, well connected outer suburbs and adjacent towns and rural areas have seen significant price growth relative to flat (but not falling) city centre house prices.

Some caution about the likely future scale of such shifts has to be maintained because although prices have not fallen significantly with Covid-19, new construction completions and turnover have, so that prices are rising in a context of low sales volumes. Relatively few movers have been involved. Counter to that caveat, however, the patterns of change around the larger Scottish cities are consistent with the direction of change noted in English, Australian and Canadian metropolitan housing markets and that had become established pre-Covid because of unaffordable housing in major city cores (and that case best fits post-2000 Edinburgh experience). City centre housing demands in Scotland are likely to recover through 2021 but as they do high housing costs in core locations will continue to feed revival in well-connected towns with amenity.

Rental markets have shown more signs of difficulty through Covid-19. Vacancy rates have risen and reported dis-investment in buy-to-let flats was noted in the webinars. At present new rent control legislation and measures to regulate Airbnb have progressed through the Scottish Parliament with relatively little opposition.

Housing experts in the webinars, whilst recognising the benefits of more secure tenancies and regulated rents for tenants were of the view that an **ACTION (26)** was urgently required by the Scottish Government to monitor change and estimate the short and medium supply side reductions in homes available to rent, both for shorter and long-term letting. There is a need to consider how they might be remedied, especially for low and moderate income tenants, and to assess whether non-profit providers might be urgently supported to repurpose office and commercial spaces no longer required within cities, not least as city-centre homelessness is expected to rise as young, unskilled households will suffer disproportionately from rising unemployment through 2021 and 2022.

Covid Impacts and Housing and Neighbourhood Poverty

The highest rates of Covid infection have occurred in the poorest, disadvantaged localities. This observation chimes with experience in the rest of the UK, and indeed most OECD countries. Whether people have been economically precarious because of age, ethnicity, unskilled manual working status and absence of car-ownership, infection and death rates from Covid have reflected and reinforced the economic impact of Covid.

The housing and city policy webinars in the Action Project, whilst recognising relatively strong Scottish Government support in these areas, takes the view that an urgent **ACTION (27)** is now required: to significantly accelerate programmes of investment in better quality homes and neighbourhoods for Scotland's most disadvantaged and to address housing investment had been so weakly addressed in recent debates and measures to support inclusion.

Further linkages to wider outcomes and housing investment are addressed below.

This initial section addressed actions that are required both because of the distinctive 'cityness' of larger places and because they have been particularly impacted by Covid-19. It now turns to actions for change that could readily have been proposed before Covid-19, but that recent events have restored to prominence in policy and planning debates. In reporting observations and actions from the webinars it is recognised that there is an imperative of urgent planning and spending action that will forestall the scarring effects of unemployment that will affect all of Scotland through 2021 to as long ahead as 2025.

When governance and infrastructure actions are considered, it has to be recognised that time and effort will be required to take the long term view, infrastructure spending today will be impacting the effectiveness of household and firm actions at least half a century ahead. And actions need to look for

collaborative, cooperative approaches between places and limit competition (and for public resources) to where there are potentially clear gains from such processes. Integration of values, actions and metrics to embed wider goals will be challenging but essential and smart decision taking may be as important as smart technologies in making better places. Above all, widespread actions across all governments and public bodies to reduce the implementation gaps in managing places of both growth and decline in Scotland is essential.

In the webinars and discussions on cities, towns and rural areas the traditional 'drivers' of local economic development were at the core of the discussion but also sought the nuances of more complicated explanations of local change and how it might vary from place to place. This identified an action for local leaders, Ministers and officials, that should be universal in all place-intended actions. It is simple, and challenging **ACTION (28)**: What is this place, and what is this investment or action for? What is it intended to achieve?

Governance, Infrastructure, Skills and Innovation actions discussed in the webinars are reported below.

Changing Governance at City-Region Levels

City and city-region leaders and officials are no longer charged with simply delivering supplementary action to ground and support a nationally thriving 'welfare state' (in many respects the core ethos of Scottish local government for much of the second half of the 20th century). Rather localities, with limited budget autonomy and thinking capacity, required to plan and deliver progress in meeting the grand challenges of the 21st Century. These include promoting environmental sustainability, coping with ageing, addressing the consequence of automation in labour forces, and more, now alongside Covid-19 recovery.

In the webinars it was widely suggested that appropriately structured and resourced city-regions, with less than full understanding of the present and crippling uncertainty about the future, should adopt a 'Missions' framework for action (though there were multiple (mis) interpretations of the 'Missions' approach in discussions). There is a strong sense in city policy discussions in Scotland that the 'missions' approach, that has shaped important aspects of recent Scottish Government policy should become the framing for strategic place policy implementation.

The **ACTION (29)** suggested is that place policy strategies and actions should be developed as a series of locally defined missions aimed to deliver clear top-level goals (perhaps those embedded in the NPF) and that approach would apply as soon as possible to strategic planning, infrastructure strategy and local expenditure planning.

In early February 2021, consistent with earlier observations in the Report on the Future of the Glasgow City Region Economy, the Scottish Government highlighted its new major infrastructure strategy as enabling 'local missions'. It is important for city officials that National Planning Framework 4, currently being developed by Scottish Government, is now defined in similar terms. A 'missions'

approach to delivering progress towards meeting grand challenges, requires that these challenges are defined; that key objectives to be achieved in meeting them are also defined; that the intended contribution that investment and other projects make to meeting these objectives are identified ex ante, that synergies with related missions are clarified and that high quality monitoring metrics are established and maintained.

Given the complexity, scale and duration of the projects involved in changing cities there is much uncertainty ex ante regarding outcomes. Good monitoring allows rapid feedback as to how to redirect or recalibrate projects if they are not demonstrating intended results. Such an approach is more likely to be applicable to a series of similar investment projects over time (for example the infrastructure packages required to create 20-minute neighbourhoods) rather than a major infrastructure project creating a network link (such as refashioning the A82). Much effort and expense has been made to facilitate a post 'evaluation' of City Deals. With Covid-19 and Brexit now in place there can be little expectation of such an evaluation being credible.

In remaking Scotland's places in a world full of external shocks there may be much merit in, **ACTION (30)**: that the Scottish Government's economic advisers not only review the Green and Magenta Books to embrace new goals but also frame strong advice on appropriate, smart monitoring frameworks for all governments implementing place-oriented projects and programmes.

