



## 20 Minute Neighbourhood - the recording and outputs from the 2021vSRP Session on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Session curated by the [Development Trusts Association Scotland](#) and chaired by Lena Hutton, DTAS.

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The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns highlighted not only how resilient communities are, but it also magnified the issues others already had. Looking forward now at recovery, the Scottish Government has published its Programme for Government (PfG) in which it supports the idea of 20-minute neighbourhoods and the benefits of living within 20 minutes walking distance of a person's daily needs. This session was a participative exploration of how a 20-minute neighbourhood model may be interpreted for rural and island Scotland.

### Summary of Presentations

**Louisa MacDonnell, CEO of DTAS** – Louisa gave brief overview of the Town Centre Action Review Group, of which she is a member. The Review Group carried out an evaluation of the original Town Centre Action Plan, published in 2013, and concluded that much of the original report was still relevant - town centres are the heart of a community and they should remain a priority with regards to planning.

This also ties in with the 20-minute neighbourhood concept and Louisa posed various questions around whether communities had the services and facilities required to have their daily needs met within this specific distance, what challenges and opportunities lay ahead in realising this and if it was even relevant in a rural and island setting.

This is an emerging policy and Louisa encouraged attendees to have an open and honest debate so that she can feed the rural and island perspective back to the Scottish Government.

**Sarah-Jane Allsopp, Project Development Manager, Castle Douglas Development Forum** – Sarah-Jane considered what a 20-minute neighbourhood looks like from a rural perspective. Giving her local town centre as an example, Sarah Jane spoke about how Castle Douglas is a vibrant town centre that relies on the surrounding farms and villages to sustain itself. She suggested that many of the essential elements of this concept, like access to green, open spaces, are in abundance in rural areas and there are creative ways of ensuring access to the others. Recognising that sometimes

convenience overweighs local, she believes a way to bridge this gap is through connectivity and a blended approach to service delivery.

**Robert Scott, Community Hub Manager, Rosewell Development Trust** – Having recently completed the construction of The Steading, a community hub built by the Rosewell Development Trust for Rosewell, Midlothian and its surrounding area, Robert offered up advice and support on how to set up a 20-minute neighbourhood. He detailed the journey Rosewell took from initial discussions around a lack of community services and facilities, identifying a potential piece of derelict land, the negotiations and fundraising required to buy and develop this land and the attempts to consult with and include the local community in the process.

## Discussion Points and Recommendations

How realistic is the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods within rural and island Scotland?

What are the opportunities and challenges in place-planning using a 20 Minute Neighbourhood framework?

These were the questions that were put to the 74 delegates who attended this session at the vSRP2021 with one of our favourite exchanges:

*“What percentage of the population is more than 20 minutes from services by public transport?”*

*“Forget distance from services! Many live more than 20 minutes from the public transport!”*

## Points raised in discussions

### Background/Context

The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns highlighted not only how resilient communities are in how they were able to manage the challenges they faced but it also magnified the issues others already had. Looking forward now at recovery, the Scottish Government has published its Programme for Government (PfG) in which it supports the idea of 20-minute neighbourhoods and the benefits of living within 20 minutes walking distance of a person’s daily needs.

Although not necessarily a new concept, the idea of being able to fulfil one’s needs within a 20-minute walk is gaining traction. It aligns with UN Sustainable Development Goals which focus on wellbeing, inclusive development, and the climate emergency, as well as the Place Principle which now underpins much of the Scottish Government’s policies. The concept also ties in with the Town Centre Action Plan in which the importance of a thriving town centre is stressed as it can enhance both a sense of community and place for all who live there and increase participation.

One statistic cited in support of 20-minute neighbourhoods is that ‘80% of journeys taken in the car are under one mile’ but is this the case in a rural setting when we know that ‘6% of population is in remote rural and 11% in accessible rural’ and the government definition of accessible rural is ‘area with a population less than 3000 and within a 30-minute drive of a settlement of 10000 or more?’

## Benchmarking – do we know everything we need to about this topic?

What does a 20-minute neighbourhood look like in rural and island Scotland?  
Presumption amongst the attendees that this would be interpreted as a 20-minute drive.

Mapping the requisite elements of a 20-minute neighbourhood to determine whether this is something that can be applied to much of rural and island Scotland.  
This mapping needs to take into account the quality of the services available. There were many comments on ‘fit for purpose’ transport during this session which suggests that the current provision is inadequate.  
  
N.B. If some of the barriers to realising this concept lie in better technology and connectivity then the mapping should include the quality of connectivity too.

## Mobilisation – who needs to be involved and what support do they need?

Planning

Communities to be involved in projects from the initial stages. Raising awareness and widening access to government consultations like NPF4 would bring communities in at the initial stages.  
*“Important to have proper community consultation to deliver appropriate services for everyone.”*  
*“Gap between planning implementation and what communities really feel they need.”*  
  
Stronger links would reduce suspicion and the fear that can be felt between communities and local authorities, land-owners and service providers, as well within communities themselves.  
*“Supportive environments for collaboration at all levels - from grassroots right through to national policy level”*  
  
*“Local Development Trust worked for several years to put forward plans (and funding) to take over the local primary school only to have the council sell it to a developer for £1”*

Community Engagement and Empowerment

Make the process easier and protect communities in their endeavours: *“Community capacity and collective action needs nurtured and sustained through resources being transferred into the hands of local people.”*  
  
Strong sense that all voices within the community needed to be heard when designing projects.  
*“if anything works for disabled people, it will also work for everyone else, so listen”* but to *“challenge silo thinking”*  
  
Better community engagement between communities, local authorities and other stakeholders. Acknowledging that community groups have already successfully delivered on many, high-cost projects.  
  
