



1 Introduction

The Scottish Civic Trust (SCT) was set up in 1967. In its infancy, it successfully campaigned for the restoration of Edinburgh's New Town and can also claim credit for saving New Lanark and bringing Doors Open Days to the United Kingdom.

The heritage landscape has changed considerably since that time, with a more hands-on approach taken by organisations such as Historic Environment Scotland (HES), and substantial funders in Scotland such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, HES and the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund all steering the sector in accordance with their own strategies and agendas. It is no longer possible for one actor to develop and deliver such large-scale projects. This is not a negative development, in that collaboration helps to strengthen ideas, but it does make it increasingly difficult for organisations within heritage to differentiate themselves from one another.

The purpose of our consultation exercise was to help us be clearer about what our role is and where we sit in Scotland's heritage sector. When we were first set up, along with supporting amenity groups, our objectives were:

- Well-informed public concern for the environment of town and country
- High quality in planning and in new architecture
- The conservation and, where necessary, adaptation for re-use of older buildings of distinction or historic interest
- Knowledgeable and therefore effective comment in planning matters
- The elimination of ugliness, whether resulting from social deprivation, bad design or neglect

However, there are now a variety of organisations that carry out some variation of the above roles. We have developed the attached diagram in consultation with partners in the sector, mapping the Scottish heritage landscape, which illustrates who carries out what at a national and local level.

Examining the mapped heritage landscape, it seems clear that SCT's role fills the gap in advocating on behalf of amenity groups that may not have a specific building project as their core focus, but considers the general preservation and betterment of their physical environment as their objective.

There is no other organisation providing grassroots level support to these organisations, which number well over three hundred in Scotland. Currently, we provide the following services:

- Support and advice on national planning issues
- Ad hoc guidance to local groups on heritage issues, including fundraising, governance etc
- Scottish Heritage Angel Awards, celebrating individual contributions to heritage
- My Place and My Place Photography, celebrating the transformative impact of heritage-based regeneration projects on communities
- Doors Open Days, a national festival of architecture

- Civic Connections, strengthening intergenerational connections through outreach activities

This programme of activities has developed in an organic way over the years, tied together by their heritage and community outcomes. SCT's current Board, in considering these activities, asked if this was sufficient to fulfil its over-arching remit, or if there was more that could be done.

2 Survey Methodology

In considering how to consult with amenity groups, our immediate concern was making sure we concentrated on quality rather than quantity of response. At the outset, we were aware of Community Heritage Scotland's (CHS) online survey, which promised to reach a very large number of people, but would not have the capacity to elicit complex information from its respondents. Our goal was to compliment this research with a deeper level of questioning from a smaller pool of respondents.

Baring the above in mind, we considered the best way to carry out our consultation was through face to face meetings wherever possible, supported by telephone and email conversations where there were geographical or physical access issues. We decided to use our cohort of 127 affiliated amenity groups as our consultation audience, as these represent a broad section of the kind of amenity groups found across Scotland, and our existing relationship with them made them more amenable to taking part.

In all, we spoke to 47 of our groups, representing over 5,600 individual members, with the following geographic spread across Scotland.



Distribution of consultees across Scotland

We arranged two lunchtime workshops in Glasgow and two workshops in Edinburgh during June and July 2018. We invited our groups along to join us and were delighted to find how ready they were to give us their time. We asked each group a set list of questions about heritage and about SCT – which can be found as an Appendix to this document – and with their permission, we recorded their responses, on the understanding that their comments would be anonymised. We asked the same list of questions of our telephone consultees. All consultations were carried out by Dr Susan O'Connor, Director of SCT.

The following summarises the responses received across a series of key areas of interest to both the amenity groups and SCT.

3 Consultation Themes

3.1 Modernisation

"We're a bit stuck in our ways I suppose."

"We're a bit nervous about taking on Facebook. I know it's good for talking to younger people, but it takes a lot of work."

Amenity groups are struggling to modernise. The majority of groups are finding it difficult to attract new members, but are relying on traditional methods of communication to engage with their local audience, such as leafletting and Winter lecture programmes. This has not proved an effective recruiting method. However, when the potential of social media for engagement has been discussed, there is a resistance to developing skills that might allow it to become an effective tool for local groups. Communicating in new ways is seen as a challenge and a burden, rather than an opportunity for engaging with a new audience.