There was also repeated comment across cities, towns and rural areas (in addition to the need to enhance the autonomies and restructure the scales of local government noted earlier) as participants remarked critically on the absence of community participants and organisations in both place-wide and neighbourhood strategy decisions. These observations, that are near universal on the part of those who work and live in poorer places, suggest an urgent and strong set of actions is needed to give credibility, and indeed energy and insight to city-deal and community/neighbourhood changes. The set of **ACTIONS (31)** included:

engaging community interest in investment and service decisions, and not just planning actions, through deliberative processes, citizen juries and memberships on key partnerships committees, again stressing the implementation gap between what is known good practice and actual processes; and, taking steps to ensure that key officials, especially in policy and research posts in the civil service are made more acutely aware of the lived experience in problematic places with staff exchange procedures in place for Scottish Government civil servants to be required to spend some time on secondment in local government, and community action and delivery bodies.

In the 1990's some of Scotland's most senior civil servants, including two who subsequently became Permanent Secretary, served as Chairs of the renewal partnerships in 4 of Scotland's largest public housing area renewal schemes. Their learned experiences were apparent to others long after the projects had been completed.

City-regions can also take **ACTION (32)**: to appoint a Peer Review/Advisory Panel of expert 'critical friends' to help foster best practice and innovation for local deals. With evolving expertise in Zoom

and small webinar meetings such a body could be truly international, online and conducted with minimal costs.

During the course of The Action Project interest was ascertained on the part of senior officials in major cities in the UK, Europe, North America and Australia in exchanging experience with city officials and leaders in Scotland. This also holds true in relation to policies and strategies for Scotland's Towns. The work of the Scottish Towns Centre's Review is well regarded. Particular kinds of towns are important components within city regions and large towns such as Falkirk and Ayr and Paisley deserve no less policy attention than smaller 'cities' such as Perth and Stirling. Some other towns are smaller, older market centres for rural areas. The place policies for Scotland's towns will reflect the spatial/regional settings they exist within and the functions they play and will require both general policy mechanisms (such as the six Big propositions) as well as alignment to and core involvement in the city-region or rural-region settings they exist within.

PART FIVE: ACTIONS FOR CHANGE IN RURAL AREAS

Shaping Rural Narratives and Policy Framings

ACTION (33). The contributions to the webinars suggest that there is an urgent action required, on the part of governments, and the media and others to develop a relevant, modern narrative for Rural Scotland.

There is a widespread perception that rural Scotland primarily comprises areas that are remote, sparse, declining, poor, dependent on its cities, and sustained by tourism and extractive agriculture, forestry and fishing and subsidies.

A new reality, that appears to be being reinforced by socio-economic impacts of Covid-19, is that significant areas in rural Scotland are close to major towns and cities, some areas are growing in population and employment, that flows of goods, people and environmental services from the countryside to cities are significant and increasing, and employment in creative microbusinesses now outweigh extractive industries in the rural economy.

Narratives need to consider how rural places contribute to the wellbeing of urban Scotland, not least in securing better environmental outcomes for the future. The new narrative must emphasise not just the 'wrong' but the 'strong' in rural Scotland. Bringing goals of sustainability and wellbeing to the core of the policy discussion makes this a moment and opportunity to pause and revalue the flows and synergies between the 'country' and the 'city' in Scotland. Scottish Government place policy for rural areas has progressed strongly over the last decade but it often sounds as redistributive and about "saving places" and that is appropriate for some. There would be merit in the Government of

Scotland to discuss with the Government of Ireland the recent major statement on rural areas and small towns in Ireland that are now seen to be central to post-Covid recovery strategy and national wellbeing rather than been viewed as a problematic periphery.

ACTION (34). For governments, although it is a time to pause and reflect, it is not a time to delay.

There is a real sense of frustration and disappointment in the communities, businesses and indeed local policy institutions in rural Scotland that for a quarter of a century, at least, there have been positive words and plans for the 'rural'. Seminar participants from backgrounds in business, economic development programmes, tourism, farming, housing and other sectors, praise Scottish Government intentions but are unanimous in their identification and criticism of yawning implementation gaps. Housing and economic development professionals stress that knowledge of what needs to be done has long been known but delivery has not been achieved. All governments, central and local, need to collaborate in addressing what is a systemic crisis in delivering the adopted goals for rural Scotland. The new government needs to re-energise the important work undertaken (into 2018) on the rural economy but that has languished over the last two years. Past action backlogs as well as new opportunities need to be urgently addressed.

ACTION (35). There is a widespread view in the business, research and policy communities working on, or in, rural Scotland that governments rarely ask cities to justify the policy attention directed towards them but that rural areas have to 'hustle' to maintain policy interest. A new narrative will require Scottish Government, its agencies, and municipalities to adopt a focussed and resourced interest on rural Scotland.

ACTION (36). Arguably rural areas suffer most from the top-down, siloed approaches to policy design and delivery. Policies for rural places are limited by their reductionisms, they never stress city-rural interdependencies (that will be crucial in addressing challenges of carbon reduction and sustainable biodiversity in the future) and they simply fail to grasp the ways in which complex local interactions shape innovations and transactions between individuals and institutions in rural areas. Siloed policy sectors and agencies are not granular, grounded and inherently interactive in the ways that action in rural communities requires. All levels of government need to rethink their rural strategies and delivery arrangements and align them with a better understanding of how rural economies and societies function.

ACTION (37). The Scottish Funding Council and the analytical and statistical services of the Scottish (and UK) governments should act to support the better development of spatially referenced microdata that picks up on the local, and often low-intensity signals, of rural economic and social change (our participants highlighted the lack of data on microbusinesses in rural areas) so that better informed policies, and their progress, could be analysed and monitored. Evidence also needs to hear the voices of the lived experience in rural Scotland - for poor and affluent alike, and inter-generational. Stories and evidence remain somewhat patchy and that needs to change. A programme of work on Scotland's understanding of rural places and considering their future economic governance should be put in place in 2022 and completed by 2025.

ACTION (38). Subsequent actions below examine ideas for changing the governance of policy delivery in rural Scotland but at this stage it is important to make a distinction in policy and action framing that governments, and others should pay constant heed to.

