

# Fort William Town Centre Meadhan Baile A' Ghearasdain



Action Plan  
for  
**FORT WILLIAM  
TOWN CENTRE**





## Executive Summary

The Fort William Town Centre Action Plan highlights a range of proposals and opportunities identified by the community and stakeholders that can deliver regeneration in Fort William town centre.

The purpose of the Action Plan is to provide a steer for the projects that could be delivered should funding opportunities arise, or where planning applications might help to make these a reality.

The Plan also takes account of the opportunities that will be presented through changes to public service provision in Fort William, including the relocation of the Police Station to Blar Mor and the future relocation of council offices to the southern end of the town centre. There is also a need to enhance activity and retail opportunities in the town centre for the benefit of both local community and the tourism industry.

The plan has been developed and tested by local stakeholders collaborating with public and private sector at a two-day public workshop that took place in May 2014. The Action Plan builds on local stakeholder inputs, knowledge and understanding of Fort William town centre, including concepts and ideas recorded. Although the current economic climate makes it more difficult to deliver projects, this document is important as it will put the town in a strong position to compete for any funding opportunities that do arise. Community groups will be required to lead the regeneration of their town centre by continuing to work closely with public sector partners and land owners.

This Action Plan identifies 14 proposals for the development of an active, vibrant town centre that increases footfall, attracts more visitors and expands the range of shops, services and jobs available to local communities. These proposals have been categorised into four key themes:

1. Improve Town Centre environment and gateways.
2. Improve movement networks between the Town Centre and surroundings.
3. Develop new uses for redundant space and buildings.
4. Maximise the potential of the waterfront.

This Action Plan has been configured to reflect these themes and proposals. It does not set out a timetable for delivery because it is anticipated that individual projects will be brought forward or amended as funding becomes available. Proposals are not prioritised but wherever possible the plan highlights relevant issues that could impact on timing, delivery and/or funding of individual projects.

Successful delivery of Town Centre proposals is likely to involve collaborative action on the part of a wide range of stakeholders. This document draws attention to a need for effective partnership-working and signposts potential sources of funding and support.

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# 1. Background and context

## Purpose

The Fort William Town Centre Action Plan highlights a range of proposals and opportunities identified by the community and stakeholders that can deliver regeneration in Fort William town centre.

The Plan takes account of the opportunities that will be presented through changes to public service provision in Fort William, for example the relocation of the Police Station and the potential redevelopment opportunities for the site. There is also a need to maximise the use and attractiveness of the waterfront, strengthening the linkages and to improve movement between the waterfront and the High Street.

The purpose of the Action Plan is to provide guidance on future priorities for the town centre taking account of:

- Issues, concerns and aspirations of local stakeholders;
- Existing or emerging proposals and projects, in particular proposals for adaptive re-use of redundant buildings, and
- A need to align, co-ordinate and prioritise a diverse range of town centre initiatives.

The plan has been developed and tested by local stakeholders collaborating with public and private sector at a two-day public workshop that took place on the 15-16 May 2014. Participants included representatives from community groups, Lochaber High school pupils, businesses, voluntary organisations and agencies. The Action Plan builds on local stakeholders' input, knowledge and understanding of Fort William town centre, including concepts and ideas recorded.

Although the current economic climate makes it more difficult to deliver projects such as these, this document is important in placing the town in a strong position to compete for any available funding opportunities that arise. Community groups will need to lead the regeneration of their town centre by continuing to work closely with public sector partners and land owners.

The Action Plan has particular relevance in view of provisions within the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill introduced to the Scottish Parliament in June 2014. The aims of the Bill include broadening community control of land and buildings by extending "right-to-buy" to urban communities and enabling community organisations to take control of buildings or land. More information on the relevance of this legislation to the delivery of the Action Plan is presented in Section 3.

## Structure of this document

Section 1 of this document describes the purpose and context for developing the Fort William Town Centre Action Plan. Section 2 presents the Action Plan configured to reflect the themes and proposals put forward at through public consultation. Section 3 focusses on delivery, highlighting issues and funding sources that enable successful outcomes.

## Action Plan Process

The Fort William Town Centre Action Plan is part of the Scottish Government's programme to facilitate town centre regeneration, which includes a commitment to assess the strengths, weaknesses and resilience of town centres and develop proactive planning policies that enable appropriate action.

The Action Plan was co-funded by the Scottish Government's 2014 – 15 Town Centre Charrette Programme and The Highland Council. Fort William was one of three Highland towns selected for this programme because of its vital role in providing essential services and facilities that support a wide catchment area of rural communities and its reliance on tourism to sustain the local economy and jobs. Similar Action Plans have been prepared for Nairn and Tain. All three plans were prepared by CH2MHILL with input from the Council's Development and Infrastructure Service.

The Action Plan builds on local stakeholder inputs, knowledge and understanding of Fort William town centre, including ideas and proposals recorded at a two-day public workshop that took place at the Alexandra Hotel, The Parade, Fort William in May 2014.

The purpose of this workshop was to gather local people's views on developing an active, vibrant town centre that increases footfall, attracts more visitors and expands the range of shops, services and jobs available to local communities. Attendees were asked for their views on a wide range of issues including: environmental improvements; use of buildings, streets and open spaces; methods of travel to, from and around the town centre; shops, services and facilities in the town centre; and the type of jobs on offer.

Workshop participants scoped a wide range of opportunities for town centre renewal and diversification aimed at ensuring Fort William could maintain its relevance for local people, businesses and visitors. The event included the involvement of a number of school pupils from Lochaber High School who provided valuable input to the process. Online comments were received from a number of stakeholders who were unable to attend the workshop. Appendix A summarises the workshop process and outputs.

## Planning Policy

The Highland-wide Local Development Plan identifies Fort William's important role as serving the West Highland and Islands area fulfilling sub-regional functions for the wider area. The West Highland and Islands Local Plan (as continued in force) April 2012 (WHILP) supports Fort William as the heart of Lochaber where the bulk of growth will be focussed. The Plan identifies the need to upgrade the fabric of the town, provision of mixed-use gateways, heritage-based refurbishment and the re-use of vacated "brownfield" sites. One of the Plan objectives in relation to Fort William is to:

- strengthen the town centre and integrate a major waterfront development as part of a strategy for regeneration, traffic management and conservation (8.3).

