Item: 4

Orkney Towns Board 7 February 2025

Engagement Report

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1. Overview

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a brief overview of the meetings and engagement undertaken by the Orkney Town's Board during 2024. It includes a summary of OTB meetings, a record of consultation events, and a summary of the ideas generated through these consultations.

2. Recommendations

2.1. It is recommended that Orkney Towns Board:

i. Note the engagement work which has been undertaken to date, and the summary of the outcome of this work detailed in Appendix 1.

3. Background

3.1. The inclusion of an Orkney based programme as part of the UK Government's Levelling Up Towns Board Programme was announced by the UK Government in spring 2024. At that time, the UK Government had established a very challenging and urgent timeframe for progressing the engagement phase which was originally required to conclude by November 2024. The expectation at that time was that project funding would begin shortly thereafter.

3.2. Following the General Election in July 2024, the UK Government began a review of the Towns Board Programme. This review is not yet complete, with revised Guidance and timelines expected to be issued during the first quarter of 2025. In advance of publication of this revised guidance, the Government has confirmed that Towns Boards across the UK should plan for a longer period for development of a project programme, to run throughout financial year 2025/26; with the first year of project delivery funding to be expected from April 2026.

3.3. As noted above, the Towns Board began a rapid period of development work over the summer 2024. This included several Board meetings/workshop sessions and public engagement events.

3.4. Board meetings/workshops included:

i. 10 June 2024 – formal meeting of the Board which covered key OIC decisions, potential funding opportunities, deliverables and timescales, setting the groundwork for the work of the Board.
ii. 25 June 2024 – informal workshop which included discussion on the Vision and the range of community engagement activities which the Board were keen to progress over the summer.
iii. July 2024 – informal workshop which further developed the public engagement methodology and target outcomes.
iv. 11 July 2024 – formal meeting of the Board which included discussion on emerging Vision, draft proposals for public engagement and approval of Terms of Reference.
v. 16 July 2024 – informal workshop which focused on more detailed planning for the community engagement events. This included arranging workshop sessions, establishing communication channels and social media platforms, and developing strategies for indirect project idea collection.
vi. 10 August 2024 – Board member engagement as part of County Show stand.
vii. 13 August 2024 – informal Board meeting to discuss outputs from County Show and discuss next steps for public engagement work.
viii. 3 September 2024 – informal Board meeting which included updates from the Chair to Board Members regarding progress with engagement activities.
ix. 8 October 2024 – informal Board meeting to discuss engagement outputs and revised guidance from UK Government.
x. 4 November 20024 – informal Board meeting to discuss next steps following new UK Government Budget.
xi. 12 November 2024 – informal Board meeting which focused on factual/ orientation briefing on engagement outcomes and emerging themes, in advance of workshop on 27 November 2024.
xii. 27 November 2024 – Board workshop to develop Vision Statement and draft Framework/sub-themes emerging from engagement process.
xiii. 12 December 2024 – Board Chair attendance at Scotland's Towns Partnership' Towns Board Chairs. Meeting.
xiv. 16 January 2024 – Board Chair attendance at Scotland's Towns Partnership' Towns Board Chairs' meeting (these will continue on a cycle every 5 weeks).

3.5. In addition to this series of meetings of the Board, there have been additional regular meetings (up to 2-3 meetings a month) of the Board Chair and two other Board members with the Council's Economic Development team members to oversee progress with project management and delivery.

3.6. The primary public consultation events which were organised to gather project ideas for the Board included the following:

i. July 2024 – present – Open project/idea registration via webpage/QR code.
ii. 2 July 2024 – Board Chair presentation to Orkney Business Forum Core Group.
iii. 18 July 2024 - King Street Halls – three stage presentation/engagement event.
iv. 10 August 2024 - County Show – open forum.
v. 26 September 2024 – presentation and engagement with Orkney Business Forum.
vi. 1 October 2024 – Online workshop engagement event (this included good attendance from Isles based people).
vii. 17 October – Board Chair meeting with HIE and Orkney Local Area Action Group representatives.

3.7. As a result of these engagement events approximately 800 project ideas and issues have been recorded. Each submission has been documented in a project database. This project database has provided a steer on the kind of issues and project ideas which consultees believe the Towns Board might consider. This represents an invaluable resource to support the Board in developing the 10-year vision and the 3-year investment plan.

3.8. The Council's Economic Development team has undertaken work to review the database to draw up key themes to present a Programme Framework which can be used to Structure the ongoing work of the Board. The Programme Framework is addressed in a separate report to the Towns Board.

3.9. Appendix 1 to this report provides a summary of the engagement database, linked to the Programme Framework and Sub-themes; and provides an overview of the key commentary for each sub-theme. This information will be used to support the development of the 10-year vision and 3-year plan.

4. Appendix

Appendix 1 – Summary of Engagement database.