Much place policy in Scotland, as noted in the introduction on cities policies, is framed as area (or territory) based management policy and often has a focus on integrating different vertical silo actions at sub-national scales. In webinars and follow-up work practitioners and businesses stressed that the core of place policy was about 'community', and not just the social dimensions. Complex local actions needed to be addressed otherwise the crucial connections and complementarities that occur locally, and often outside the market, would be missed in policy design and action.

Community action is a term most commonly associated with radical social action. It is essential, however, that it be interpreted as a normal governance focus for creating mainstream approaches to economic as well as social change. This holds true in parts of urban economies but it is the dominant framing required in rural localities.

The webinar concentrated on economic development in rural Scotland and particularly the formation and sustainability of microbusiness and the emergence of new approaches and activities including energy production, ecosystem services and community land and broadband activities. The provision of housing and infrastructure was explored in relation to community based and market models and the webinar explored issues in the governance of rural communities. The discussions that produced actions are reported below.

Changing Economic Development in Rural Scotland

The broad contours of population and economic change in rural Scotland are well established. Overall population change varied from sharp increases in rural areas well connected to major urban centres to sustained decline in more remote areas. The one in six Scots who live in rural areas live in a diversity of contexts with different histories and futures. This variety cautions analysts and policymakers alike against over-generalising the 'rural' and uniform national approaches to 'local' actions. Over the last decade there has been piecemeal evidence of larger (but still small) flows of residents into rural areas from formerly urban addresses. In part this may be suburban spread of 'dormitory' settlement into the 'rural-urban' fringes of growing urban areas, but in definitively rural settings flows of retirees have risen and there has also been a reported growth in established younger households moving their homes and work locations. Covid-19 has reportedly reinforced that process though evidence based on house price pressures is based on low transaction volumes. As noted in the Cities section, there is some uncertainty over whether these new preferences will continue to grow at a rate that will shape large and permanent impacts.

The broad economic structures of rural Scotland are also well researched in a range of previous Scottish Government reports. Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita grew in rural Scotland between 1997-2017 and rural unemployment rates, and wages, are below those of urban Scotland (though

with severe local unemployment concentrations, such as in East Ayrshire). Performance has been highly variable across areas and economic sectors. The island areas have experienced least growth but consistently rank highly for quality of life. Overall, growth has been in diverse sectors and business services growth (just outstripping Construction) has far outstripped the 'Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry' (AFF) sector, indeed AFF accounts for only 4% of rural GVA.

A dominant feature of the rural economy is the dominance of employment in small or 'micro-business' (over two-thirds in remote rural Scotland, double the overall Scottish rate), and self-employment and part-time employment outstrip Scottish averages. There are major current uncertainties about the AFF sector, which often dominate media and public concern about the rural areas. Brexit has had negative short-term effects on the fishing industry but medium-term prospects are somewhat better. Agricultural support levels are being maintained at broadly past EU levels over the next few years but UK, and Scottish, agricultural policy is set to change with concerns about biodiversity, greening and the role of land in providing ecosystem services. However, it is the evolution of the ecology of micro-business, and its relationship to residential relocation choices that is at the core of change agendas in much of rural Scotland. In relation to rural employment, the internet is more important than the fishing net. The webinar focussed on microbusiness and community business.

In reviewing the literature on rural Scotland it is apparent that in this millennium there have been numerous serious and content rich public reports on driving economic change in rural Scotland. The webinars and conversations reported widespread agreement with these visions and strategies but equally expressed disappointment at the systematic failure to implement the approaches and aims of Scottish Government strategies. In rural Scotland, Multiple Deprivation is still too prevalent but Multiple Disappointment seems even more pervasive. One webinar participant emphasised that it has been clear what needed to be done in housing provision for rural Scotland since the middle of the 1990's but progress has been peripatetic. Others expressed surprise and disappointment that the recommendations of the NCR report (2018) had been widely accepted by the Scottish Government and led to the formation of the Rural Economy Action Group, but that group had largely been disregarded by the Scottish Government over the last 18 months. Webinar attendees, without exception, sent two clear calls to action on the part of the Scottish Government.

ACTION (39). The Scottish Government should immediately re-engage with the work and mission of the Rural Economy Action Group and firm-up a framework, mission and action for rural change.

ACTION (40). Whilst pursuing Rural Action 7, the Scottish Government and its main delivery agents should, looking to the post -Covid context, review the implementation deficit between rural promise and rural progress after 2010, report on how rural policy had contributed to NPF goals and, following that review, outline a policy framework that it intends to work with for the next decade.

In this regard the recently published Irish Government Report might provide some pointers on how to act as well as why. They have identified 150 actions (many of which are already reflected in Scottish rural policy), are working on targets to track progress and have assigned responsibility for particular

action to at least one of the Dublin Ministries involved in the programme. A similar approach, with progress targets aligned to the National Performance Framework, and recurrent cross-Ministerial meetings could move Scottish action forward faster.

Frequent policy change is a particularly difficult governance outcome for microbusinesses. One rural entrepreneur commented that the 'policy framework' does filter down to impact local implementation agency decisions, but that policy was like her broadband 'it comes and goes'. Clearly the Scottish Government needs to find better ways to channel the energy and enthusiasm for rural business that is increasingly driven by talented, creative and articulate entrepreneurs who demonstrate capabilities to make a real difference.

The literature scan also indicated that skills, infrastructure, innovation and good economic governance are, as in cities and towns, key framing ideas for policies, though specific interpretations are shaped by context. Here, reflecting the discussions in the webinars, there is a brief comment on rural skills, a lengthier discussion of microbusiness, new rural activities and housing challenges.

Rural skills

The webinar discussion highlighted three areas of concern: the immediate challenges of replacing EU labour flows (and not just for seasonal work); the loss of young people in the context of an ageing population and skills for owners and employees in micro-businesses.

There was a general view that Skills Development Scotland, especially working with the major rural development agencies in the Highlands and South of Scotland, had promoted understanding of future skills needs (as discussed in earlier sections). Webinar participants had nothing to add about the imperatives of reconnecting to EU labour supplies in agriculture or replacing them with other sources of seasonal and short-term labour. There was a strong view that local labour supply into such activities would not increase and that many young people had little or no interest in working on the land and would rather move elsewhere to seek non AFF jobs.