Action: SCT will develop support for community groups to use social media as an effective tool. This might take the form of workshops, peer-to-peer advice and written guidance. SCT will also take an active role on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to support and connect Scotland's amenity groups.

Amenity groups are also unaware of how new technologies can support their existing work. For example, digital card readers are now cheaply available for use at events, and can increase revenues dramatically.

Action: SCT will provide and promote an annually-updated fact sheet on new technologies that may help amenity groups operate more effectively.

3.2 Funding

"Funding is always a struggle."

"Funding is an issue for us when we're thinking about taking on anything new. Most of the time we're okay."

"We have a healthy balance, but then we don't need to spend much."

Initially, most groups reported funding as being an issue, however, when questioned more fully about it, most agreed that they had the funding available for their current remit. If they were planning a bigger project, there was also the sense that funding could be sourced if necessary, but that there was a capacity gap in being able to access it. Availability of funding is therefore not the overarching issue for the groups, but the skills, time and knowledge to apply for it was.

Action: SCT is committed to launching a mentoring programme that will support skills development in writing fundraising propositions and assist groups in creating funding strategies. This programme will launch in January 2019. For those not accessing the mentoring programme, SCT will link to the Resourcing Scotland's Heritage and BRICK online resources on fundraising and other issues through our website.

3.3 Planning

"We comment on quite a lot of things. We object to quite a few things."

"our most treasured and important function"

"We are concerned about planning and the new Planning Act. There seems to be less and less opportunity for local organisations to make their views known and appeal against planning decisions. The planning process seems to be very much developer-led rather than planning department-led."

"The voice of the individual is simply not heard."

"It's all developer-led these days"

"It's not always easy to find the right words."

"You need to be a bit of an expert to know just exactly where, when and how to lodge an objection."

"There's a vast inequality in resource. That's a really big issue and something the Scottish Government needs to address. You've got developers who are spending millions, billions, and therefore can employ consultants at vast amounts of money and you've got individuals responding to it or small organisations. That's not democratic."

Groups are overwhelmed by their responsibilities with regard to planning, and are disenfranchised by the lack of transparency around the consultation process. They made the following points:

- They are expected to take on too great a burden with little support from local authorities
- They spend considerable time and effort examining and responding to local planning decisions, but feel ignored by those dealing with applications and get no feedback on their comments from the current process.
- Where they are engaged with Civic Design Forums, they felt, in some instances, under-skilled in presenting meaningful response. They noted that the environment, where all the other representatives in the room knew each other, was intimidating and somewhat unwelcoming.

Action: SCT will investigate providing workshops on interpreting planning applications with PAS. We will raise the issue of the implications of expectations of voluntary organisations within the planning process with the Scottish Government's Planning team, and with Volunteering Scotland and Built Environment Forum Scotland, both of whom have a remit to address such issues. SCT has already begun feeding back concerns regarding the transparency of the planning process to the national Digital Planning team and will continue to do so.

3.4 Networking

"How [do] we overlap the conversations of the different communities? It certainly presents a very fractured conversation."

"There's a real lack of understanding as to where best practice exists across these communities."

"What I would find really useful is if we had a way of engaging with each other."

"Our strength is that we have a lot of knowledge amongst us. . . but sometimes people have found ways of doing things that are much more effective and it is having that forum where we can learn from each other. There's strength in knowing that there are others out there who are trying to do the same thing and that's also where we can shape our voice."

Groups felt that opportunities for learning from peers were very limited: interaction tended to be rushed, at tea breaks during annual conferences. There were no opportunities for amenity groups

designed to allow them to form new relationships and engage in peer-to-peer learning, and groups felt this would be a particularly useful exercise.

Action: SCT is arranging two networking events for amenity groups, to be held in January/February 2019. These Hello Hooleys will be held in a Central Belt and a Highland location and will be promoted to members and non-members alike. They will allow opportunities for problem-solving, forming new relationships and talking to key funders in the sector in an informal setting.

When asked if Facebook and other social media platforms could be used for networking, groups felt that they might be a useful add-on, but not a substitute for face to face interactions, which could form the basis of a meaningful and mutually-beneficial relationship.