The Plan clearly establishes that the Council will engage with partners in preparing a Fort William Town Centre Strategy to provide a detailed framework for ongoing regeneration and management (8.23).



## Property Market Review

The Town Centre Action Plan takes account of relevant policy issues along with the following review of property market forces affecting the town centre:

### Residential

The Highland Council has a target to provide 5,000 new homes across the Highlands by 2017, including at least 688 council houses. The Highland Council has partnered with local organisations to provide affordable housing. New housing projects delivered by the Highland Council in Fort William include 13 units at the former Angus Centre site (out of the town centre), and 15 units at the Old Glenlochy Distillery site just off North Road..

### Retail

Retail units in Fort William town centre are located along the length of the High Street and its immediate surroundings. The shopping area accommodates a variety of independent and national retailers, including a range of shops covering convenience retail, tourism, outdoor activity, clothing, craft, flowers, banking and restaurants/bars.

Fort William is the largest town in the West Highlands, it is the commercial centre of Lochaber sitting within a 1 hour drive-time catchment of around 20,000 people. Additionally, the Highlands attracted 2.26 million visitors in 2013 (Visit Scotland). With a total annual expenditure of £509 million, Fort William is a key destination within the Highlands for tourists visiting the region.

Fort William's retail market appears to be operating smoothly with the High Street recovering relatively quick from shop closures. According to local sources, 20% of the 85 shops on High Street are lying empty, following shop closures such as Blockbuster (2013), Clarks (2011) Victoria Wine (2009) and Extreme Photography (2012). However, there is little demand from national retailers and vacancies are tending to be filled by local businesses.

Supermarkets in Fort William include Tesco (High Street), Morrisons (An Aird Road), Lidl (Camanachd Crescent), Farmfoods (Lochyside Road), Co-operative (Caol) and Londis (Caol). Of these only Morrisons is a larger format superstore and the others are smaller metro or discount outlets. Tesco's site at Blatr Mhor will not be developed by the company and the future use of the site is uncertain at this point.

Morbaine have recently been granted permission for a second retail park on North Road. The site consists of 5 acres of brownfield land and has outline planning permission for around 55,000 sq.ft of non-food retail floorspace split into bulky goods and non-restrictive use. Tenants have already been secured for 2 units, Aldi (16,400 sq.ft) and Home Bargains (15,000 sq.ft); a further 2 units are available to let extending to 18,000 and 5,000 sq.ft.

Across the UK small to medium-sized towns such as Fort William are currently squeezed between prime city destinations, out-of-town retail parks and superstores, and migration of expenditure on-line. Against a background of weak consumer expenditure growth the retail sector continues to face a challenging outlook. Scottish Government data does however suggest expenditure increased by 2.4% over the 12 months to April 2014 following a protracted flat period.

## **Employment Property**

There are currently 4 offices available in Fort William totalling, two on the High Street and two in an out of town location.

There are twenty-three existing office units on the High Street of Fort William (Scottish Assessors). Seven of these offices are within Tweeddale House, a 1960's/70's style building with retail units on the ground floor and offices on the first and second floors including: Highland Council offices, NHS Highland Estates, and Lloyds TSB. There are two vacant units within this building. Lochaber House is a large office space also occupied by the Council. Other office units are occupied by the likes of architectural/interior design consultants, housing association, legal services, etc.

The site of the former Fort William Secondary School at the south end of the town centre has been confirmed as the future office for the entire Highland Council's presence in Fort William. This site has been selected over a move out of the Town Centre to the Blar Mhor site, which is good news for the town centre as it will retain its largest employer.

A new joint Fort William Police and Ambulance Station was officially opened in February 2014 at Blar Mor. This building replaces the Northern Constabulary area command building on the High Street, and the original Scottish Ambulance Service building in the Inverlochy area.

## **Tourism**

Lochaber is a major attractor of tourists drawn by the areas scenic and recreational qualities of the area and is rightly branded as the outdoor capital of the UK. Fort William functions as the key hub in the provision of services to the tourism industry.

Fort William has 18 hotels and c. 74 B&B's and Guest Houses catering for a large number of visitors. A recent addition to Fort William's leisure property scene in 2009 was a £7 million Travelodge, spread across two floors above existing retail development on the High Street.

## 2. Town Centre Action Plan

### Themes and proposals

The workshop and public consultation held in May 2014 produced a range of ideas, projects and concepts for renewing Fort William town centre. These reflect the vision and principles addressed by workshop attendees while considering issues that affect the vitality and viability of the town, in particular: accessibility, economy, community and environmental impacts (see Appendix A).

The public consultation identified fourteen tangible proposals that could, over time, deliver economic, environmental and social benefits for the town and wider area. These have been categorised into four key themes:

1. Improve town centre environment and gateways
2. Improve movement networks and between the town centre and surroundings
3. Develop new uses for redundant space and buildings
4. Maximise the potential of the waterfront

### Town Centre Action Plan

The Town Centre Action Plan has been configured to reflect the themes and proposals identified in the public consultation. It summarises both the rationale captured at the workshop and issues that arose from more detailed consideration of each proposal.

It is important to bear in mind that the plan is intended as a decision-making tool for investment and fund-raising rather than a precise blueprint for the future of Fort William town centre. The plan does not set out a timetable for delivery because it is anticipated that individual projects will be brought forward or amended as funding becomes available. Some proposals are readily achievable whilst others are more aspirational and long term. Some require further work to identify whether or not they are economically viable.

Proposals are not prioritised but wherever possible the plan highlights relevant issues that could impact on timing, delivery and/or funding of individual projects. It should be noted, however, that feedback from the public consultation identified the short term priority to be improving the appearance, viability and accessibility of the High Street, while other property projects were medium-to-long term aspirations. The record of short, medium and long term priorities put forward at the public consultation is presented in Appendix B.

