



Scotland's Towns Summer Session

A National Commitment to Towns:
Setting the Direction for Scotland

Wed 24th June, Stirling



Agenda

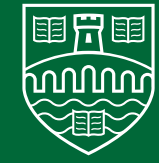
- 12.30 Arrival and lunch /networking
- 13.30 Kimberley Guthrie: Welcome and set context, introductions to speaker and panel
- 13.40 Prof Leigh Sparks keynote speech
- 13.55 Q & A
- 14.10 Facilitated Panel Discussion
 - Christine Webster, Regeneration and Town Centres Manager, Aberdeenshire Council
 - Pauline Smith, Chief Executive, Development Trusts Association Scotland
 - Stacey Dingwall, Head of Policy and External Affairs, FSB Scotland
- 14.40 Audience-panel Q & A
- 15.00 Closing remarks.



Welcome and Introduction

Kimberley Guthrie, Chief Officer
Scotland's Towns Partnership





Local Places, National Priorities: Why Towns Matter

Professor Leigh Sparks MA, PHD, CF, FRSE
Chair, Scotland's Towns Partnership

June 2026

Background



University of Stirling, Professor of Retail Studies since 1992



Chair, Scotland's Towns Partnership since 2014



Board member, Scottish Grocers Federation/Scottish Government/Scotland Food & Drink, "Go Local" Project, since 2020



Chair, Made in Stirling CIC, since 2025

Let's Go Back to 2011

- Recession, Recent Government Change, Austerity (“We’re all in it together”)
- Mary Portas – The High Street – UKG conceptualising the problem as a retail one
- Not the Approach in Scotland

The Portas Review

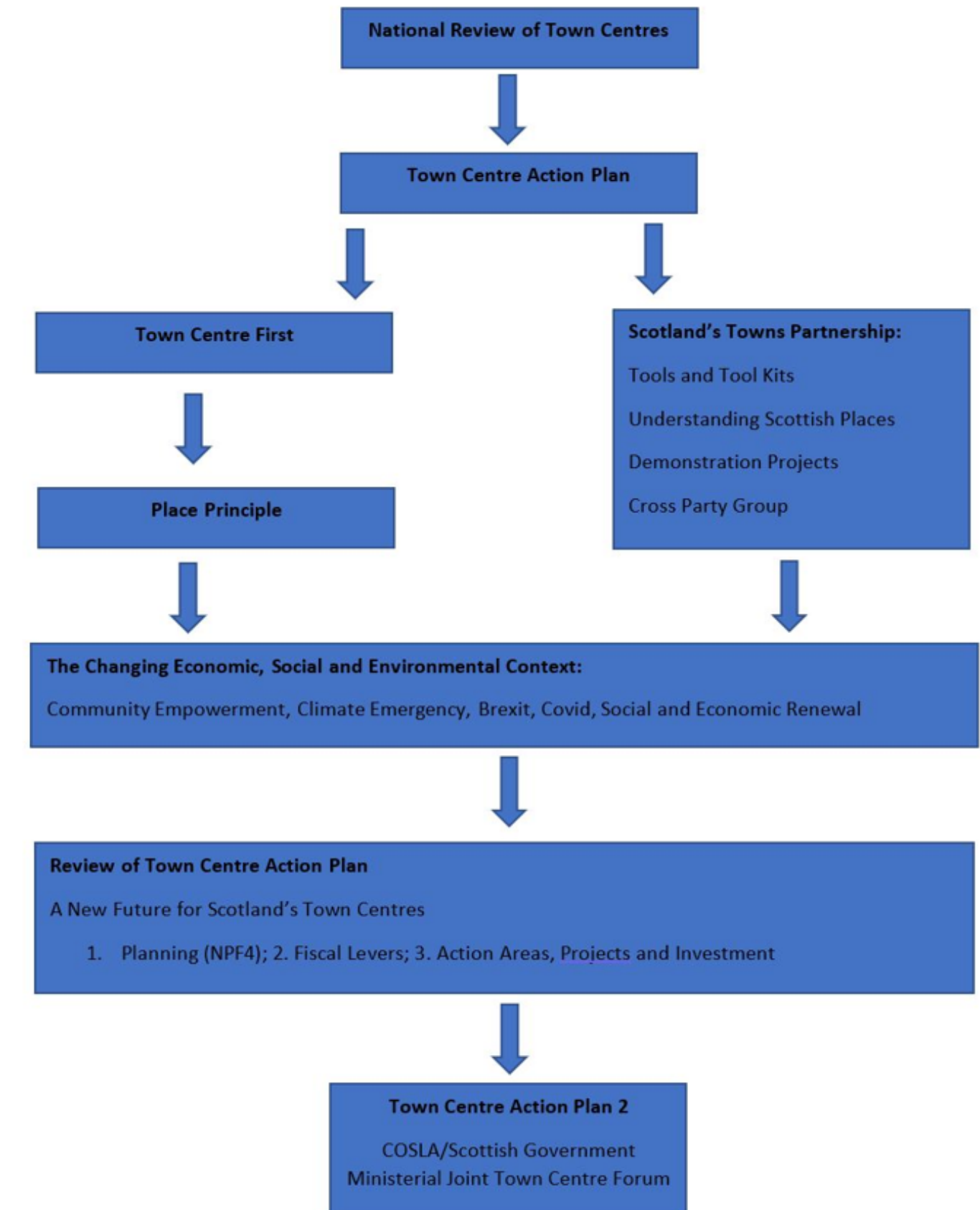
An independent review into the future of our high streets