Groups were keen to understand how Facebook might be used for peer-to-peer help and advice, and suggested that SCT should take the lead in creating and moderating a suitable group that all of those engaged in the heritage sector might access. When asked if a dedicated online resource might be more appropriate, respondents considered that this might be *“re-inventing the wheel”* and would not take advantage of Facebook’s universal appeal to attract new members to the group, including those not already fully engaged with the heritage sector.

Action: SCT to create, moderate and promote a Facebook group for amenity groups to share information, network and access peer-to-peer advice.

3.5 Capacity

“I feel the problem is the membership is aging. I think we’ll all suffer from that.”

“There’s a growing expectation that the voluntary bodies will automatically take on things that the Council stops doing.”

“We want to get more involved in practical projects, be more hands-on. But we struggle with numbers.”

“We should really be active and participating”

“It’s getting difficult to get people to come on to the Committee and put an active hand in things, but we do have a very interested group of people really.”

“We would like to get some more members to give us a bit more muscle.”

Amenity groups feel stretched. In general, they have a low rate of active members – 10-30% is usual – and there is considerable burden on those active members to carry out the full range of activities. While they are keen to take on further projects, they feel they don’t have the time available to spare, and as a result, are limited to the same range of activities. This in turn means that they cannot create new projects that might attract new members, and perpetuates a cycle of gradual decline.

However, when groups are able to attract even one or two new active members, their perception rapidly shifts. Once the workload is more balanced, active members are able to take a more strategic overview of their own activities and consider engaging in new activities.

This creates something of a chicken and egg scenario. Without new members, amenity groups do not feel they can take on new projects: without new projects, they cannot encourage new members.

Action: SCT considered the above in some detail, to establish if its support would be better focussed on supporting a membership drive or in building existing members’ skills to take on new projects. Both would seem to be appropriate investments in time for SCT. However, during the research period, it became apparent that the Our Place in Time working group on volunteering (see above

diagram for where it fits into the heritage sector) is already considering a larger public campaign on volunteering. SCT would be replicating if it were to pursue a membership drive.

Accordingly, SCT will develop a programme of mentoring to enable community groups to develop their capacities for projects. The mentoring support will take the form of a combination of face-to-face and remote support, tailored to the needs of individual groups. Mentoring will be focussed on those groups who are outside the range of major cities, or from areas of economic and social disadvantage.

3.6 Education

"Sometimes [the challenge] is identifying the speaker who is going to galvanise the interest."

"Providing lecturers would be very useful."

"We're always keen to bring in knowledge and expertise."

Most amenity groups have developed their own lecture series and rightly take great pride on the role the lectures take in maintaining interest in the historic environment in their area. Along with responding to planning applications, lectures are seen as a core function.

However, for many, it is difficult to attract new speakers – many communities, especially those in rural areas, have a relatively small pool of experts to draw from. The topics for discussion also tend to be hyper-local (village window design, the influence of the local Laird on the development of the town, etc) and thus there is a low level of awareness of larger issues within the heritage sector. For example, many groups had heard of but did not know the details of current topics such as Community Asset Transfer, Community Shares or Historic Environment Scotland's move away from the Scottish Government. Knowledge of such contemporary issues plays a large role in the ability of amenity groups to continue to play a meaningful role in the conservation and development of their places.

Action: SCT will develop a programme of lectures for hire, on current themes in the civic heritage sector. These lectures will be available annually from 2019, and amenity groups will be able to book the lecturers to deliver their talks to them locally through SCT.

3.7 Challenges for the Scottish Civic Trust

There was considerable confusion as to the role of SCT. Amenity Groups were all aware of our campaigning work on national planning issues and on Doors Open Day, but had much less knowledge of other activities. There is much legacy good will within the groups towards the organisation however, and a strong sense that if SCT was to take a more pro-active position in supporting and promoting amenity groups, it would be very well received.

Action: SCT will better publicise its activities, and will communicate more effectively through the creation of an updated website, and a more active plan of social media interaction.

Action: SCT will commit to the actions listed above, so that it can better support its members and the broader sector. These actions will feed into the three strands of activity, as shown in the attached Activity Strands diagram.

4 Conclusion

The process of consulting with member amenity groups has been extremely interesting for SCT, in giving us an unvarnished sense of what the problems are for our groups, and for us as an organisation. We have been given a clear remit on what our activities should be and where we need

to focus our resources. Our consultation makes us confident that our new strands of activity accurately match contemporary concerns, allowing us to best serve and lead the civic heritage sector.