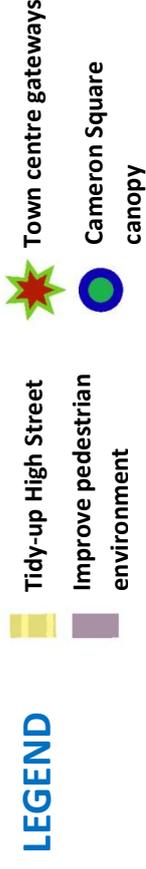
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## **Theme 1: Improve Town Centre environment and gateways**

The proposals below were put forward at the public consultation event to develop this plan. They take account of suggestions from the community for a general clean-up of the High Street to remedy issues such as poorly maintained pavements, unattractive shop fronts and inadequate lighting. They also focus on creating a more welcoming environment for visitors and enhancing the vitality and flexibility of outdoor space.

### **Proposals**

- 1. Tidy-up High Street and improve the public realm**
- 2. Make town centre gateways more welcoming and attractive**
- 3. Improve the pedestrian environment between the rail station and the High Street**
- 4. Install a canopy at Cameron Square to promote all-weather use**



## Theme 1: Improve Town Centre environment and gateways

### Proposals and rationale put forward at public workshop

#### 1. Tidy-up High Street and improve the public realm



The appearance and condition of High Street buildings influence people's enjoyment of the town centre. Repairing and reinstating traditional shop front features and placing greater emphasis on shop front presentation could encourage residents and visitors to spend more time there. Public space would be enhanced by better surfacing, landscaping and lighting, and improved maintenance of prominent rear elevations, such as the buildings along Middle Street.

#### Issues and options arising from more detailed consideration

- Motivating shop and business owners to undertake shop front/building improvements is a key priority because although the Council may require defects to be remedied, it can only enforce repairs where property is a danger to the public.

#### 2. Make town centre gateways more welcoming and attractive



Entrances to the town centre need to convey a better sense of arrival to the Outdoor Capital of the UK. Gateway features such as lighting, tree planting, landscape solutions and public art could be used to define and enhance eastern and western approaches. Trunk road roundabouts could provide a focal point for gateway features.

- There may be scope to develop imaginative ideas for gateway features in collaboration with companies that have an interest in the Outdoor Capital and may be willing to provide sponsorship
- This proposal is directly related to Proposal 10 to redevelop the Police Station site

### 3. Improve pedestrian and cycling environment between the station and High Street



Visitors arriving by train deserve a more welcoming environment which could be achieved by improving the station entrance and providing better walking and cycling links to the town centre. Routes to and from the station need to be safer, more legible and better signposted.

- The development of a new link road between the town centre and Coul would increase scope to improve walking and cycling links.

### 4. Install collapsible canopy at Cameron Square to enable all-weather use



A removable canopy would be an asset to the town centre because it would facilitate outdoor activity in all weathers. Its design and operation would have to take account of the needs of neighbouring retailers and businesses.

- Following recent installation of anchor points, an inflatable canopy was temporarily installed at the Square to accommodate Christmas activity. This was funded by Fort William Chamber of Commerce and attracted positive feedback.

## Theme 2: Improve movement networks between the town centre and surroundings

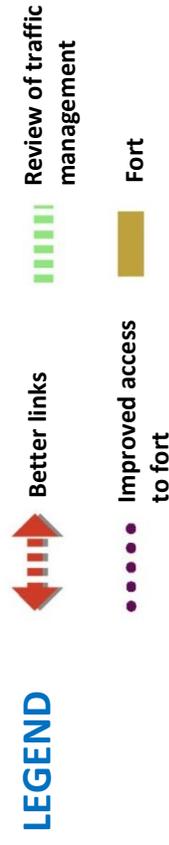
### Fort William Town Centre Action Plan

#### Theme 2: Improve movement networks between the town centre and surroundings

The proposals below were put forward at the public consultation event to develop this plan. They reflect the need to improve connections between the High Street and the surrounding area, in particular the strengthening of linkages to the waterfront and the Old Fort which are underutilised assets for Fort William. Improvements to signage and improvements to the quality of the pedestrian crossing will increase the attractiveness of the area to visitors and locals. Better implementation of traffic management measures had also been considered necessary to provide a more controlled environment for pedestrians and vehicles alike.

#### Proposals

5. Promote better walking and cycling links between the town centre and the waterfront
6. Create attractive pedestrian links to the fort
7. Review and improve traffic management on the High Street



## 4 Proposals and rationale put forward at public workshop

### 5. Promote better walking and cycling links between the town centre and the waterfront



The High Street is located less than 100m from the shores of Loch Linnhe but lacks good quality pedestrian and cycle links that provide safe, attractive access to the waterfront for all age groups and abilities.

### Issues and options arising from more detailed consideration

- Sustrans, the active travel charity, has a long term aspiration to develop a traffic-free path alongside the A82 between North Ballachulish and Fort William, replacing the current stretch of National Cycle Route 78 that runs along the west shore of Loch Linnhe.

### 6. Create attractive pedestrian links to the fort



The fort is cut off from its surroundings by a busy road and lacks safe, attractive walking links to nearby facilities, including the station and the High Street. Access should be improved as the fort is an important feature of the town's built and cultural heritage and deserves a higher profile.

- Sustrans' long term plans to increase opportunities for active travel along the A82 could contribute to better pedestrian links to the fort. (See Proposal 5)

### 7. Review and improve traffic management on the High Street



A review of traffic management rules is needed to ensure these are fit-for-purpose and operating effectively. Issues such as on-street car parking, traffic regulation enforcement and business/retailer servicing should be addressed to better balance the needs of all people using the High Street to access businesses, shops and homes.

- Since Police Scotland withdrew Traffic Warden Services across Scotland in February 2014, and in line with other Scottish Local Authorities, the Council is preparing to decriminalise certain parking offences including restrictions on "on-street" parking, waiting and loading. The Council will instead employ wardens to place penalty charges on vehicles parked in contravention of Traffic Regulation Orders. Unlike the previous system, these fines will be owed to the Council. It is expected these changes will be introduced to the Highlands in 2016.
- Actions programmed to improve traffic management and pedestrian access in the town centre include: enforcement of restrictions on delivery times to High Street businesses; removal of cycling prohibition on the High Street to enable access to all areas of town centre by bike; introduction of bollards at Middle Street to restrict parking on pavements; and provision of disabled parking bays at Monzie Square.

## Fort William Town Centre Action Plan

### Theme 3: Develop new uses for redundant space and buildings

The proposals below were put forward at the public consultation event to develop this plan.