Include local authorities in the development of community skills and technological and administrative support to engage with their small rural communities

Capacity Building	<p>An awareness of and pooling of resources – link to SCA Community Learning Exchange was one example. Connecting people with relevant skills/experience to appropriate tasks/projects.</p> <p>Continuation of home working where possible and an encouragement of home workers to utilise their local area. <i>“Take advantage of the current skills and expertise and engagement of community members - because of home working”</i></p>
Transport	<p>Wider option: Link up different transport providers as well as users to creatively look at the needs of communities.</p> <p>More specifically: Finding an affordable solution to a community’s transport needs. As was mentioned in the section above, this requires the consultation and inclusion of local people at the planning stage to determine whether this fits with their community’s requirements. Developed in consideration of the climate emergency and ideally, this would be locally managed.</p>
Connectivity	<p>Viability of Digital High Streets/Smart Villages Outcome of pilot study into Castle Douglas Digital High Street. Consultations between community and digital providers, not just broadband but 5G and satellite. Training for businesses to help bring businesses online. Bridging the gap between convenience and local. The idea of a Digital High Streets/Smart Villages was well received in the session and is a way of investing in local as well as reducing carbon emissions but this requires access for all, be that through training, connection or affordability.</p> <p>Communities need to be supported in realising the options open to them rather than accepting what providers are offering. Little incentive for providers to find workable solutions.</p>
Funding	<p>Funding to be made more accessible from preliminary stages onwards, eg if a group wants to do preliminary investigations re planning, legal, feasibility costs etc.</p> <p>If priority has moved to wellbeing, then there needs to be less focus on the financial sustainability and greater attention given to the social benefits of a project which may mean subsidies are required.</p> <p>Less barriers to funding for community groups. One example given was a community group having been established to facilitate an asset transfer. As part of their funding bid, they were required to submit verified accounts (for a newly formed group.)</p> <p>Funding for paid support within the community would alleviate some of the pressure on community groups trying to manage multiple community projects.</p>

## Recommendations

- **Work with DTAS and others to re-define the 20 Minute Neighbourhood conceptual framework so it is relevant to both urban and rural contexts.**

The term '20-Minute Neighbourhoods' is a conceptual framework for better designed and more sustainable places. The simplicity of the term belies the complex range of planning and community development processes that need to be employed to enable a move towards creating a '20-Minute Neighbourhood.' It also belies the urban and rural geographies that shape these processes.

The Scottish Government-adopted definition which can be found in everything from the Programme for Government to political parties' Manifestos speak of services within a "20 minute walk" of a person's home.

Much of rural and island Scotland would not be able to access the requisite elements of a 20 Minute Neighbourhood by walking but this does not render the concept valueless in the rural context. It just renders the definition valueless.

- **Develop 20 Minute Neighbourhood mapping systems that are grounded in the lived reality of local communities**

Following on from clarifying the definition, a more nuanced mapping of the essential 'daily' elements of a 20 Minute Neighbourhood should be carried out. Current mapping around digital coverage for example may suggest that communities have the pre-requisite infrastructure, but the infrastructure does not necessarily translate to fit-for-purpose household or business connection speeds, assuming households and businesses are even connected. Walk or drive time to services also means little if your walk is not wheelchair/ buggy accessible or the drive time cannot be achieved through public transport. It also means little if the services you are accessing are themselves not fit-for-purpose. More precise community mapping would engender better joined-up planning and resource allocation.

- **Invest in paid staff (plus core costs) to support local communities in conducting inclusive consultations, finding consensus on local priorities and implementing their priorities in partnership with others. Proactively map and identify communities that may require additional support to develop local plans.**

Many communities do have dedicated Development Officers. Those that do not are frequently overlooked in the allocation of resources that could improve their locality. This is creating inequalities in the application of the Scottish Government and CoSLA's Place Principle which will become more acute once Local Place Plans come into force.

- **Invest in expert organisations who can enable local communities to meaningfully shape the National Planning Framework (NPF4) development process.**

It is within everyone's interests in the pursuance of a 20 Minute Neighbourhood model for Scotland that we have an enabling planning regime and a National Planning Framework that puts community wellbeing and environmental sustainability at the fore of considerations.

Consultation is ongoing on NPF4 and the consultation process must empower and provide a platform for rural and island communities to shape the drafting of NPF4.

### Other documents and initiatives mentioned during session:

- *Town Centre Review Group Report:* <https://www.gov.scot/publications/new-future-scotlands-town-centres/pages/7/>
- *Castle Douglas Development Forum:* <https://www.castledouglas.info/about-this-website/>
- *Sustrans definition of a 20 Minute Neighbourhood:* <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/get-active/2020/in-your-community/what-is-a-20-minute-neighbourhood>
- *Scottish Community Alliance definition of a 20 Minute Neighbourhood:* <https://scottishcommunityalliance.org.uk/2020/08/11/just-20-minutes/>
- *Rosewell Development Trust Facebook Page:* <https://www.facebook.com/RDTRosewell1/>
- *Rosewell Development Trust website (currently under construction):* <http://www.rdtrosewell.org.uk/>
- *Smart Villages – a digital platforms developed within specific communities aiming to both utilise and build upon the skills and assets within the community:* <https://www.smartvillage.scot/>
- *An example of how effective community engagement produces results:* <https://www.ruralnetwork.scot/news-and-events/news/leader-legacy-balquhider-community-broadband>
- *Friockheim Community Hub – has Changing Places compliant facilities:* <https://www.friockhub.co.uk/changing-places-toilet>
- *Climate Exchange research into mapping of 20 Minute Neighbourhoods:* <https://www.climateexchange.org.uk/research/projects/20-minute-neighbourhoods-in-a-scottish-context/>