

Nairn Community Town Centre Plan Plana Meadhan Baile Coimhearsnachd Inbhir Narann



September 2015

**NAIRN
TOWN CENTRE**





Executive Summary

The Nairn Community Town Centre Plan highlights a range of proposals and opportunities identified by local residents, businesses and community groups to increase footfall and deliver regeneration in Nairn town centre. The purpose of the 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 highlights that footfall could be increased by tidying up the High Street, reconfiguring open space and bringing redundant buildings, shops and upper floors back to active use. It reflects a keen interest in signposting and strengthening connections between the town centre and the wealth of assets and attractions that lie within easy walking and cycling distance including the river, beach and harbour. It also recognises opportunities that will arise from the introduction of the Nairn by-pass and associated de-trunking of King Street, which has significant potential to increase the vibrancy of the town centre.

This plan was first drafted and tested by local stakeholders collaborating with public and private sector representatives at a two-day public workshop that took place in May 2014. A Draft Nairn Town Centre Action Plan was prepared to reflect local stakeholder input, knowledge and understanding of the town centre, as recorded at the workshop. This draft was issued for public consultation over nine weeks between March and May 2015, which included a public exhibition and facilitated evening meeting. In response to consultation feedback the plan was revised and re-named the Nairn Community Town Centre Plan.

Although the current economic climate makes it difficult to deliver town centre improvements, this plan is important because it places Nairn in a strong position to compete for funding opportunities that arise. It also enables community groups to lead the regeneration of the town centre, working closely with public sector partners and land owners.

The 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 three key themes:

1. Improve High Street environment and expand activities
2. Make better use of area between King Street and the High Street
3. Improve walking and cycling links between the town centre and surroundings.

Proposals are not prioritised, nor does it set out a timetable for delivery because it is anticipated that individual projects will be brought forward or amended as funding becomes available. 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.

1. Background and Context	3
2. Nairn Community Town Centre Plan	8
• Improve High Street environment and expand activities	
• Make better use of area between King Street and the High Street	
• Improve walking and cycling links between the town centre and surroundings	
3. Implementation	20
Appendix A – Extract from Scotland’s Towns Partnership’s Town Funding Finder	26

1. Background and context

Purpose

The Nairn Community Town Centre Plan highlights a range of proposals and opportunities identified by the community and stakeholders that can deliver regeneration in Nairn town centre. It takes account of the opportunities that exist to improve the town centre and also considers opportunities that will be presented through changes in the future, such the delivery of a bypass, which will have a significant impact on King Street and its surroundings. It also highlights a need to signpost and strengthen connections to the wealth of assets and attractions that lie within easy walking and cycling distance of the town centre, including the river, fishertown, museum, rail station, links, golf course, harbour, beach and campsite. There is also a need to make the High Street more active, attractive and accessible for the benefit of businesses, residents and visitors.

The purpose of the Action Plan is to highlight improvements that could be delivered should funding opportunities arise or where planning applications might help to make these a reality, based on:

- 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.

This plan was developed and tested by local stakeholders collaborating with public and private sector representatives at a two-day public workshop that took place in May 2014. Participants included representatives from community groups, businesses, voluntary organisations and agencies. A Draft Nairn Town Centre Action Plan was prepared to reflect local stakeholder input, knowledge and understanding of the town centre, as recorded at the workshop. A nine week public consultation on the Draft Action Plan took place between March and May 2015, which included a public exhibition and evening workshop. In response to consultation feedback, the plan was re-named the Nairn Community Town Centre Plan.

Although the current economic climate makes it more difficult to deliver many of the plan's proposals, this document is important as it will put the town in a strong position to compete for funding opportunities that arise. It also enables community groups to lead the regeneration of the town centre, working closely with public sector partners and land owners.

This plan has particular relevance in view of provisions within the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill introduced to the Scottish Parliament in June 2014. The Bill aims to broaden 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 Plan delivery is presented in Section 3.

Structure of this document

Section 1 of this document describes the purpose and context for developing the Nairn Community Town Centre Plan. Section 2 presents town centre proposals put forward by the community, configured by theme. Section 3 focusses on delivery, highlighting issues and funding sources that enable successful outcomes.

Town Centre Plan Process

The Nairn Community Town Centre Plan is supported by 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 plan was co-funded by the Scottish Government's 2014 – 15 Town Centre Charrette Programme and The Highland Council. Nairn 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 plans were prepared for Tain and Fort William. All three plans were prepared by CH2MHILL with input from the Council's Development and Infrastructure Service.