Workshop participants recognised the benefit of testing these proposals within the context of a broader study of development potential across Fort William town centre. For example, in 2016 the Council will co-locate its main administrative offices, democratic services, Service Point and Registration Offices in the listed former Fort William Secondary School site on the western edge of the town centre.

#### Proposals

8. Convert Tweeddale House to residential use
9. Promote appropriate redevelopment of Fort William RC Primary School site
10. Ensure redevelopment of Police Station site enhances town centre's western gateway
11. Make better use of area surrounding MacRae's Lane

#### LEGEND

 Potential for adaptive re-use



8. Tweeddale House
9. Fort William RC Primary

10. Former Police Station
11. Area surrounding MacRae's Lane

## Theme 3: Develop new uses for redundant space and buildings

### Proposals and rationale put forward at public workshop

#### 8. Convert Tweeddale House to residential use



There may be an opportunity to convert part of this prominent High Street building to residential use following the recent the relocation of Council services to other town centre sites. This would diversify the range of housing type and tenure available in Fort William.

#### Issues and options arising from more detailed consideration

- One of a number of town centre commercial buildings that are currently vacant or partially vacant.
- Modern block in single private ownership with frontage to High Street - comprised of ground floor retail units and offices on upper floors, all currently rented or for rent. Ground floor in active use; upper floors now mostly vacant.
- Until recently the Council occupied part of the ground and first floors under a lease that runs to 2071.
- A recent preliminary review by the Council's Housing team indicated scope to convert the upper floors to 24 dwelling units, while maintaining retail use at street level.
- The Council recently purchased the former Whisky Centre, another redundant building at the west end of the High Street, with a view to developing 16 new flats on this site.

#### 9. Promote appropriate redevelopment of Fort William RC Primary School site



Proposed changes to Fort William's school provision are expected to free up this site for redevelopment in the near future. The site may expand to include Belford Hospital site in the longer term. Workshop participants favoured a flexible approach to identifying new uses although there was a preference for residential accommodation.

- The Council plans to replace three schools, including St. Mary's, with a new joint-campus school in Caol, due to open in August 2016.
- Future use of the site is likely to be influenced by review and programming of the changes to the NHS estate.

## Theme 3: Develop new uses for redundant space and buildings

### Proposals and rationale put forward at public workshop

### Issues and options arising from more detailed consideration

#### 10. Ensure redevelopment of Police Station site enhances town centre's western gateway



Redevelopment of the Police Station site presents an important opportunity to improve the town's western gateway. Workshop participants favoured a flexible approach to identifying new uses although there was a preference for residential development.

- Building mostly vacant following recent relocation of Police Scotland to their new facility at Blar Mor.
- Adjacent BT building also only partially used.
- This proposal is directly related to Proposal 2 to make town centre gateways more welcoming and attractive.

#### 11. Make better use of area surrounding MacRae's Lane



The backlands surrounding MacRae's Lane have considerable potential to provide *pop up space* and workshops that accommodate local arts/craft businesses. Better links are needed to make this area accessible and attractive, in particular pedestrian routes to the High Street.

- Making better use of this area could complement and reinforce High Street activity.
- Due to tight space and narrow access, careful consideration is needed of what can be achieved in this area. Issues relating to access and ownership also have to be resolved.

### **Theme 4: Maximise the potential of the waterfront**

The proposals below were put forward at the public consultation event to develop this plan. The waterfront area is seen as an asset to be promoted for a range of uses, and options have been put forward to develop the area and deliver social and economic benefits. These include investigation of the flexible and temporary use of the loch-side carriageways of the A82 to allow specific activities to take place at the promenade; delivery of a new pier and marina and delivering an attraction to the east end of the promenade.

#### **Proposals**

- 12. Create an attractive waterfront promenade**
- 13. Develop new west pier and marina**
- 14. Develop appropriate new cultural attraction at east end of promenade**

#### **LEGEND**

Attractive promenade



New pier and marina



New cultural attraction



## Theme 4: Maximise the potential of the waterfront

### Proposals and rationale put forward at public workshop

#### 12. Create an attractive waterfront promenade



The waterfront is one of Fort William's most significant assets but is currently cut off from the town centre by the A82 dual carriageway. Reducing carriageway width to develop an attractive waterfront promenade could deliver significant environmental, social and economic benefits. It would make sense to assess the impact of temporary road closure of two lanes before developing a permanent solution.

#### Issues and options arising from more detailed consideration

- Further discussions are needed with Transport Scotland to scope potential for temporary closure of lanes on the A82 to accommodate events. Initially closures would need to be undertaken on a trial basis to determine feasibility.
- Careful consideration required of implications for congestion and the need to prioritise efficient movement of traffic.
- Identification of appropriate trial event required.

#### 13. Develop new west pier and marina



A western pier and marina could have potential to accommodate cruise ship berthing as well as marina facilities for small pleasure craft. Fort William is well-placed to become a significant cruise and sailing destination due to Loch Linnhe's outstanding scenery and water depth, and current strong demand for marina facilities on the west coast.

- Previous work for larger scale development undertaken in 2009.
- Options exist for smaller scale enhancement of the waterfront area, including accommodation for marina facilities.

#### 14. Develop appropriate new cultural attraction at east end of promenade



Workshop participants proposed that the new promenade, pier and marina should be balanced by a cultural attraction at the east end of the waterfront, such as a facility celebrating Highland heritage.

- Significant improvements to pedestrian routes will be required to deliver an attraction at the east end of the promenade.

## 3. Implementation

### Partnership approach

Successful delivery of Town Centre proposals is likely to involve collaborative action on the part of a wide range of stakeholders, including local community groups, property owners, Council Services, Elected Members and Community Planning Partners such as HIE and SNH.

Fort William has a strong tradition of community spirit and an active voluntary sector that is already focussed on raising the profile of the town as a place to live, work, visit and operate a business.

Wherever possible, The Highland Council will align investment in Fort William town centre with proposals set out in this action plan. It is clear, however, that the Council's limited resources are not sufficient to deliver proposals single-handedly. The Council will encourage and support local stakeholders to work collaboratively on securing funding from external sources such as, for example, the Scottish Government, SSE, Highland LEADER 2014-2020, and the National Lottery.

It is likely that larger projects will require organisations and groups to work in partnership with each other to take ownership of individual projects, build relationships with local audiences, develop proposals and cost estimates, identify relevant funding sources and apply for and secure funding.