The Rural Youth Project contributed important insights from their recent survey of young people (18-28) in Rural Scotland, and they are particularly significant in the context of retaining young people in rural areas. Rural young people reported that access to housing, transport, employment and education opportunities were particularly important and 98% cited digital connectivity as absolutely essential to their future (though only 13% have access to high-speed broadband). Broadband connectivity apart, these are the same priorities that surveys in the 1990's highlight too. Each one of these sectoral 'provisions' is necessary but not sufficient to stem the outflow of younger households, and even integrated 'packages' of affordable shelter, connectivity by physical and internet means, and employment and education with 'lifetime' prospects will not work unless they are integrated at very local or community levels. Some, but not all localities, adopt this truly community level approach to economic policy delivery. This needs to change.

ACTION (41). Throughout rural Scotland the relevant departments of local authorities and government agencies need to identify conjoined strategic actions, within appropriately defined communities (identified on flows of labour, housing and transport connections), and committed budgets to raise the proportion of young people remaining within their rural communities and, indeed, attracting more.

Positive action has a real prospect of success. Rural Youth reported that 72% of the young people surveyed in 2018 were strongly optimistic about the future of the rural areas they lived in. But there is a need for urgent action too; resurveyed at the end of 2020 and in the context of Covid-19 their optimism had halved. Covid has heightened their sense of physical isolation and that has been exacerbated for those with inadequate broadband (with rural young people spending an average of 3 hours per day of non-work time online).

In the recent resurvey the biggest ask from young people in rural Scotland was for increased access to mental health support.

ACTION (42). Immediate Action, by the NHS, is required to substantially expand the provision of mental health support services in rural Scotland, and specially in remote places.

Although the re-survey has indicated falling optimism, interviewees in response to the questions as to whether they wanted to move to a town or city post lockdown, resoundingly responded that they wanted to stay in rural areas and looked to government to provide better mental health services, and enterprise and business support.

Microbusiness

The growth in microbusinesses has been evident in much of rural Scotland in the last decade, it is now important, set for further expansion and it is increasingly the defining feature of rural economic opportunity. Covid-19, if anything, may have increased the potential rate of micro-business formation. The webinar had a sustained and informed discussion of the possibilities, problems and reshaped policy solutions in rural Scotland. The core of this discussion is the recognition that, as noted in the introduction, that economic development is a grounded process and that it melds local creativities with regional and national measures and that it requires understanding and policies that support the complex business-home-community interactions that shape processes and that are seldom recognised in the analyses and actions that shape conventional, silo-driven economic policies. This limitation is increasingly recognised in the local authorities and rural development agencies that operate in Scotland.

The webinar discussions looked at broad pros and cons in the growth of the sector. There was a sense that change through microbusiness involved:

- Talented, energetic, small-scale entrepreneurs, often with starter assets (often released by extracting housing equity on moving from high priced urban housing markets and so able to take risk) and with ambition and confidence to succeed.
- Already established local enterprises, and especially farmers, seeking new income streams by meeting existing local demands (for tourist accommodation, for example) or by venturing into food (and drink) processing.
- New communications technology that allowed business relocation to rural areas through keeping in touch with social networks or an urban office or facilitated online production of professional services, so that technological change has redefined the spatial links between workers and firms, firms and markets that facilitates geographic dispersal to non-urban locations.
- Employment and income gains as they employ people directly and have multiplier impacts on local employment.
- Creating a more diverse and redefined output structure for rural Scotland that now includes life sciences, energy production, creative industries and financial services.
- Diversifying or changing, existing local businesses or in movers, and the recently established South of Scotland, Dumfries and Galloway agency, has through Covid-19 witnessed significant investment in small business and in new ideas and products.
- Strong marketing advantages as customers relate well to provision by place-based family business that imparts a sense of authenticity.

In some localities, growing inward flows of households establishing a business may, along with retirees relocating rurally, raise the demand for middle and upper-income housing and with sluggish planning and construction responses displace local purchasers. There have been proposals in some places to restrict house purchase and building permissions only to local residents or those with an area 'connection'. These issues need to be bottomed out as part of a coherent, flexible policy response to rural shift.

ACTION (43). The Scottish Government, agencies and researchers urgently need to understand the locational origins and socio-economic profiles of households moving into different kinds of rural local housing markets and how such moves impact house prices, rents and housing supply. Ignoring these shifts may both impose losses on poorer locals, inducing them to relocate, or reduce the attractiveness of other potential business owners from moving to the locality.

Initial identification of flows can be informed by the Land Registry (for home-owners) and subsequent survey work reveal key motives for rural relocation. This is a key missing piece of a sound evidence base for local housing, infrastructure and business planning. It also leads to an essential Policy Action, better linking housing and business/economic policy at local scales.

ACTION (44). As part of a wider statement of how housing outcomes and investment impact the local rural economy (a missing element in Scottish housing/local economic development policy at all spatial scales) housing providers need to work closely with economic development, planning and other infrastructure sectors to ensure that the 'space' supply side of local systems is flexible and

avoids undue increases in land and housing prices (this is the local equivalent of the infrastructure in place approach articulated for cities). This needs an immediate conversation in and with communities to avoid the justification and implementation of policies to exclude incomers.

Where economic development strategies are being put in place to foster, attract and grow microbusiness it is important to recognise their essential economic features. They typically have multiple income streams and products (as indeed crofting always had) and there may be seasonal variations in patterns of production. One webinar participant summarised this well: *“We run a number of different micro businesses from our very small farm, we have multiple income streams; we have a tourism business, agriculture, a distilling business, an arts business. As well as that we do a lot of community work and are founder members of the development trust”*.

Although this participant was used to complexity and promoting community, they noted that *“Along with that there's different areas and levels of administration, there's different areas of regulation around all of that”*.

Rural businesses and officials and leaders from council and non-profit sectors all had positive views of Scottish Enterprise and regional enterprise agencies in supporting small and micro-businesses. However, there was a sense that the design of policies and financial approval criteria for grants and loans to suit Scotland-wide purposes were not well suited to small, new, multi-income stream, often seasonal enterprises. The demise of bank branches in rural Scotland meant that the complex sequencing and income flows of micro-businesses were not well suited to more standardised lending assessments and neither public agencies nor private lenders had emphasised the ‘relational’ nature of lending and granting to rural microbusiness. A collaborative, relational approach to lending is required for start-up and expansion.