The Town Centre Plan builds on local stakeholder inputs, knowledge and understanding of Nairn town centre, including ideas and proposals recorded at a two-day public workshop that took place at the Nairn Court House, High Street, Nairn on 30 April & 1 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 Nairn could maintain its relevance for local people, businesses and visitors. Online comments were received from a number of stakeholders who were unable to attend the workshop. A summary of the workshop process and outputs is available on the Council's website.

A Draft Action Plan was prepared to reflect shared priorities aimed at maximising footfall and delivering town centre regeneration, as recorded at the public workshop. Its purpose was to highlight improvements that could be delivered should funding opportunities arise or where planning applications might help to make these a reality. A consultation on this draft ran from 12 March to 15 May 2015. Members of the public were invited to provide written feedback by means of a form available online or in hard copy. On 24 March 2015 a consultation event took place at Nairn Court House in collaboration with Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), and Highlands and Islands Social Enterprise Zone (HISEZ). This consisted of an exhibition, public

drop-in session and facilitated evening meeting attended by members of the public, Elected Members, and representatives from Community Councils, Nairn Improvement Community Enterprise (NICE), Nairn Economic Initiative (NEI) and the Association of Nairn Businesses (ANB). A summary of issues raised and priorities identified through the consultation is available on the Council's website.

Planning Policy

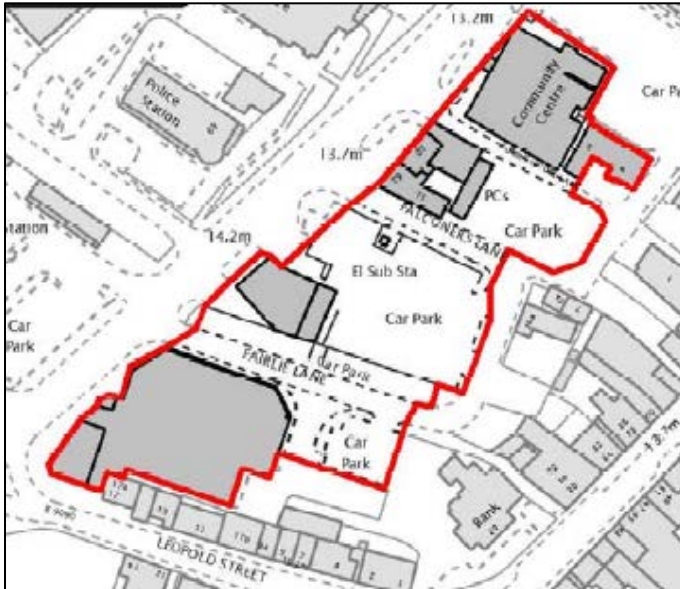


Figure 1: Nairn Town Centre Development Brief Area

Local Development Plan policy for Nairn is detailed in the Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan (IMFLDP), which sets out the Council's proposed policies and land allocations to guide development in the Inner Moray Firth area over the next 20 years. The development plan highlights a clear objective to strengthen Nairn's historic town centre with a specific focus on promoting uses that add to commercial vitality and viability, improve the physical appearance of the town centre and increase pedestrian links and footfall to the High Street. It confirms that the Council will not support development that is likely to have an adverse effect on

the town centre's vitality and viability. Developers whose proposals generate significant footfall must apply a sequential "town centre first" approach to selecting a development site. Where an out-of-town site is proposed the developer must justify why locations in or near Nairn town centre are not suitable.

The Nairn Town Centre Development Brief (2011) focuses on the regeneration of the area between King Street and the High Street, where open space and vacant or underutilised buildings detract from the physical appearance and vitality of the town. The purpose of the brief is to identify and promote opportunities and actions for the redevelopment of this important town centre gateway.

Extent of Town Centre

The extent of Nairn town centre put forward in this Plan is driven by outcomes and considerations addressed in the recent public consultation. The plan is focused around the main commercial and administrative activities on the High Street but also takes into account King Street (A96) to the west and the river to the east.



Figure 2: Nairn, early 19th century, showing the structure of places and spaces

Figure 3: Aerial view of Nairn Town Centre circa 2010

Property Market Review

The Town Centre Plan takes account of relevant policy issues along with the following review of property market forces affecting the town centre, carried out in May 2014:

Residential

The Highland Council has a target to provide 5,000 new homes across the Highlands by 2017, including at least 688 new council houses following a 15-year gap in council house-building. The Highland Council has partnered with local organisations to provide affordable housing. New housing projects delivered in Nairn include 24 units at Lochloy (with a mix of council and housing association rent and low cost ownership) and 16 affordable units at the former bus station within the town centre.

Land south of Lochloy Road has been subject to housing development over the past few years. This is set to continue with Springfield Homes having recently received planning permission for 178 homes. In addition, there is a proposals pending at Delnies for up to 300 homes.