Collaborating with other Highland towns facing similar challenges may bring benefits and opportunities, including the potential to pool resources, share best practice and pursue large-scale funding packages.

In some instances it may be necessary or desirable to lever in private sector investment to secure public sector funding. Most private sector partners will prioritise an acceptable return on investment, whether in the form of capital receipt from site or property sales, or a steady rental income.

Both public sector grant funding and private sector investment are likely to require financial appraisal of project proposals to assess the potential to deliver acceptable outputs and/or return on investment. They are also likely to require clear evidence of community support, secure through public consultation.

### Potential sources of funding and support

Sources of local and national funding that could be of direct relevance to Fort William town centre projects are highlighted in Boxes A and B on the following pages.

## Box A: Sources of grant funding for community projects in the Highlands

### Highland LEADER (2014-2020) Programme

LEADER is a European Union Community Initiative to support economic and community development within rural areas. The last LEADER programme ran from 2007-2013 and provided funding of around £14 million to 371 projects in Highland.

Following recent public consultation Highland LEADER finalised a Draft Local Development Strategy and Business Plan for the new 2014-2020 LEADER Programme that will determine the kinds of projects this funding can support over the next six years. Highland LEADER is finalising a Local Development Strategy for the new programme that will be submitted for Scottish Government approval in the next few months. If approved the programme is expected to allocate funding according to four strategic themes:

1. Stronger and more resilient communities
2. A growing and diversified economy that promotes sustainability
3. Increased and sustained local services and activities
4. Enhanced cultural, natural and heritage assets.

Information on the new programme will be available on the LEADER website:

<http://www.highlandleader.com/>

### SSE Highland Sustainable Development Fund

SSE launched its Highland Sustainable Development Fund in November 2013 as part of a programme of support for strategic projects in regions where SSE is developing its renewable energy projects. To date the fund has awarded £1million to Highland projects that include: a new visitor centre, shop and bespoke retail units for start-up businesses; fitting out new affordable housing; community runrigs; a community broadband service; renewable energy projects; skills development; and a community buy-out.

<http://sse.com/beingresponsible/responsiblecommunitymember/sustainablefund/>

## Scotland's Towns Partnership

Scotland's Towns Partnership (STP) is a member organisation launched in 2012 to share good practice, campaign for and support initiatives that improve the economic performance of Scotland's towns and high streets. Appendix C lists a wide range of funding sources identified in STP's Town Funding Finder. Detailed information on these funding streams is available from the Council's Ward Manager.

STP membership is currently restricted to companies and organisations but preparations are underway to expand the partnership to include community groups working on town centre initiatives. Membership benefits include access to a regularly updated Town Funding Finder containing a comprehensive list of live grant funds. Information on community membership will shortly be available on STP's website: <http://www.scotlandstowns.org/>

## Box B: Sources of grant funding for community projects in Scotland

### Scottish Land Fund

The Scottish Land Fund supports rural communities to become more resilient and sustainable through the ownership and management of land and land assets, including buildings. The fund is open to organisations that are community-led, community-controlled, and defined by a geographical area, including settlements with a population of less than 10,000. The Scottish Land Fund can fund up to 95% of project costs including the purchase price of the land or land assets, professional and legal fees associated with the purchase, and some initial help with running costs. Organisations can apply for a grant of between £10,000 and £750,000.

<https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/global-content/programmes/scotland/scottish-land-fund>

### Investing in Communities: Growing Community Assets

Investing in Communities: Growing Community Assets is a Big Lottery programme designed to support communities to take more control and influence over their own future through ownership of assets. These are usually physical assets, such as land, buildings or equipment, but may also include other types of asset such as energy. Funding awards range from £10,000 to £1million. <https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/scotland>

### Awards for All Scotland

Awards For All Scotland is a Big Lottery programme offering grants ranging from £500 to £10,000 for projects that involve bringing local people together, helping people learn, improving local spaces and getting people more active. The award scheme is open to not-for-profit / voluntary or community groups, social enterprises, community councils, schools and statutory bodies.

<https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/global-content/programmes/scotland/awards-for-all-scotland>

### Heritage Lottery Fund

Since 1994 the Heritage Lottery Fund has been the largest dedicated funder of heritage projects in the UK supporting the full breadth of natural, cultural and built heritage.

HLF Scotland offers a wide range of options for organisations and community groups to secure funding for built heritage projects - from small scale Start-up Grants for the creation of a new organisation to look after heritage to Heritage Grants in excess of £100,000 to rescue a historic building. <http://www.hlf.org.uk/looking-funding>

## Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) is the Scottish Government's economic and community development agency for the north and west of Scotland, whose purpose is to generate sustainable economic growth across the Highlands and Islands. HIE aims to increase the role of communities in the ownership and sustainable management of land and assets for the benefit of the community. Across the Highlands and Islands, over 420,000 acres (170,000 ha.) of land are now owned and/or managed by local communities, ranging from large estates such as in

South Uist, to smaller assets including community owned shops, industrial units and lighthouses.

Land and other assets can be vital resources in the development of resilient rural communities. HIE can support community groups considering the acquisition and development of assets with advice and information, and potentially funding. This can offer communities the freedom to develop valuable local services, create income streams and provide environmental benefits for their areas.

HIE is interested in supporting the purchase of income-generating assets that will meet an identified need within the community. There should be a clear vision of what the asset will be used for and how it will make a difference to the community. It is also important to consider how the asset will be managed once it is in community ownership. Together with community consultation, demonstrating the viability of a project through a business plan is a critical step in the process.

Box C below sets out a typical sequence of events in the acquisition of a development asset by a community with support from HIE. The sequence may vary and some activities will happen concurrently. Local circumstances and the type of asset to be acquired will also have an influence on the process.