Entrepreneurs, many of them new to running their own business or living in rural areas, may require no support or a great deal of support. Advice, or helpful agency, that matters is not just about linking businesses effectively to suppliers and markets but also connecting newcomers to the complex tissue of social capital within a community that raises productivity by building trust and sharing information. There needs to be a business ecosystem. This is business advice not from the agency silo but from within the business sector. Such an approach was operating in the East Perthshire area and was a clear exemplar.

ACTION (45). Enterprise agencies, councils and others who support local business development require a balance of instruments across different enterprise scales, ranging from conventional investment attraction and promotion to support for micro-business. These sponsors urgently need to ensure that microbusiness support is based in the local economic community, that it is relational in nature and seeks to fashion similar engagement by the banking sector (where it is missing). This is an urgent action given apparently increasing numbers of relocations of households with capital to rural locations.

ACTION (46). There may be areas and their villages in attractive and potentially accessible rural areas of Scotland that are currently struggling to maintain permanent population. Agencies and councils, working with communities, could identify potential localities where they might concentrate some of their efforts to accelerate ‘microbusiness’ growth poles and consequent ‘place capital’.

New Times, New Roles

New lifestyle preferences and new technologies in communication have been central to the growth of rural microbusinesses. Some businesses are inherently footloose and could have relocated in city centres, suburbs or small towns but have chosen rural amenity and cost structures. Others have narrower spatial choices and often grow out of the local resource base of natural capital (lands, forests, beaches, rivers, lochs, scenery, birds, animals) and have been typically driven by the market values placed on ‘products’ and ‘amenities’ produced.

Changing the ‘big policy’ goals for Scotland has important implications for different communities. A priority placed on ‘inclusion’ should reassure and support remote and disadvantaged rural communities. It is important however, to look beyond redistributive changes. Meeting ‘green goals’ involves inducing consumer and producer behaviours that encourage choices that reduce adverse environmental effects. The espousal of zero carbon targets for Scotland by 2040 are likely, in the wake of the Dasgupta Review, to be reinforced by increasing concerns for nature and biodiversity loss. Renewable energy flows, flows of quality water, woodland and land-based flows all need to be valued as rural outputs. Pursuing major policy goals of carbon reduction and biodiversity, requires measuring and valuing natural capital and the flows of value (ecosystem services) from it.

Recognising and valuing these flows has significant implications for place policies at rural regional and community levels:

There will be gains in employment in rural localities from nature ‘processing’ (producing renewable energy, for instance) and the expansion of ‘green’ business, management and maintenance services. At an aggregate level it will revalue the flows of ecosystem services between urban and rural Scotland and recognise what has been a significant, under-valued contribution to both Scottish wellbeing and GDP; this raises the economic ‘heft’ of rural Scotland.

Notions of place and region in Scotland, as noted earlier are largely based on daily flows of commuters, so the city-region is defined by the localisation of housing and labour markets: recognising and valuing flows of environmental services from rural hinterlands requires either a redefinition of ‘region’ for modern policy purposes or more coherent identification of ‘hinterland connections and effects’.

ACTION (47). Strong leadership, strategic clarity and effective implementation will be required to implement a ‘green’ turn in rural policy and urgent action will be required to bring diverse strands of rhetoric, policy and spending. This involves action for all, but for urgent action the Scottish Government should redirect the Rural Economy Action Group to report by end 2021 on the ‘green’ dimension of strategy for the rural economy and how the ‘mission’ might be delivered.

The Treasury-led Green Book for assessing the economic costs and benefits of projects and programmes has to be modernised to put in place firm metrics to value ecosystem services from rural land use: plans to remove market measures of land value uplift as a measure of project gain are to be welcomed in rural Scotland.

The SFT should work with the group to scope and cost the infrastructure (broadly defined) requirements, to 2025, to provide the appropriate local and inter-regional infrastructure to secure green change implementation.

Working with financial institutions and banks to ensure that functional metrics are developed to meet investor requirements and that the key features of rural microbusinesses do not see them rationed out of support for 'green' and SNIB should rapidly develop expertise in green financing for rural community and small business projects.

In order to inform public sector scrutiny and financial sector commitment it is important that owners of natural capital develop an agreed set of indicators of ecosystem flows and how to measure them, not least by embedding sensors within real land and flow systems (in the way that flows of power and measure and monitored). This reinforces the case for improved internet connections throughout rural Scotland.

To ensure that traditional landowners and managers of 'extractive' rural uses (farming, forestry, fishing) recognise the importance of ecosystem services and, at least in the immediate innovative future, incentives to produce them may be required: the introduction of a universal land tax, as proposed earlier, would also encourage better use of land

The webinar supported the extension of community ownership of assets in rural settings (and the governance implications of such initiatives are discussed further below. The last Scottish Office (pre-devolution) Minister for Housing and Communities, Dr Calum MacDonald (MP for the Western Isles) argued that key aims of policy in Scotland should be community ownership of housing in the cities (an aim lost in the 'municipal turn' of Scottish Executive housing policy circa 2003) and community land ownership in towns and rural areas.

Community land ownership has thrived as an idea through Scottish policy for almost 40 years and almost 100 transfers have been undertaken. Bobby McAuley articulated, and evidenced, the different ways in which community ownership strengthens individual and community capabilities and impacts not just jobs and incomes but, through complex routes, the health of residents. The connections of community lived experience matter for fairness, productivity and, now, sustainable outcomes in rural Scotland.

There is a sense that somewhat like housing-led community renewal in urban Scotland, this has created successful models for change that more than ever in the past contribute to the major 'missions' we now espouse. But there is a sense we have lost, at the national policy scale, belief that we have vehicles that deliver change. So, community-led models struggle along, battered by new

policy framings (Wellbeing Economy, 20 Minute Neighbourhood, Community Wealth) that may provide marginal useful insights when what is needed is non-marginal increases in resource support. The webinar discussion of Community-led Broadband provision in Balquhiddy highlighted the importance of these issues in wider infrastructure and service issues.

In 2021 there is still not a full evaluation of the community land transfers in Scotland.

ACTION (48). As a precursor to a wider programme to accelerate community-led land reform in Scotland the Scottish Government should immediately commission an evidence-based review and evaluation of costs and benefits of community land transfers.

At present Scottish taxpayers pay substantial sums of public money to effect community land transfers. The recipients are invariably in the top 1 percent of the Scottish wealth distribution and ex post the success of the CLTs established would suggest prior sub-optimal productivity in use of land. These outcomes do not sit well with a nation now voting for inclusive, green and productive policies. Land Reform, including tax, community ownership and ecosystem services provision all need to be tackled in an integrated fashion over the next five years.