Retail

Retail units in Nairn town centre are located along the High Street and its immediate surroundings, including Leopold Street and the Co-op supermarket on King Street. These streets accommodate a variety of national and independent retailers including bakeries, delicatessens, pharmacies, newsagents, clothes and home furnishing shops, banks, a florist, hardware shop and book shop. Supermarkets include Co-op stores on King Street and the High Street, Scotmid (Forres Road) and Sainsbury (Forres Road). Smaller Co-op outlets operate at Moss-side Road and Inverness Road (Filling Station).

Retailing in Nairn town centre has faced a challenge in recent years, mirroring experience in many small to medium-sized towns across Scotland. This has led to the closure of a number of High Street businesses, some linked to national closures that affect various locations such as Blockbuster, Victoria Wine and DE Shoes. Nairn's retail market appears to be operating smoothly, however, with the High Street recovering relatively quick from shop closures.

Although there is little demand from national retailers, vacancies tend to be filled by local businesses. In May 2014 two national retailers had a requirement to open a store in a location like Nairn, the Card Factory (Scotland) and Yorkshire Tile Company.

Across the UK, small to medium-sized towns 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. According to the Scottish Retail Consortium/ KPMG in December 2014, total retail sales were 1.8% lower than December 2013 and in 2013, internet sales accounted for 10% of total retail sales.

Employment Property

There is little demand for employment property in Nairn. This is mainly due to its close proximity to Inverness, which continues to expand steadily.

The majority of office space in Nairn is situated either within the town centre or at Balmakeith Business Park. In May 2014 there were approximately 22 office units on the High Street, including eight that were vacant and six units on King Street, of which five were vacant. Seven of the vacant office units were within Barron House, which was sold at auction in 2013 and has since been the subject of a full planning application and listed building consent to change the use class from offices to residential units.

Balmakeith Business Park has 13 units. There are 2 vacant units at Balmakeith Business Park, one of these is an office unit of 183 sqm.

Balmakeith Industrial Estate is Nairn's key industrial estate, comprising approximately 35 units containing a mix of commercial and industrial workshops/warehouses, stores and compounds. In May 2014 five units were vacant.

Tourism

Nairn has 10 hotels and 28 B&B's and Guest Houses. Since the economic downturn in 2008, activity in this sector appears to have slowed with more leisure property becoming available than deals being made.

2. Town Centre Plan

Themes and Proposals

The workshop and public consultation held in May 2014 produced a range of ideas, projects and concepts for renewing Nairn 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.

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 three key themes:

1. Improve High Street environment and expand activities
2. Make better use of area between King Street and the High Street
3. Improve walking and cycling links between the town centre and surroundings.

Action and Priorities

The Town Centre Plan has been configured to reflect the themes and proposals identified through public consultation. It summarises both the rationale captured at the May 2014 workshop and issues that arose from more detailed consideration of each proposal, including actions and priorities identified through public consultation on the draft plan in 2015.

This consultation highlighted that local groups and organisations share a strong commitment to making Nairn a “go to” place, serving the needs of residents and businesses while ensuring the town develops as a thriving tourist destination. The consultation also reinforced local commitment to partnership-working to make best use of volunteer effort and maximise fundraising capability. Shared priorities for partnership-working are recorded in Section 3: Implementation.

It is important to bear in mind that the Town Centre Plan is intended as a decision-making tool for investment and fund-raising, rather than a precise blueprint for the future of Nairn town centre. The plan does not rank proposals in order of priority, nor does it 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. The plan notes, however, that the following priorities were identified during the public consultation on the Draft Nairn TCAP:

- Tidy up the High Street
- Bring the former Social Work building back to active use
- Make car parking space more attractive
- Develop walking links, including improvements to wayfinding and paths.

Wherever possible it highlights relevant issues and action that could impact on timing, delivery and/or funding of individual projects.

Nairn Town Centre Action Plan





Theme 1: Improve High Street environment and expand activities

The proposals below were put forward at the public consultation event to develop this plan. They focus on increasing footfall on and to the High Street and enhancing vitality by bringing vacant property, particularly dwellings, into active use, and through development of a civic hub. They also take account of requests from workshop participants for a general clean-up of the High Street, including steps to remedy poorly maintained pavements and unattractive shop fronts.

Proposals

1. Tidy-up High Street and improve the public realm
2. Bring upper floors back to productive use
3. Improve appearance and condition of shop fronts
4. Develop a civic hub
5. Improve appearance and amenity of Castle Square

LEGEND

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
|  | Attractive public realm |  | Fully occupied upper floors |
|  | Shopfront enhancement |  | Castle Square improvements |



Theme 1: Improve High Street environment and expand activities

Proposals and rationale put forward at May 2014 public workshop

ISSUES AND ACTION

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



The High Street is a key destination for residents and visitors and its appearance and condition have a significant impact on people's enjoyment of the town centre. A more coordinated approach to tidying and cleaning up could encourage people to spend more time in the town centre. There is also scope to improve the quality of the public realm, including increased landscaping.