### **Box C: Typical steps in community acquisition of a development asset**

- Identify needs within the local area through community consultation
- Prioritise the needs identified by undertaking a needs analysis
- Look at different ways to address the needs through an options appraisal
- Investigate two or three of the most appropriate options in a feasibility study
- Compile a business plan to give details of how the preferred option will operate
- Obtain a valuation of the asset. The valuation, which should be undertaken by a valuer registered with the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), may highlight some issues which need to be investigated further. A valuation report expires after a certain period of time and this should be kept in mind when deciding when to instruct a valuation as funders/lenders will not accept out of date valuations.
- Remember that there will be legal fees associated with the purchase. This will include work to ensure the property has good title and also to manage the transfer of ownership.
- Ensure the organisation's governing document allows it to own property
- Raise the funds to enable the purchase. Funding packages can involve grants, borrowing and fundraising. It is important to liaise closely with your proposed funding sources as each will have different requirements, obligations and timescales. This can become quite complex and needs careful management. Commercial borrowing is an increasing component of community acquisitions and the repayments need to feature in the business plan.

## Fiscal incentives

The Highland Council maintains a watching brief on support and funding opportunities arising from the Scottish Government's response to the recent National Review of Town Centres. Potential initiatives include a roll-out of Town Centre Investment Zones, where discretionary rates relief could support local businesses, and the promotion of Fresh Start rates relief to bring vacant premises back into use.

## The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill

The Scottish Parliament's forthcoming legislation on community empowerment could have a significant impact on Scottish town centres because it will enable greater community control over land and buildings. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill was introduced to the Parliament in June 2014 and, on publication of the Action Plan, is in the first stage of becoming legislation.

The Bill defines community empowerment as '...a process where people work together to make change happen in their communities by having more power and influence over what matters to them.' It aims to broaden community right to buy land and buildings and make purchase easier including:

- Extending community right to buy to urban as well as rural communities, lifting the 10,000+ population exclusion so that all of Scotland is included;
- Enabling community groups to buy abandoned or neglected land and buildings, even if the owner does not want to sell, and subject to Ministerial approval;
- Streamlining the processes for purchase and clarifying aspects of the process including defining communities and group eligibility, ballot arrangements, extending the period for concluding sales, dealing with late applications and the valuation process.

The Bill recognises renewed interest in community growing, and re-defines allotments as land owned or leased by a local authority on a non-profit basis to grow vegetables, fruit, herbs or flowers. Councils must keep a waiting list for allotments and take reasonable steps to provide more allotments if the list becomes too long.

The Bill also provides for community organisations to request ownership, lease or management of publicly owned buildings or land, whether or not they are available for sale or deemed surplus to requirements by the owning body. The initiative is placed with communities and their requests must be granted unless there are reasonable grounds for refusal. Public bodies must also respond to information requests about the assets it holds. Communities have the right to appeal to Ministers where requests are refused; although for Councils the appeal route is through the Council's own appeals process. If an asset transfer is agreed, the public authority must make an offer to the community body within 6 months, unless the community body and public authority agree to an extension.

## Workshop process and outputs

On 15 and 16 May 2014, a charrette was held to develop an action plan for Fort William town centre. The charrette was a stakeholder engagement workshop that promoted a collaborative approach to considering the issues facing Fort William town centre. It focused on delivery and implementation.

The charrette for Fort William town centre ran at the Alexandra Hotel, The Parade in Fort William. It provided a process to build shared outcomes for regenerating the town centre. The approach promoted meaningful collaboration. By working together stakeholders developed solutions jointly and found common ground that allowed pragmatic and deliverable proposals to be developed.

The charrette provided a framework for developing a culture of collaboration, with stakeholders acting jointly to find solutions for the issues facing the Fort William town centre.

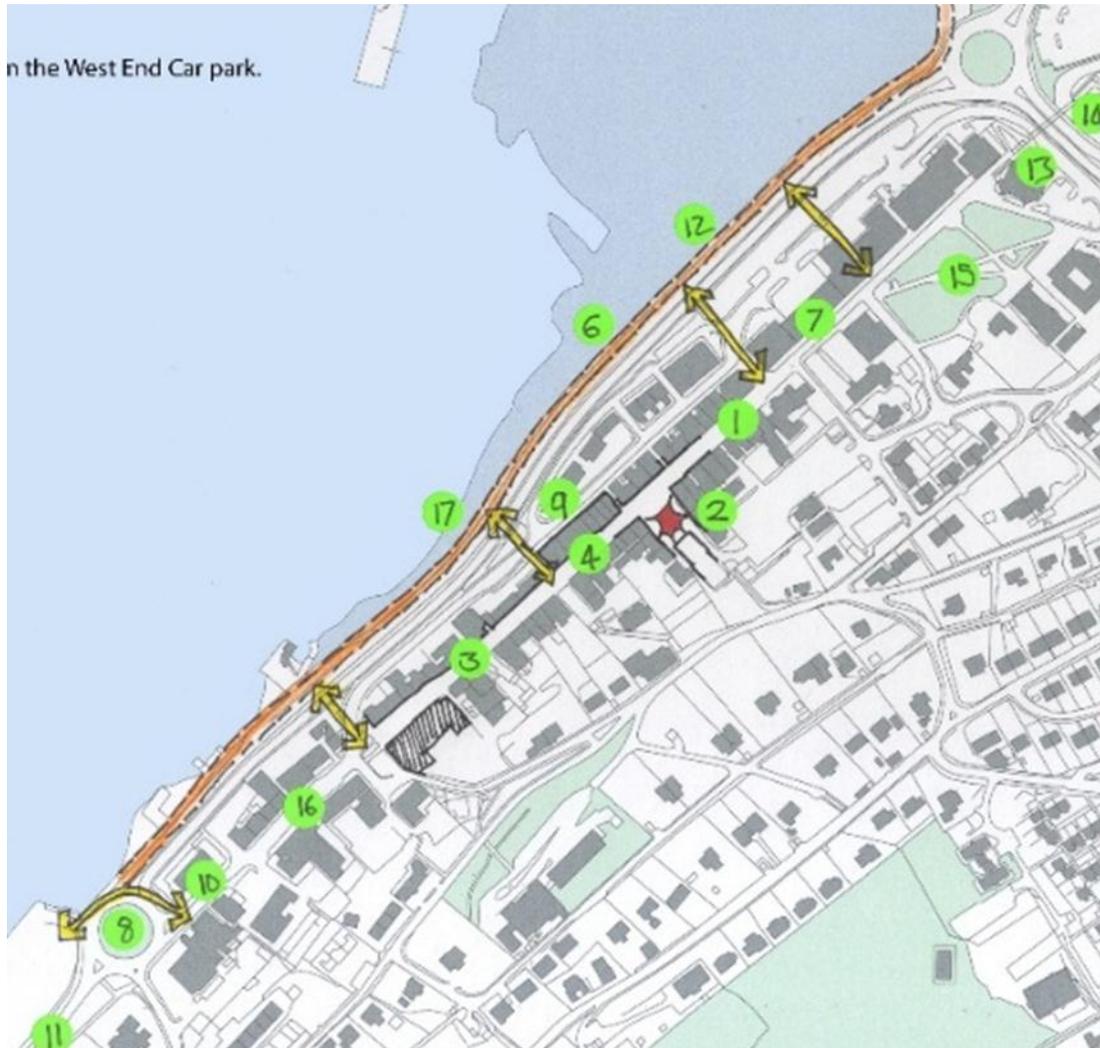
The charrette worked over two sessions where parallel events were held for stakeholders from:

- The Highland Council (THC).
- Local residents.
- Local groups.
- Elected members of THC.