Mary Portas
December 2011

In the 15 years since, Scotland has

- Tried to ameliorate the excesses of Westminster
- Voted not to leave the European Union
- Suffered long run austerity
- Attempted to see the solutions as town and place based rather than solely high street or retail
- Undertaken a focused long-term approach to Scotland's Towns

Figure 1: From the National Review of Town Centres (2013) to Town Centre Action Plan 2 (2022)



A New Future for Scotland's Town Centres (2021)

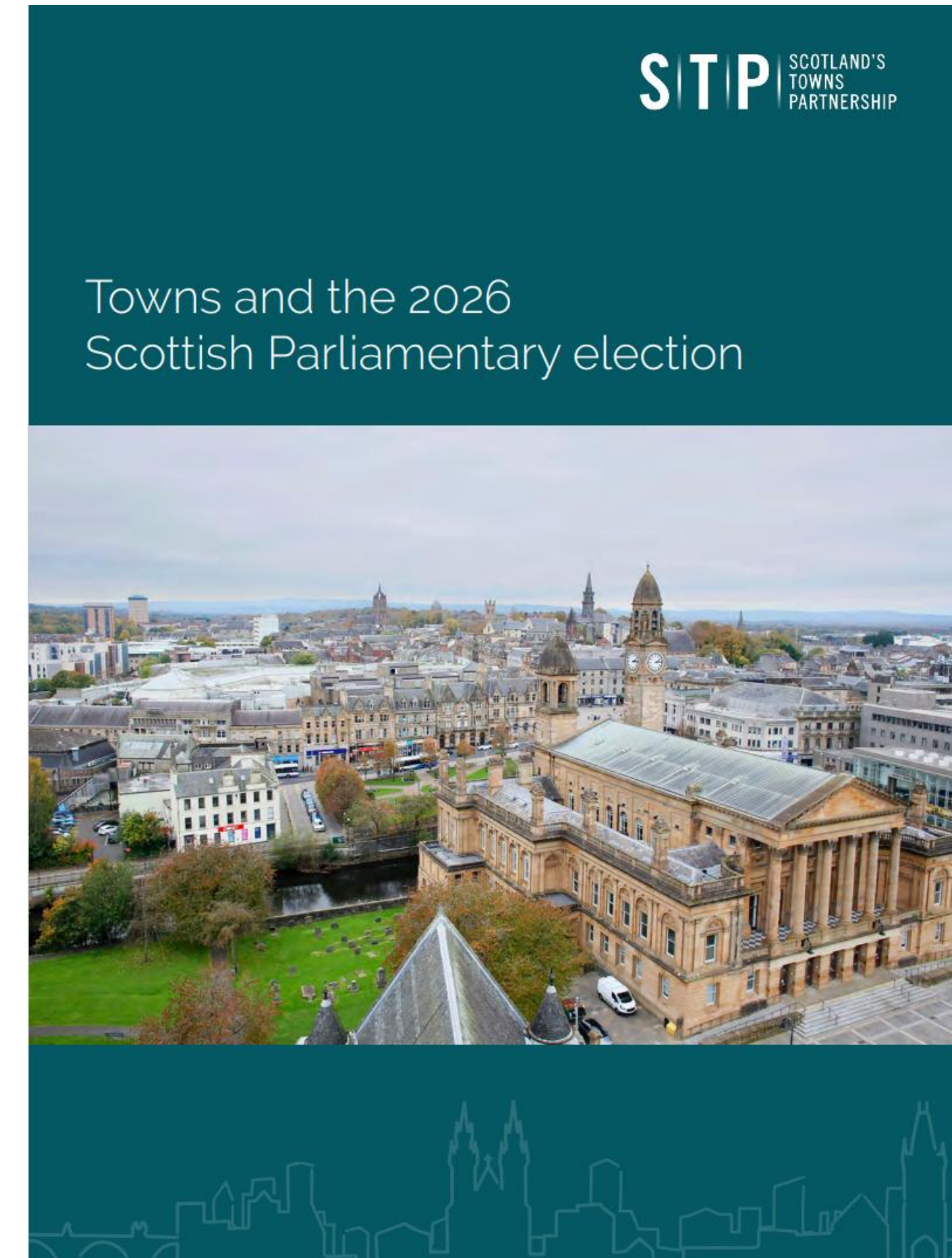
Recommendations

1. Strengthen the formal positioning of towns and town centres in National Planning including requirements to produce town and town centre plans, coproduced with communities and enhance data collection and use at the town and town centre level