Appendix 1
Data summaries based on Consultation Priority themes
Consultation Priority theme - P1a
45 entries:

Young people	
General Commentary	There is regular opinion that there is insufficient availability of facilities for young people across Orkney, noting the limitations of the current Youth Café in Kirkwall. Additionally, there are common concerns about the poor condition or lack of playparks throughout Orkney. There are comments that limited transport options further restrict access to existing facilities. For individuals aged 18 and older, there are views that there are limited options which can lead to risk of alcohol related incidents.
Specific ideas	Picky Hub or wider Youth Café offer (staff costs) Community /Island Playparks
Potential project Leads identified?	Community Groups seeking Playpark investment noted Youth Café and or Picky (proposed)
General notes	Transport, new infrastructure requiring maintenance, Education, employment training, staff resource. Positive feedback from young people
Crossovers	P2a – Reducing anti-social behaviour leads to security and safety. P1b/P2c – Things to do for younger people. P3a – Improving accessibility for younger people to partake in events and clubs

NOTE: the information presented in this table is drawn directly from the raw data/public comments recorded in the engagement database. The tables are to provide an illustration of the matters raised by the public in the engagement exercise. None of the ideas have been subject to detailed appraisal. Any mention of "project leads" has come from the public comment only and has not necessarily been proposed or discussed with the groups themselves at this time.

Appendix 1
Data summaries based on Consultation Priority themes
Consultation Priority theme - P1b
49 entries

Sport & recreation	
General Commentary	A variety of general fitness and sport suggestions were proposed, including more specific facility ideas. Gymnastics and an indoor synthetic 60:40 3G pitch were mentioned multiple times. Some project ideas also focus on upgrading existing sports facilities, such as the skatepark and football pitches. Other sports highlighted include tennis courts, gym equipment, and water sports.
Specific ideas	Indoor gymnastics hall Indoor synthetic pitch (60:40 3G surface) Kirkwall Skatepark upgrade / new Stromness Skatepark Outdoor swimming pool Island games marquees
Potential project Leads identified?	Football Clubs Gymnastics Club Other sports clubs / associations
General notes	New infrastructure maintenance/operational cost requirements, community engagement and usage, long-term sustainability. Increased uptake in sports/activities. Competitiveness of Orkney athletes in sports events
Crossovers	P1a- Things to do for young people. P2b – regeneration opportunities.

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Appendix 1
Data summaries based on Consultation Priority themes
Consultation Priority theme - P1c
73 entries:

Entertainment & culture	
General Commentary	Project ideas consistently focus on creating opportunities to showcase Orkney's diverse creative talent, including art exhibitions, music performances, and theatrical events. Regeneration projects are also suggested, with some local clubs seeking to repurpose unused spaces, alongside ideas to refurbish the former Phoenix Cinema and Visitor Centre.
Specific ideas	Multifunctional music/performance hub, such as 'The Hairt' at the former Reel Kirkwall Street Art Festival – turning neglected areas into vibrant cultural spaces through street art installations, art museum, Indoor and outdoor live music venues for festivals and band performances.
Potential project Leads identified?	Kirkwall BID Community groups
General notes	Places for creative expression, opportunity for groups to meet and perform, appreciation of Orkney arts and culture, educating on local arts. Operational costs, community engagement, long-term sustainability, tourism and economic impact
Crossovers	P2c – creative developments. P1a – facilities for young people P2b – regeneration opportunities

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Appendix 1
Data summaries based on Consultation Priority themes
Consultation Priority theme - P2a
125 entries:

Secure, safe, welcoming public spaces	
General Commentary	Project ideas focus on revitalising towns and enhancing existing facilities, including improvements to roads and green spaces. Some suggestions highlight the need for CCTV around the travel centre. Common themes also include the development of new footpaths, street furniture, and outdoor spaces.
Specific ideas	Street furniture (i.e, benches) CCTV, Drug dog presence Improved footpaths/walkways, such as in Stromness where paths can be slippy in winter. Public toilets around Ring of Brodgar
Potential project Leads identified?	Development Trusts Police Scotland
General notes	Maintenance costs, security staff costs (i.e, who checks CCTV), identifying key areas for accessibility improvements. Improved health and wellbeing index.
Crossovers	P1a – Improved measures to prevent anti-social behaviour P3a - improved connectivity and safer, more accessible pathways/routes P2c - creating more vibrant spaces and improvements

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Appendix 1
Data summaries based on Consultation Priority themes
Consultation Priority theme - P2b
135 entries:

Heritage, conservation and regeneration	
General Commentary	A number of ideas relative to areas have potential for refurbishment, either for new uses or to restore their former purpose. There are several suggestions regarding the redevelopment of an abattoir, as well as improvements to piers and harbours across the Isles.
Specific ideas	Regenerating a building in Kirkwall and Stromness to replicate The Reel. Stromness Marina expansion Further developments to existing projects (i.e, Trebb, HMS Tern, St Nicholas Kirk)
Potential project Leads identified?	Development Trusts Harbours Community Organisations Pier Arts Centre
General notes	Boost in tourism, enhanced attraction of the Isles, and revitalised town centres with a focus on sustainability. Potential feasibility challenges, extended timescales, and the possibility of larger-scale projects
Crossovers	P3d – Potential for greater tourist attractions P1a – Places/facilities for young people P3c – opportunity for wellbeing hubs, training centres, etc P3b – Regenerating buildings to become more energy efficient