**Session 1 - Option Development** – held on 30 April introduced and established the background to the charrette. Constraints and opportunities were examined. Stakeholders registered their expectations and requirements. The Town Centre Brief was briefly reviewed. Ideas and proposals were generated by the stakeholders. Principles and vision were developed. In developing proposals, stakeholders suggested that The Highland Council could lead on publishing information about what businesses and property owners can do for themselves, including potential sources of funding.



## Stakeholder Ideas and Proposals: Residents



**Vision** *'An accountable action plan led by the Council but developed, monitored, & evaluated by residents. Proposals should be targeted at the short, medium & long term with clear reporting for delivery.'*

### Proposals

Focused around a *green* High Street with improved linkages to an improved waterfront.

### Suggestions:

- Equitable accessibility & walkability
- Improve appearance of buildings (green High street)
- Improve links between the town centre & the water/ yacht club
- Shops for local people as well as visitors
- Review of traffic management
- Cover Cameron Square
- Quick wins as well as longer term actions

## Stakeholder Ideas and Proposals: Local Interest Groups



**Vision** *‘Let’s work with what we have & make it better’*

### Proposals

The least interventionist set of suggestions seeking to build on the existing assets of the town centre and make them better. Does promote promenade suggestion at waterfront

#### Suggestions:

- Make Fort William attractive:  
Attract people, shop tidying up, remove dilapidation, maintenance/management
- Working with what’s there :  
Heritage, Culture, Infrastructure
- Waterfront promenade.
- Supportive governance & leadership
- Reduce rates

## Stakeholder Ideas and Proposals: Local Business Interests



**Vision:** *'Outdoor capital ambition: Harnessing talent'*

### Proposals

Focused around reclaiming the waterfront, increasing footfall and providing cruise ship berthing.

### Suggestions:

- Benefits for business, increase foot fall
- Shops that serve local people
- Clear vision 'Fort William Hub'
- Improve town centre environment
- Quick wins = temporary closure for part of A82
- Build relationships between private & public sector
- Change default = Yes we can!

## Stakeholder Ideas and Proposals: High School Students



### Proposals

Focused on taking advantage of the waterfront and the town centre's setting, this proposal sought to connect the High Street with the waterfront and create an anchor in the form of a leisure pier.

### Suggestions:

- Improve shops on the High Street: Better shops, Shops for locals
- Connect water front with the High Street with a feature pedestrian bridge
- Create an additional pier with attractions such as restaurants & DJ
- Utilise & regenerate the Parade Square Landscape interventions such as water features
- Create a cinema
- Better linkages to supermarkets
- A youth centre where young people can gather

## Stakeholder Ideas and Proposals: Council Officials



### *'Fort William - at the heart of the Loch, the Glen & the Ben'*

#### Proposals

**Ambitious proposals focused around a new waterfront promenade, waterfront development at Middle Street and attractive linkages into High Street**

#### Suggestions:

- Ease the barrier effect of the A82, by reducing the dual carriageway to single carriageway
- Create a wide & attractive promenade along the water extending to the Fort
- Introduce tree planting along the High Street to add colour & soften appearance
- Encourage new mixed use developments along Middle St, orienting towards the water
- Improve accessibility between the High Street & the water, by creating clear and attractive linkage through side streets
- Find suitable uses for vacant (or soon to be vacant) buildings

