

SCRUTINY REVIEW – TOWN AND VILLAGE IMPROVEMENTS: DESKTOP REVIEW OF PROPERTY AND PUBLIC REALM

1. Purpose of Report

This report provides further information on the role of Building Standards, the Local Development Plan, Registered Social Landlords and Public Realm as requested by the Committee.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to

- 2.1 consider the further evidence and information detailed in **Appendix 1, Appendix 2 Appendix 3 and Appendix 4**; and
- 2.2 agree this should be added to the evidence gathered for the Town and Village Improvements Scrutiny Review.

3. Considerations

3.1 The Scrutiny and Performance Committee agreed to undertake a review of Town and Village Improvements on 16 April 2015.

3.2 The Review Scope's purpose is:

To evaluate the effectiveness of the investment made in the town and village improvements and identify any improvements for the future.

Review Objectives:

- Identify public realm improvements to key towns' centres (Dumfries, Stranraer Lockerbie, Dalbeattie and Annan) across the region over the last five years
- Understand the Shop Front Improvement Scheme including the factors that have influenced take up
- Establish the role of planning and the opportunities for positive contributions
- Establish the impact of the improvements made
- Compare and contrast with arrangements in other local authority areas, including evaluation methodology
- Make recommendations for future arrangements

3.3 Members at the 17 January 2017 Committee meeting requested further information on the role of Building Standards in relation to town centre buildings and deterioration of property (**Appendix 1**); the link to sustainability of town and village centres and Planning through the Local Development Plan (LDP) (**Appendix 2**); the activity of Registered Social Landlords in developing town and village centres locally (**Appendix 3**); and the public realm improvements that have taken place over the last five years in our region (**Appendix 4**). This report provides this further information for Member scrutiny.

3.4 In summary the main findings identified from this information includes:-

- The Local Authority has the power to make a building safe by removing the immediate danger and ensuring the safety of the public. This can be as simple as erecting barriers to keep the public away from the area ensuring that any financial liability is kept to a minimum.

- The Local Authority has no power to carry out work that may improve a building nor can they compel the owner to make any building more appealing.
- The Local Development Plan has determined that demand for premises from national retailers in market towns has fallen dramatically and in order to offset this departure from High Street shopping (for example internet shopping nationally has risen by 12% over the last decade and 27% in Dumfries and Galloway) it is proposed less restrictive planning regulations be put in place to ensure that proposals to develop retail opportunities in the High Street and regeneration areas will be supported and encouraged. In addition, town centre boundaries will be more focused towards the High Street and regeneration areas.
- Dumfries and Galloway's house building is characterised by a number of small scale builders and people who want to build their own house and the planning authority has recognised that this is an area where further guidance and assistance would be of benefit. The Council's planning authority has proposed to the Scottish Government the development of a 'Plot Passport' model for small and single unit sites.
- The delivery of affordable social housing was agreed as a nationwide policy priority by the Scottish Government, which is committed to delivering 50,000 additional new homes by March 2021.
- Through the local region's Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP), registered social landlords are developing a number of large and small scale projects in towns and villages across the whole of our region to deliver new affordable housing. A number of these projects encourage town centre living.
- The Council's focus is changing from using Scheme of Assistance grants to improve individual accommodation to using this funding to help town centre regeneration including bringing empty homes back into use.
- Housing supply is being targeted in a more evidence based way and this should lead to housing being available where there is demand rather than where land is available.
- Information relating to Public Realm shows that over £9 million has been committed over the last five years as part of a wider regeneration programme using the "town centre first" principles. Evaluation processes are being developed and refined to ensure learning from previous projects across Scotland is used to ensure objectives are achieved.

4. Governance Assurance

The Corporate Management Team contributed to the development of the Review Scope and has been involved in, and is in agreement with, the overall Review process and arrangements.

5. Impact Assessment

As this report does not propose a change in policy, the formal adoption of a plan, policy or strategy it is not necessary to complete an Impact Assessment.

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Approved by

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Appendices– 4

Appendix 1 - The Role of Building Standards

Appendix 2 - The Role of the Local Development Plan

Appendix 3 - The Role of the Strategic Housing Investment Plan and Registered Social Landlords

Appendix 4 - Public Realm Improvements

Background Papers

[Scrutiny and Performance Committee - Handbook - meeting of 15 November 2012](#)

[Scrutiny and Performance Committee - Future Work Programme 2015 -17 - meeting of 16 April 2015](#)

[Scrutiny and Performance Committee – minute of meeting of 17 January 2017](#)