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Appendix 1
Data summaries based on Consultation Priority themes
Consultation Priority theme - P2c
63 entries:

Retail and creative working spaces	
General Commentary	Ideas here focus on creating markets, enterprise zones, and centres where community groups can meet, host events, and small businesses can showcase their products. Other suggestions include spaces for work and meetings, as well as improvements to shop fronts through murals and other forms of art.
Specific ideas	Garden square mural development Community hub centre with offices, consultation spaces, hotdesking. Enterprise zone to include charity shops and rental units. A market area with rental spaces during tourist seasons. Craft Hubs on Isles
Potential project Leads identified?	Orkney BID?
General notes	Relates to regeneration efforts, increasing Orkney's vibrancy while supporting local enterprises and communities. It has positive implications for tourism by diversifying offerings and attracting a broader range of visitors. Improved town centre viability.
Crossovers	P1c – opportunities for creative groups to host events P2b – potential to repurpose buildings into said projects P3d – ability to create vibrant towns to attract tourism

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Appendix 1
Data summaries based on Consultation Priority themes
Consultation Priority theme - P3a
175 entries:

Connectivity and movement	
General Commentary	This sub-theme has generated the most ideas, all focused on improving connections—whether through cycle paths, walkways, bus routes, roads, or other means. It also includes ideas for enhancing digital connectivity, particularly improved broadband in the Isles.
Specific ideas	Cycle path from Kirkwall to Finstown, to Stromness. EV charging areas to accommodate EV drivers. Night busses. Improved paths around Scapa, Peedie Sea, and parks. E-bike availability Improve signage
Potential project Leads identified?	
General notes	Large-scale infrastructure developments, improved digital connectivity, and efforts to reduce the carbon footprint in certain areas. Promoting physical activity and encouraging a healthier lifestyle. Increased transportation options to connect communities.
Crossovers	P2a – creating safer roads and pathways, promoting walking/cycling P1b – greater access to sports and recreation clubs P3b – reduction in carbon footprint and vehicle reliance

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Appendix 1
Data summaries based on Consultation Priority themes
Consultation Priority theme - P3b

57 entries:

Circular economy and fuel poverty	
General Commentary	Ideas focus on reducing the carbon footprint, promoting self-sufficiency, expanding electric vehicle infrastructure, and improving waste management. These ideas align with Orkney's Sustainability Strategy and support initiatives to become more eco-friendly. They offer insights into reducing waste and exploring alternative food production methods.
Specific ideas	Community garden – polytunnel, composting unit and volunteer unit. EV infrastructure Vertical farm implementation - Raised beds for food growing - locally produced food market Greater recycling options/zones
Potential project Leads identified?	
General notes	Improved economic measures, improved fuel poverty statistics, facilities/programmes to enable circular activity/reduced use of natural resources, development of local infrastructure to enable creation of local produce e.g., food stuff
Crossovers	P2b – sustainable, energy efficient regeneration

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Appendix 1
Data summaries based on Consultation Priority themes
Consultation Priority theme – P3c
59 entries:

Specialist needs, employment and skills	
General Commentary	General ideas focus on improving accessibility for those with additional needs and promoting employability and skills development by reducing barriers. Suggestions include the establishment of learning centres, accessible healthcare facilities, and childcare centres to better support the community.
Specific ideas	'Wraparound Childcare' – additional childcare supervision in Kirkwall around certain times. Respite care services/facilities, neuro diverse resource centre Wellbeing Officer Mental health facilities
Potential project Leads identified?	
General notes	Development of facilities/programmes which address additional support needs including mental health, inequality, and poverty reduction. Improving accessibility of Orkney infrastructure to suit range of abilities. Improved employment/employability statistics
Crossovers	

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Appendix 1
Data summaries based on Consultation Priority themes
Consultation Priority theme - P3d
36 entries:

Tourism within our Communities	
General Commentary	Project ideas relate to improving tourism facilities/accessibility. Opportunities to spread tourism across Orkney and making sure heritage sites are not overrun or damaged by unsustainable numbers of tourism, or provisions are in place to prevent damage to heritage sites.
Specific ideas	Tourist information boards across mainland and Islands Improve signage and make sure directions to places are clear Public toilets
Potential project Leads identified?	Development Trusts Tour companies
General notes	Development of facilities to support community and tourist access to Orkney. Access to sites and amenities. Improved interpretation/outdoor access infrastructure. Improved tourist satisfaction rates.
Crossovers	P3a – opportunity to improve the distribution of tourism through improved signage and route development. P2b – Potential for the development and regeneration of key tourism attractions. P2c – Creative vibrancy and revitalising town centres to attract more visitors.

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