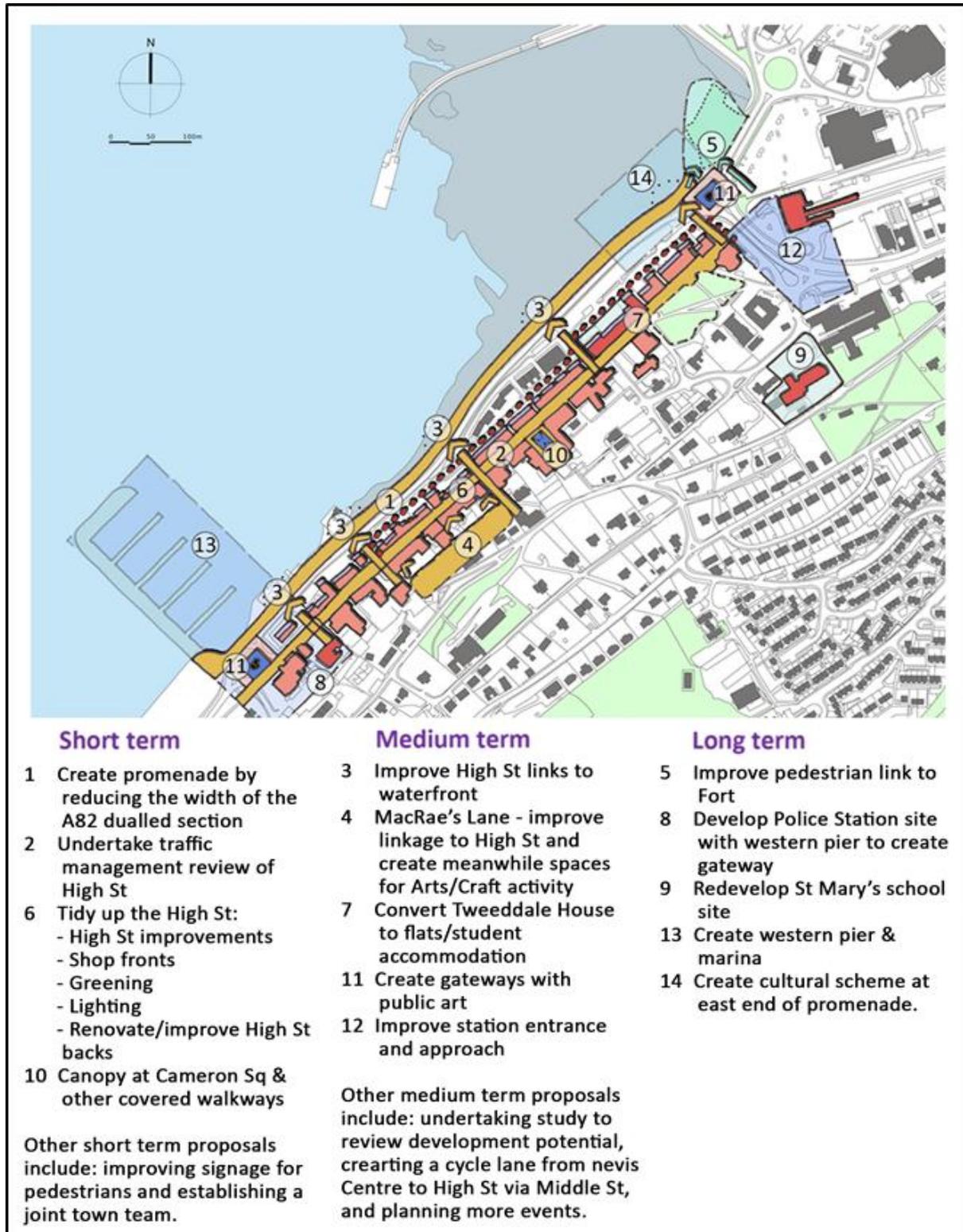
## Informing the Action Plan

A **second session** held on 1 May assessed the ideas and proposals conceived in Session 1. This applied an appraisal to consider issues relating to accessibility, economy, community and environment – a sustainability appraisal.

Working in new groups the stakeholders considered the suggestions made for improving the town centre. The ideas were discussed. This resulted in the most attractive ideas being brought forward. These schemes and proposals formed the basis for Fort William town centre's action plan.



## Priorities recorded at the workshop



## Extract from Scotland's Towns Partnership's Town Funding Finder

**NOTE:** Detailed information on these funding streams is available from the Council's Ward Manager

### Community Funding

The Polden-Puckham Charitable Foundation  
 The MacRobert Trust - Monetary Awards  
 Peoples Postcode Trust - Small Grants Programme  
 Peoples Postcode Trust - Dream Fund  
 SITA Trust - Core Fund  
 Comic Relief Local Communities Programme  
 Trusthouse Charitable Foundation  
 The Weir Charitable Trust  
 Gordon Fraser Charitable Trust  
 Hugh Fraser Foundation  
 The Active Communities Funding Programme  
 Crerar Hotels Trust  
 Carnegie Dunfermline Trust  
 Charles Hayward - Small Grants  
 The Sylvia Waddilove Foundation UK  
 First World War: then and now  
 Comic Relief Grants - UK Main Fund  
 Communities and Family Fund – Big Lottery Fund  
 Awards for All Scotland – Big Lottery Fund  
 Glens of Foudland Windfarm Community Trust  
 Investing in Communities: Growing Community Assets  
 Investing in Communities: Life Transitions  
 Bernard Sunley Charitable Foundation  
 Rayne Foundation  
 Co-operative Membership Community Fund  
 Turemark Trust Grant  
 ASDA Foundation  
 Foyle Foundation Small Grants Charitable Trust  
 Garfield Weston Foundation  
 The Robertson Trust  
 Henry Duncan Awards - Lloyds TSB Foundation  
 Esmee Fairbairn Foundation - Main Grant  
 Foundation Scotland - Express Grants  
 Bursary Funds - Esmée Fairbairn Foundation  
 SSE - Community Funds  
 The Barrack Charitable Trust  
 Steel Charitable Trust

### Regeneration

Building Repair Grant - Historic Scotland  
 Heritage Enterprise - Heritage Lottery Fund  
 Association for Industrial Archaeology Grants (UK)  
 Sharing Heritage - Heritage Lottery Fund  
 Vacant and Derelict Land Fund  
 Business Premises Renovation Allowance HMRC

### Environment

Parks for People - Heritage Lottery fund  
 CSV Local Nature Reserve Awards  
 CSV Action Earth Awards  
 Community Action Grant - Scottish Natural Heritage  
 Natural Projects Grant - Scottish Natural Heritage  
 AquaFund  
 Recycling Innovation Fund  
 Grow Wild Funding  
 Patagonia Grant

### Healthy Towns

Cycle Friendly and Sustainable Community Fund  
 HRUK Healthy Heart Grants  
 Sport Facilities Fund - Sport Scotland  
 Barclays Community Sports Awards  
 2014 Communities – Big Lottery Fund  
 Esmee Fairbairn Foundation - Food Strand Boost  
 Think Local - SRUC

### Culture & Art

Cashback for Creativity - Creative Scotland  
 Public Art R&D - Creative Scotland  
 Public Art Sited - Creative Scotland  
 Public Engagement - Creative Scotland  
 Foyle Foundation - Main Grants Scheme  
 Foyle Foundation - Small Grants Scheme  
 BBC Performing Arts Fund  
 Creative Scotland TTS. Digital Fund

/over

## Extract from Scotland's Towns Partnership's Town Funding Finder

(con'd)

<b>Employment &amp; Training</b>	<b>Education</b>
Students Summer Placement Scheme - Comunn Na Gaidhlig	Wolfson Foundation Secondary Education Programme
Flexible Training Opportunities - Skills Development Scotland	Ernest Cook Trust (UK) Small Grants Programme
Low Carbon Skills Fund	Ernest Cook Trust (UK) Large Grants Programme
Training and Recruitment Grant Programme	<b>Energy</b>
	The Naturesave Trust



## Getting Involved

**If you would like more information or to get involved in the production of future plans please contact us in one of the following ways:**

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### Post

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**For the most up to date news on the work of the Development Plans Team (and more) please follow our twitter account and 'Like' our Facebook page:**

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