The webinar discussions on the problems and prospects for rural Scotland were relentlessly realistic, optimistic, more concerned about the future than the past and supportive of the big aims of government. They were critical of how these aims were not grounded in their community understandings of how the economy operates, nor in the actions that agencies and bureaucracies have been created or tasked to deliver. The failure to see the value that rural Scotland provides for the nation, that may now change in resolving the 'tragedy of the commons', has created an underlying 'tragedy of the community' in which the social, place and natural capitals that play such significant roles in rural and community life, the real lived experience, are misunderstood and assumed away in drafting and delivering so much of mainstream policy.

Housing, Services and Governance

The Scottish Government has made major resource commitments, relative to other parts of the UK, in the last Parliament. Yet there is continuing disquiet about housing outcomes in rural Scotland. The Rural Youth Project report that the high cost and low availability of all housing, in all tenures, is both a major cause of difficulty and uncertainty for young people living rurally and, unsurprisingly, it is a major cause of why young people leave, thus exacerbating rural labour supply difficulties. In the policy sphere there is a clear message that since the mid-1990's there has been a reasonable measure of changing housing needs and demands for housing in rural areas, and an awareness of the techniques and agents that might occasion change.

Implementation failure is laid at the door of the continuing lag of rural Scottish housing policy investment behind its population share, the failure to reform land and planning processes and the weakening of the drive to develop community-owned and non-profit housing since the early 2000's.

It is important to recognise that in this millenium, Scotland, as in other advanced economies, has faced three related crises as housing prices and rents have run well ahead of incomes. First, major policy efforts have been made, prior to Covid-19 and reinforced markedly since the onset of the pandemic, to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in Scotland. Creative policy thinking and strong resource commitment will need to be reinforced as homelessness is likely to rise as young, unskilled workers become unemployed through 2021. These difficulties will be most manifested in larger towns and cities as those who become homeless in rural settings generally migrate quickly to larger settlements. Strengthening the provision of affordable housing for the rural young will reduce homelessness pressures elsewhere in Scotland.

Second, rising rents have reduced the residual incomes of households across the income distribution and high rent to income ratios for the poorest half of renters are now well in excess of the 30% of incomes regarded as a policy norm. Third, pressures spill back and forth between owner and renter sectors and rising house prices in combination with the growing scrutiny of household incomes by risk averse 'non-relational' lenders have sharply increased the age of entry to home-ownership.

Housing policy challenges have changed and become more difficult in rural Scotland even as government has renewed policy efforts. The social effects of the outcomes outlined are adverse but the economic consequences reduce consumption and spending within the 'circular economy' of rural places. Our work, and especially in rural areas, has stressed the importance of understanding connections and stressing local systems at local and community levels, and indeed stressing the connections of housing to a wide range of local social and economic activities and outcomes. The spirit of webinar discussions is that 'housing' should not be seen as a discussion about numbers of homes, but about how the variety of housing options and their affordability within a rural area acts as a system of choices and that the outcomes of these choices impact environmental, economic and social outcomes.

In the face of the urgency of the issue, national and local housing policymakers have have lost sight of the need to move forward the reluctant elephant (the housing supply system) and separately grasped the tusk, the tail and the trunk to hold back system parts (rent control, excluding outsiders, for example). Justifiable short term actions make long term solutions harder to implement. Housing policy in rural Scotland needs to be reconfigured to adjust quickly to local growth as well as deal with problems of disadvantage.

Rurality brings distinctive features to housing supply chains (though the length and links of these chains varies from place to place) including:

- Shortages of skilled construction labour and difficulties in organising widely dispersed sub-contractors.
- Limited numbers of local construction firms and absence of large-scale developers (with access to lower cost development finding and working capital) as they make higher returns elsewhere.
- High costs of assembling construction materials in rural areas.

- High costs of providing associated infrastructure.
- Demanding planning requirements and slow planning processes.
- High cost of land, reflecting strategic development planning considerations.

The webinar group took the view that some of these difficulties might be reduced by taking a long-term and place-community-based approach to change that worked to shape more flexible supply chains as a matter of social and economic urgency. It was also recognised that more and better locally evidence was required to progress policy action in this area.

ACTION (49). The Regional Economic Partnerships, and most have some rural territory within their boundaries, should lead urgent assessments of housing supply chain performance within their region and how it aids or hampers productivity and inclusion outcomes. They should progress this work in partnership with Homes for Scotland and the SFHA. Their review should include recommendations for how skills training, business improvement, new building technologies, faster planning and more effective land supply might raise regional economic performance.

A second key feature of rural housing markets stems from the diversity and nature of incomes. Low wage rates, seasonal incomes and the reliance on multiple income sources presents challenges in paying for housing, even for households with average incomes. There is much evidence that, in general, the poorest fifth of households cannot pay for decent adequate housing with the social security support levels available to them, so addressing the problems of rural housing poverty requires an expanded stock of non-market rental housing.

For younger and middle-income renters the nature of their incomes may mean that some who would have been able to secure a mortgage if their income had been certain and single sourced are rationed out of ownership because they have multiple income sources. There is a likely market failure in providing mortgage finance in rural areas that needs banks to develop better relational and non-formulaic relationships with their clients. National lending criteria don't proxy risk and reliability accurately in rural housing markets.

A third feature of rural markets, and particularly in remote, low density areas, is that markets are thin and generate weak and infrequent market signals. Even if there was a local development industry it would often be unclear as to where it should develop in any 'speculative' fashion.

These are key features of rural housing in Scotland and webinar participants argued that policy needed to be re-invigorated and nuanced in a number of ways (and a number of experienced commentators remarked on the loss of strategic support and financial muscle for rural housing since the demise of Communities Scotland). The key policy issues raised (in addition to the crucial supply side issues noted above) in the webinar required Housing Policy change.

ACTION (50). Local Authorities, the SFHA, SFT and the Scottish Government need to act to adapt existing housing policy and delivery agents across rural Scotland to deliver outcomes that will promote inclusion and not hold back local economic development. This includes:

Immediately recognising the nuances of rural markets in designing national grant schemes, for instance in designing policies for supporting first time home-buyers in purchasing homes from developers.