2. Review the current tax, funding and development systems to ensure that wellbeing, economy and climate outcomes, fairness and equality are at their heart.
3. Expand and Align Funding of Projects in Towns and Town Centres (Living, Digital, Enterprise, Green). Funding for town centre activities has to be substantial, multi-year and cover revenue and capital spend

Scotland's Towns Partnership Manifesto (2026)

Five Themes

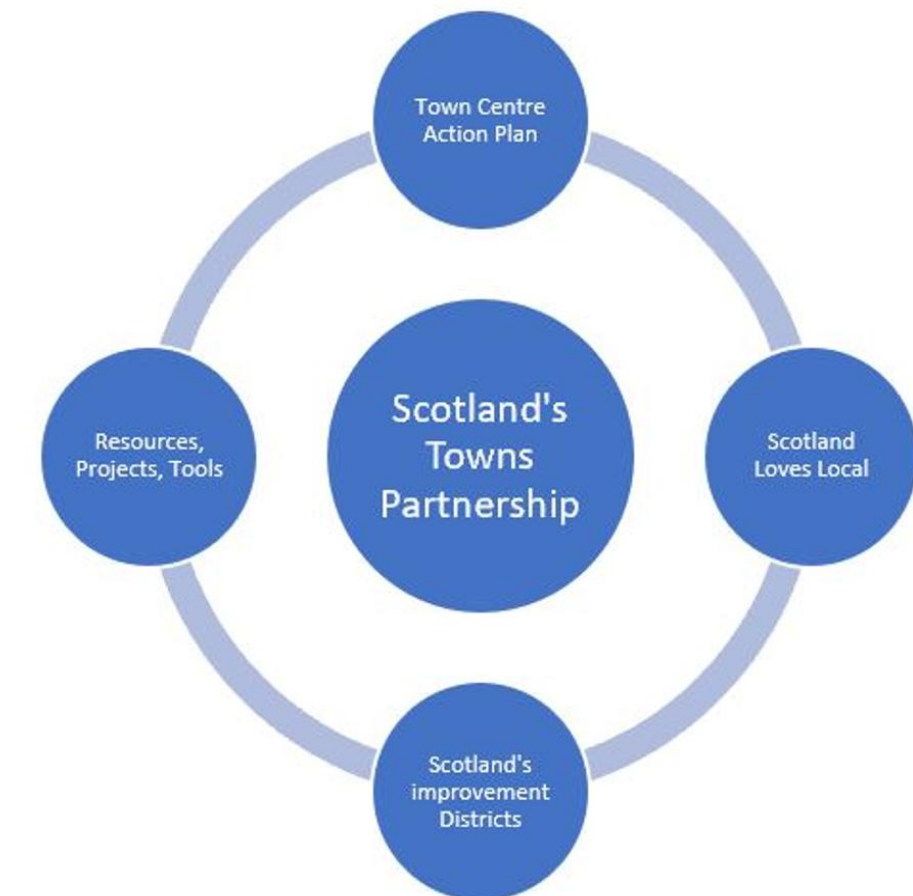
1. Strengthening further the town centre approach
2. Further embedding towns in national strategy
3. Recognise town centre living as a national delivery priority
4. Extending community wealth building measures and implementation
5. Recognising the power of localism to reduce child poverty including through supporting local businesses



Updating the 2023 Long-term Approach Diagram?