Ensuring, in current policy changes and implementation, that any rent control policies introduced or approval of pressured rental zones are to be accompanied by a strategic supply side policy to increase the stock of decent quality rental housing in the locations where it was needed.

Refocusing policy on investment through community based non-profit vehicles (with land transfers, housing associations and development trusts all potentially involved) to deliver mixed tenure schemes, including market rent housing, with mixed public-private funding and in doing so work to develop the development capacity available to local areas. This will also require significant capacity building in relation to community land and housing ownership (webinar participants noted that there were too many 'left behind' communities in relation to such choices that need professional support to change).

There was a strong sense in the webinar that there had been a failure of local authorities and governments in Scotland over the last 20 years to value and promote more widely the successful community-based models that have emerged (and this applies to methods of governance and delivery within public housing in some councils).

Nile Istephan reviewed the contribution of Eildon Housing Association which has grown and diversified throughout the Borders over the last four decades. Eildon, working in 50 of the 60 settlements in the Borders build more homes than any private developer and are an anchor organisation in these localities and would do more if there was more consistent financial support from government and supportive planning decisions from councils and some of the more advantaged communities in the area. Mixed housing provision and care support reflect a willingness to integrate provision in the communities served and Eildon are anxious to act locally to deliver the carbon reduction and inclusion goals the Scottish Government seeks, and are building new relations with the new development agency to help support SME's in the area. They are also developing the 'Internet of Things' for their occupants and in their homes that will change communications and service delivery options for all in the communities served in innovative ways.

Community wealth-building has, through the housing association sector, been hiding in plain sight in rural and urban Scotland for the last 30 years and its successes need to be seen and supported. Community-oriented organisations, in some cases, appear to be more effective in community participation and integrating services than public providers that are strongly siloed and see their Chief Executive rather than the community as their main client. Rural Scotland needs a stronger evidence base of what works in integrated, community-based action.

There was a discussion in the webinar about the relative merits of broadening the housing and other remits of non-profit and community land trusts, creating clearly defined subsidiaries if necessary, to shape both integrated action and community control (and not just consultation). This discussion was reinforced by further considering the alternative of expanding the roles of the rising number of

development trusts not only into 'green' initiatives, tourism and supporting micro-business but to have housing subsidiaries assets and actions too. In many respects this is the institutional equivalent of rural households often requiring multiple income sources, that is more diverse roles may allow better service integration and investment action on the part of non-profits but also allow them to meet operational scale and overhead costs at more local scales. And if local authorities are to remain large scale and seen as remote from rural communities then effective, well-organised participative democracy within the community may be an effective way forward. The webinar recognised the onerous tasks facing volunteers developing such initiatives, especially where host authorities were not supportive of community-led action and recognised the need for professional support and organisational development funding. Well defined regulatory regimes needed to be developed.

No attempt should be made to impose a particular organisational form in particular places. It would be a waste of resources to create such community agencies for change where councils have already developed community-led actions and were working with local non-profits.

For example, webinar participants were impressed by the ways in which East Ayrshire had been transforming its service functions and working with communities and non-profits (and in the towns webinar similar positive narratives were reported). Where this was not the case then it would be unhelpful to have housing associations and development trusts and other non-profits competing for functions (and wasting potential scale economies within providers). One way to avoid these difficulties and progress these initiatives across Scotland would be to create a class of vehicles, Community Action Trusts (CATs), that would be the designation of either an association or development trust, or it may be a merger of both and other interests, leading work in a particular community. Or Community Action Partnerships (CAPs) would bring non-profit and public vehicles into a coordinated (enduring) local partnership to ensure integrated local change driven by communities.

ACTION (51). Councils, with their service and investment budgets falling increasingly behind what is needed in rural Scotland, use their enabling roles to assess the potential of CATs and CAPs, with their own assets and access to other sources of finance, to act as key local agencies for rural service provision and development.

This is important, because if rural governance is to have a stronger community presence and involvement then place-based and community owned housing is potentially central to that effort. Arguably these local vehicles are the institutional response required to deliver change with a local perspective and voice.

Final Words: A Different Future

Better short-term and long-term thinking by government(s) could deliver a radically improved rural Scotland in two decades. There is no doubt that emerging carbon and biodiversity issues will, in themselves, change rural Scotland and its connections to the nation as a whole. There was a broad conclusion that present core policy approaches both fail to use what we know works best and are

insufficiently resourced to achieve the aims espoused. There was a steely resolve not to be reconvening in 2030 to discuss how policies had failed to progress.

Sarah Skerrat summarised key points and noted the importance of the 'network perspective' on rural places and change, the need for a modern narrative for the increasingly diverse rural economies of Scotland. Contributors stressed this is a moment of opportunity for change and creativity in policy as well as the economy. Jane Atterton emphasised the need for a stronger evidence base, future-proofing rural policy, and the importance of learning from others. All agreed with Mark Shucksmith's notion of networked approaches to policy and provision as an effective framework for matching action to the functioning of rural systems and the aims of their communities.

These are rich ideas for rural Scotland. Focused improvement of place delivery strategies for rural areas and resources to unleash potential are what is now needed.

PART 6: ACTIONS FOR CHANGE AND TOWNS

Diversity in Nature and Trajectory

Towns play key roles in the connecting and supporting tissues of Scotland's spatial systems. They house and provide amenities and services for a significant part of the workforce of nearby cities and larger towns and drive the retail and leisure demands expressed within these larger places. At the same time, they may be market and service centres for the rural areas that lie in their hinterland.

History has given Scotland's towns diverse economic bases. Larger and smaller central places to meet local demands, and process rural raw materials, are spread across the country. The dispersed nature of past industrialisation layered over historic ports, defensive sites and centres of religion and education, shaped new geographies of towns from the 18th century onwards. Textile manufacturers were drawn to water power in the Borders and at the foot of the Campsie Hills: spreading coal related manufacturing, including coal and steel, across the coalfields of Ayrshire, Lanarkshire and Fife, left Scotland with a majority of populations in towns.

Research on population and other changes in UK towns by the Bennett Institute and the University of St Andrews reveals very mixed trajectories of population and economic fortunes over recent decades. Whereas remoter and western towns have tended to decline in population in this century, towns closer to the larger cities and in eastern Scotland have grown.