- Town Centre Forum and Town Centre Living
- Community Wealth Building Act
- BIDs – a modernised joined up strategic approach
- Positive signals – independents, communities, localism (Scotland Loves Local)
- A Community Committed to Working Positively for Towns
- Too Limited Progress on Fiscal, Transport, Environment (<https://stirlingretail.com/2026/05/08/scotlands-town-centre-action-plan-forum-2023-2025/>)

Figure 2: Scotland's Towns Partnership 2023



Why Towns Matter

- The Place Ecosystem (economic, social, environmental, cultural)
- Connections and Communities
- There's an urgency
 - Inequalities (access, availability)
 - Climate breakdown
 - Local and national identities



We shouldn't need football to open streets

What Makes a Good Town Centre?

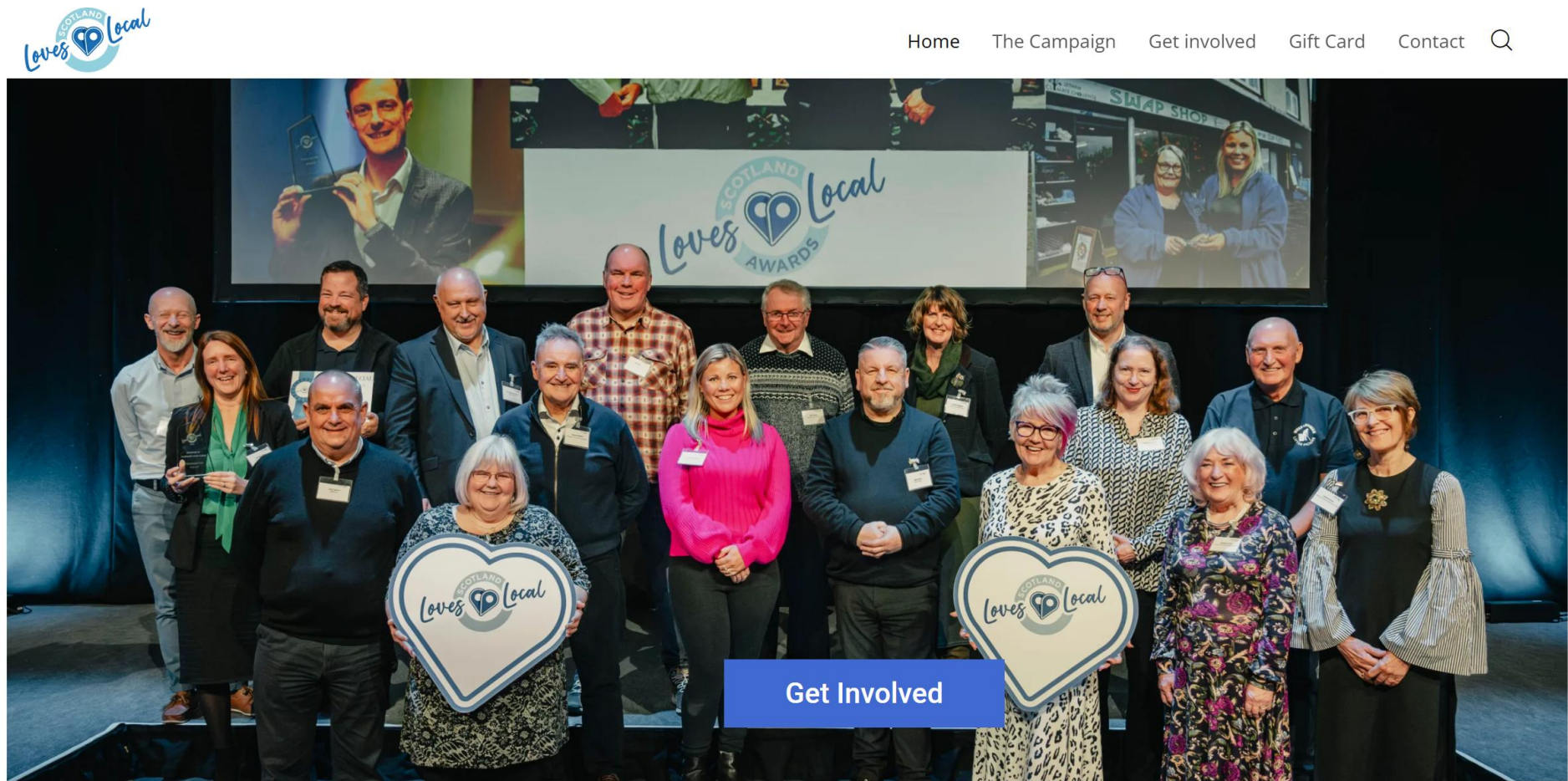
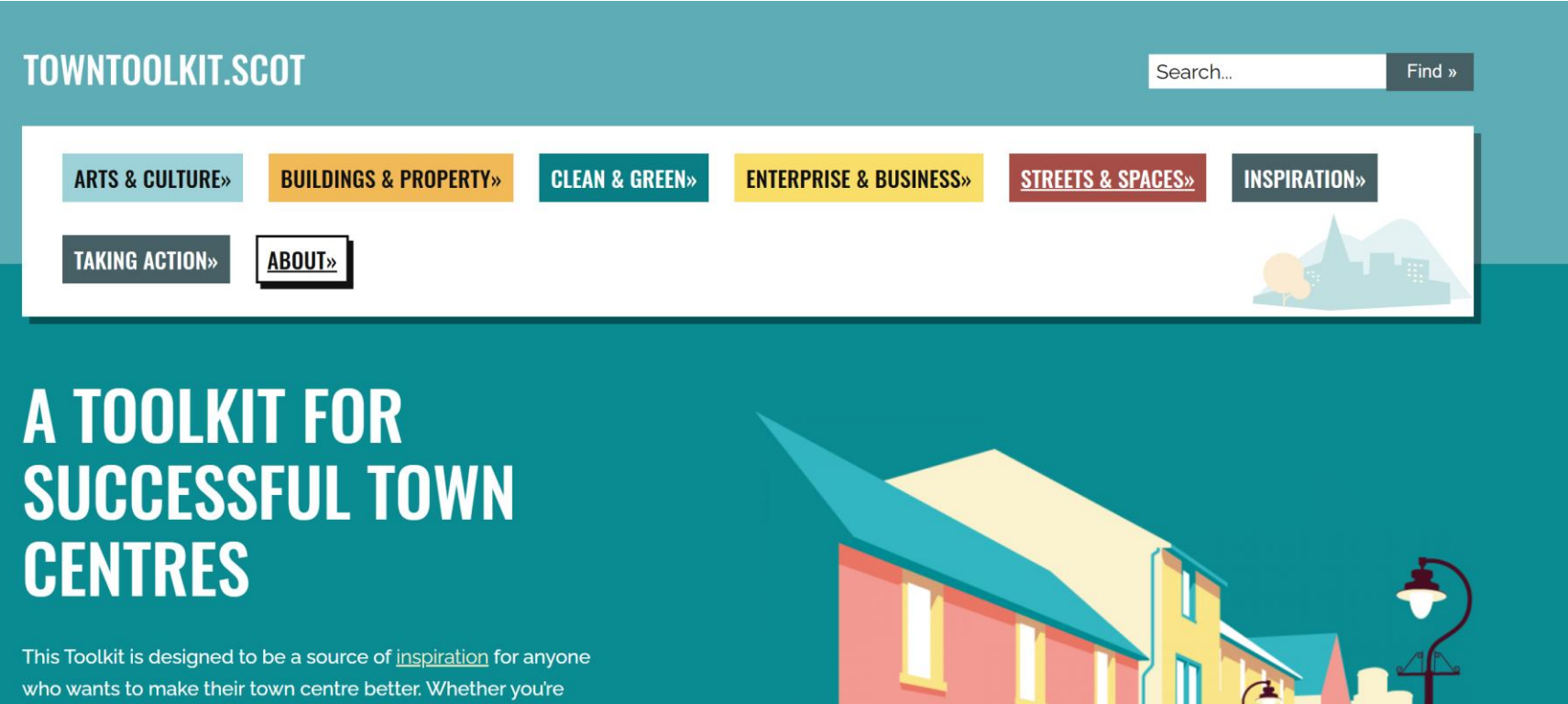
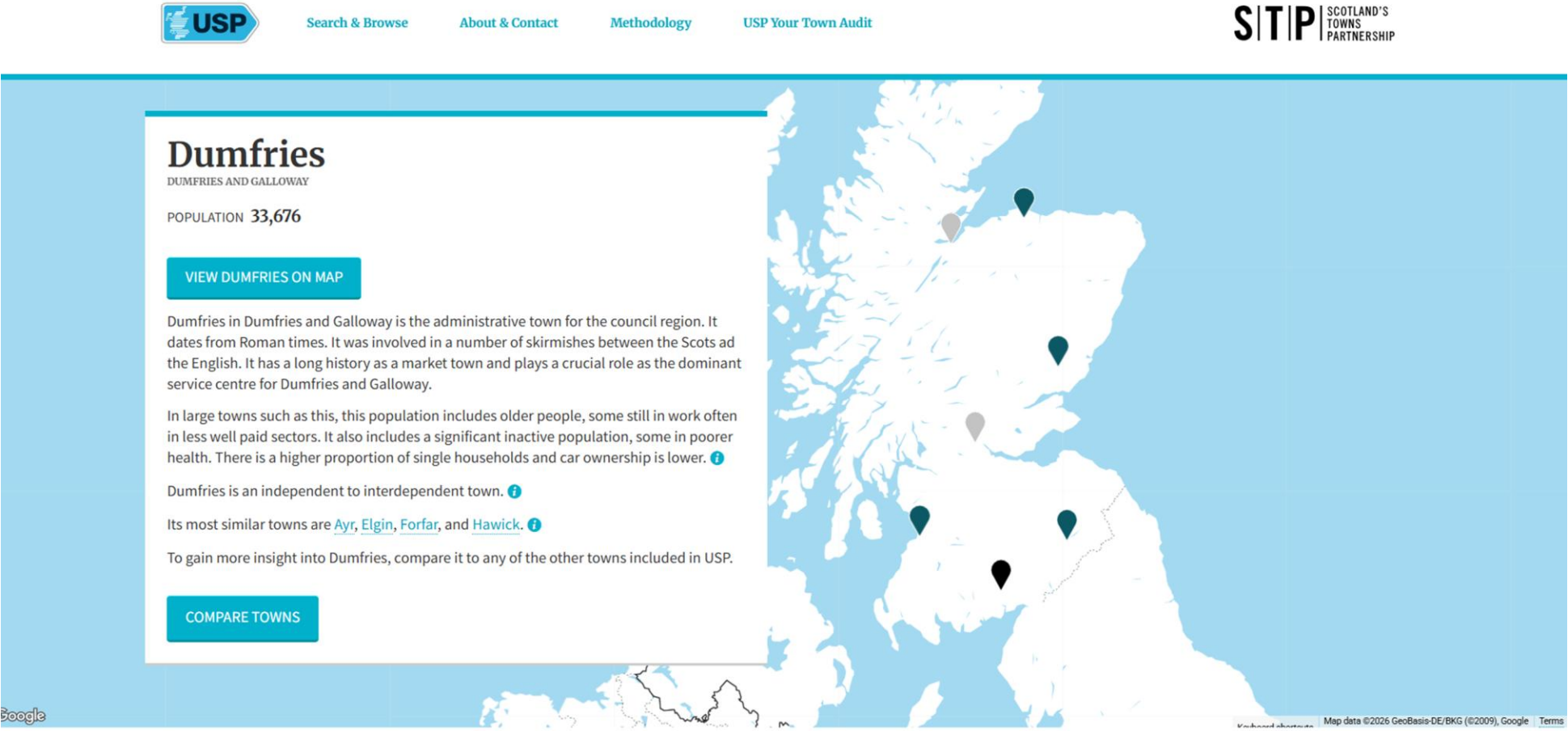
Assets and Points of Distinction/Difference	Heritage, culture, leisure, independents, community organisations, diversity
Footfall	Ease of access and movement, safety and security, attractions, living in the town centre, residents and visitors, tourism in some places
Engagement	Interesting places, spaces and attractions that make you want to spend time there and looking around
Spending	Time and Money, products and services