Pre-Covid 19 growth drivers have largely followed two trends. Favourable shifts in economic base have driven growth in some towns, mainly in eastern Scotland. In contrast, towns that lost their old industrial economic bases after the 1970's, notably, in the coalfield areas, have not all recovered. Around the major cities, in the Central Belt, residential decentralisation (with associated increases in

commuting) have driven 'dormitory' town growth, with Dunfermline a particular example. The onset of Covid-19, as noted earlier, is shaping a shifting residential demand towards well connected towns and rural areas, as discussed above, but the potential weight of flows has not yet been established.

Looking across the UK, Scottish towns have higher measured rates of deprivation and striking scales of inequality within them. General economic change processes and policy settings in spending, tax and planning policies have seen significant reductions in economic activity and vitality within many town centres and the requirement for town centre (or 'high street') renewal is evident. In all but the smallest towns spatial segregation of poorer and other households has become apparent as non-market housing opportunities have been demonstrably limited since the 1980's and younger and single poor are increasingly found in overcrowded, poor quality and high-priced private lets. Digging-down in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has not been compensated by levelling-up in the 21st century (nor indeed attracted any coherent discussion or commitments in recent UK government regional policy announcements). However, there is clear evidence that through the UK's post-2008 austerity era public service expenditures within Scottish towns have been maintained relative to English towns.

The Scottish Government, have increasingly paid attention to the problems and prospects of towns. Most recently commissioning a Review of their Town Centre Action Plan, introduced in 2013, led by Professor Leigh Sparks (University of Stirling). The review was published after the conclusion of the Action Project webinars but the towns webinar was given a preview of the key findings emerging. The broad aims and major findings of that review were widely supported by webinar participants (a minority of whom earned their living managing, researching or advocating towns). Rather than repeating the overlaps and the discussion and recommendations we suggest an Action.

(ACTION: 52) The Scottish Government should accept the major recommendations of the Town Centre's Review Report on integrating planning for towns and given them appropriate priority in national planning and spatial policy choices, on reviewing taxation, funding and charging instruments and resources for towns and expanding and aligning funding for demonstration projects.

Action Project Webinar discussions all shared the Reviews recognition that place (and other policies) now had to be concerned with not just inclusion and wellbeing (that the webinar recognised that many Scottish councils were already addressing with inadequate support) but to reinforce measures to achieve zero carbon by 2035. Action Project participants also emphasised, in line with action on income growth drivers in city-regions and rural areas, increased housing and social infrastructure investment as well as active travel strategies and rail investment, a sharp increase in skills and especially for the digital sector and rethinking innovation processes (especially for microbusinesses) within different sized towns.

Webinar participants were comfortable with the Review's Town Centre First Strategy and emphasis on community and partnership in shaping change but would have supported particular emphasis in place change policies. As the Action Project was also considering towns in the context of overall place policies for Scotland the webinar also drew attention to town-city-rural connections not emphasised

in the Review and to the remoteness from all levels of government that communities in towns often feel. A number of additional Actions follow from the webinar discussions.

(ACTION: 53) Towns and the Councils that are their local government should diversify and strengthen partnerships for renewal and recovery and leading Scottish institutions engaged in this work. SURF and the Carnegie Trust have clear examples of such partnerships that have sometimes only been imitated slowly across similar places in Scotland. COSLA and the Scottish Government should look to speeding up and supporting diverse partnerships across Scotland's towns (and this would be a supporting role for a national communities agency). Partnerships must embrace separate interests in jobs and homes and travel but also to the vitality and culture of places and should have strong representation of youth, with set quotas for inclusion of under-25s.

(ACTION: 54) Higher and Further Education institutions, encouraged by city-deals, are now playing leading roles in major city-region partnerships. The Scottish Funding Council, working with individual FE and HE institutions should be asked to review, as remote office working and learning may have permanently increased post-Covid, how they might better contribute to improving places in towns and rural areas. Is there potential for the leading Universities to develop detached campuses in the way Glasgow has at Dumfries? Less radically, might they develop knowledge exchange and learning partnerships with the broader hinterlands within which they are set

(ACTION: 55) The webinar fully supports the Sparks review notion of integrated infrastructure with indicative finance and associated planning in place. The Action Project also recommends that there is clear leadership by a designated council department or by a non-profit development entity (a Trust or recognised Wider-Action housing non-profit with local presence). Dunoon and East Ayrshire are clear cases where Council action and decentralisation have engaged communities effectively in service provision. In other localities non-profits have been more evident leaders in community involvement. There needs to be an end to complaint-led town service provision

(ACTION: 56) The planning framework for actions within towns, embracing not just the Town Centre should be linked to, and consistent with plans for the renewal of rundown neighbourhoods within towns and there should be a statutory requirement for schemes above a certain value or scale to have a masterplan for action.

(ACTION: 57) Plans and masterplans for a Town should be set within wider council planning and investment strategies. It should be a required Action for Councils to link Town plans to those for their rural hinterlands and to the major cities within their city-rural-region. Towns need to be linked in.

Last Words for New Stories

It is likely that towns will feature more in the economic and social life of the nation, that carbon reduction will impact their external linkages and internal structures. It is also clear that they will

feature more strongly in place policy debates in Scotland. Scotland needs to move beyond artificial divides in governing real economic and social systems and in constructing separate 'place' policies for towns, rural areas and city regions.

National place thinking has to move to comprehending place policies that match real social, environmental and economic systems and that connect places rather than separate them into different, arbitrary categories for policy action. Reconstructing place policies in Scotland is not only an opportunity to build back better from Covid-19 but to remake the sub-national governance and government of Scotland to match modern place challenges.

Using reformed financial and tax structures, engaging communities and individuals, (and especially younger and poorer Scots) in the democratic processes that will make Scotland a more prosperous, sustainable, inclusive and fair country. The Action Project webinars revealed the broad range of new ideas that individuals and communities are ready to share and enact with governments.

There are major long-term changes required, and much agreement about what needs to change and how to change it. As a new Parliament opens, the Project participants recognised the severity of the challenges that governments will face in the five years ahead. But all the webinars echoed the sentiment that governance/government within Scotland has to be remade, that community voices and institutions need to be listened to and responses resourced, and that short-term opportunistic actions don't impress anymore.

The voices heard in the webinars want an authentic approach to implementing place vision and provision for which so many vote. Above all, contributors to the Action Project were positive that there were ideas and communities in Scotland's rural areas, towns and cities ready for change.

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