This does not often happen by serendipity, but needs curation and management

The Future of Town Centres and High Streets Depends on What We Want them to Be and to Do

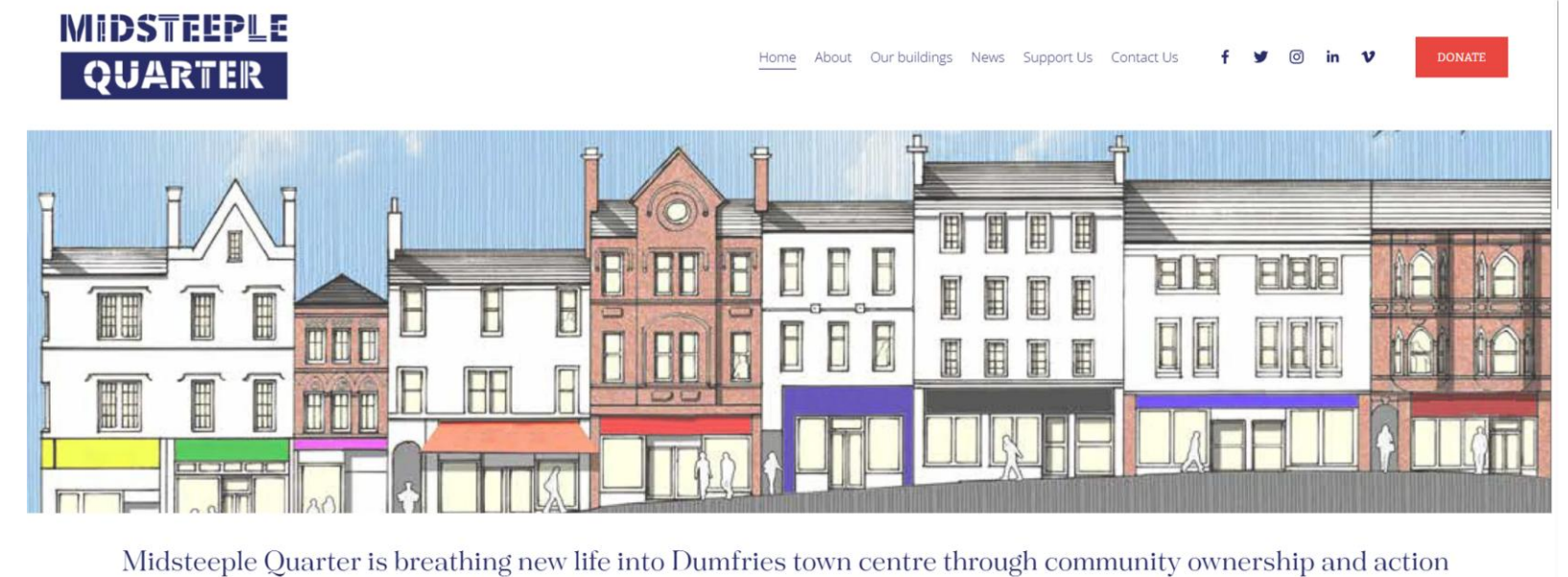
- Profit extractor or Community wealth builder?
- Disaggregated or Additive?
- Dis-Functional or Experiential?

The Thinking and Tools are in place



If we have the right priorities in local and central government then we can make massive change

- New Scottish government, new approach to priorities (?)
- **Implement** community wealth building
- National support and picture
- Local invigoration
- Stop tripping over ourselves



I'm positive we can do this

- Towns should be the focus for meeting national and local priorities
- No hiding place for those who want to perpetuate
 - Child poverty
 - Social and economic inequality
 - Homelessness and deprivation
 - One hour cities
 - Environmental catastrophe
- Groundswell of really good stuff happening
- We can do more, faster, if everyone commits



Leadership doesn't make excuses.

URBAN TRUTH
COLLECTIVE

National Commitment to Towns

Maximise Local Impact in Meeting National Priorities

Panel Discussion: Turning Commitment into Action: What Needs to Change?

- Christine Webster, Regeneration and Town Centres Manager, Aberdeenshire Council
- Pauline Smith, Chief Executive, Development Trusts Association Scotland
- Stacey Dingwall, Head of Policy and External Affairs, FSB Scotland



We welcome materials / case studies

Contact nicola@scotlandstowns.org and
rebecca@scotlandstowns.org