- This proposal was identified as a **priority** at the public consultation event on the Draft TCAP in March 2015. A collaborative approach is needed to ensure successful delivery. Suggestions included the creation of a "Town Team" to take projects forward in partnership with relevant stakeholders. The consultation also highlighted a need to deter seagulls and pigeons from landing and nesting in the town centre.
- The Council has commenced a £130K programme of improvements to street lighting at a number of town centre locations, including the High Street and some vennels. Floodlighting at the Court House also will also be renewed.
- This proposal is linked to interest in shop front improvements (Proposal 3).

2. Bring upper floors back to productive use



More needs to be done to bring upper floor properties on the High Street back to active commercial or residential use. Converting redundant space into dwellings is a viable and vital use of upper storeys and could expand the choice of housing type and tenure for Nairn residents.

- Nairn is one of three Highland locations identified by the Council's Housing team to pilot a Scottish Government scheme aimed at bringing empty properties back into affordable housing use. The Council is actively seeking property owners interested in either accessing funding to bring property up to a suitable affordable housing standard or assisting the Council (or a partner organisation) to purchase property and bring it into affordable housing use.
- The Association of Nairn Businesses (ANB) is also keen to explore options for bringing all redundant space on the High Street back to active use. Property owners are encouraged to contact the ANB for information and discussion.
- The identity of some High Street property owners is currently unknown so further investigation is needed to establish contact.

Theme 1: Improve High Street environment and expand activities

Proposals and rationale put forward at May 2014 public workshop

ISSUES AND ACTION

3. Improve appearance and condition of shop fronts



The High Street's traditional shop fronts make a significant contribution to the character and attractiveness of the town centre. Coordinating and improving their appearance, including repair and reinstatement of traditional features, could attract more shoppers and visitors.

- The Nairn Shopfront Improvement Grant Scheme was successfully re-launched in April 2015. The Council's Ward Manager is working in partnership with the Association of Nairn Businesses to administer a total grant pot of £57.5K. Grants cover 50% of maintenance and repair costs, up to a limit of £2,500. Information on this scheme is available on the Council's website.
- This grant scheme is the third and final phase of Nairn High Street Regeneration work. Further fund-raising is needed if the scheme is to continue.

4. Develop a civic hub



Workshop participants wished to see a civic hub in the town centre providing a range of community and visitor services, for example, the library, citizens' advice, tourist information, museum or other public services. Nairn Court House may have potential to accommodate some new services particularly if extended to the rear to create a new frontage to the space between King Street and the High Street.

- This proposal was recognised as challenging to deliver at the public consultation event on the Draft TCAP in March 2015. Concern was also expressed at the potential loss of jobs and Services to the town centre if Council staff had to be relocated.
- Nairn Court House is a B-Listed Building and prominent town centre landmark. It has been in continuous municipal use since early 19th century and is currently the administrative centre for official Council business in Nairn-shire, while also accommodating the local Service Point, meeting rooms and offices. New uses and services in the Court House would have to be compatible with the building's historic layout and alterations would have to respect the fabric and character of the Listed Building.
- Nairn Library currently occupies a former supermarket premises on the High Street including rear car parking, leased to the Council by a private landlord. The library is operated by High Life Highland and its High Street location generates one of the highest footfalls of all Highland libraries. The Council is in dialogue with the building owner about options to extend the current lease or purchase the property.
- Nairn Museum has no current plan to relocate from Viewfield House.
- This proposal could overlap with Proposals 6 and 7 to convert existing buildings, and Proposal 9 to establish a new town square.

Theme 1: Improve High Street environment and expand activities

Proposals and rationale put forward at May 2014 public workshop

ISSUES AND ACTION

5. Improve appearance and amenity of Castle Square



Castle Square is a valued, attractive town centre landmark. Its status as an important public open space should be maintained and enhanced. This could include, for example, use of vegetation to soften the space, or appropriate public art.

- The public consultation event on the Draft TCAP highlighted potential to enhance the square with public art (e.g. sculpture or school children's work) and/or floral displays. It was acknowledged, however, that of the action necessary to tidy up the High Street, this is the least urgent.
- The Council recently undertook minor improvements to the square, including the introduction of a public notice board.
- The Council is scoping options for the installation of external power points at the Square for use during public events and activities such as film screenings.
- The Nairn Economic Initiative is scoping options for softening the appearance of Castle Square, such as the introduction of self-watering planters.
- It may be appropriate to carry out similar enhancements at Academical Square (west end of the High Street).

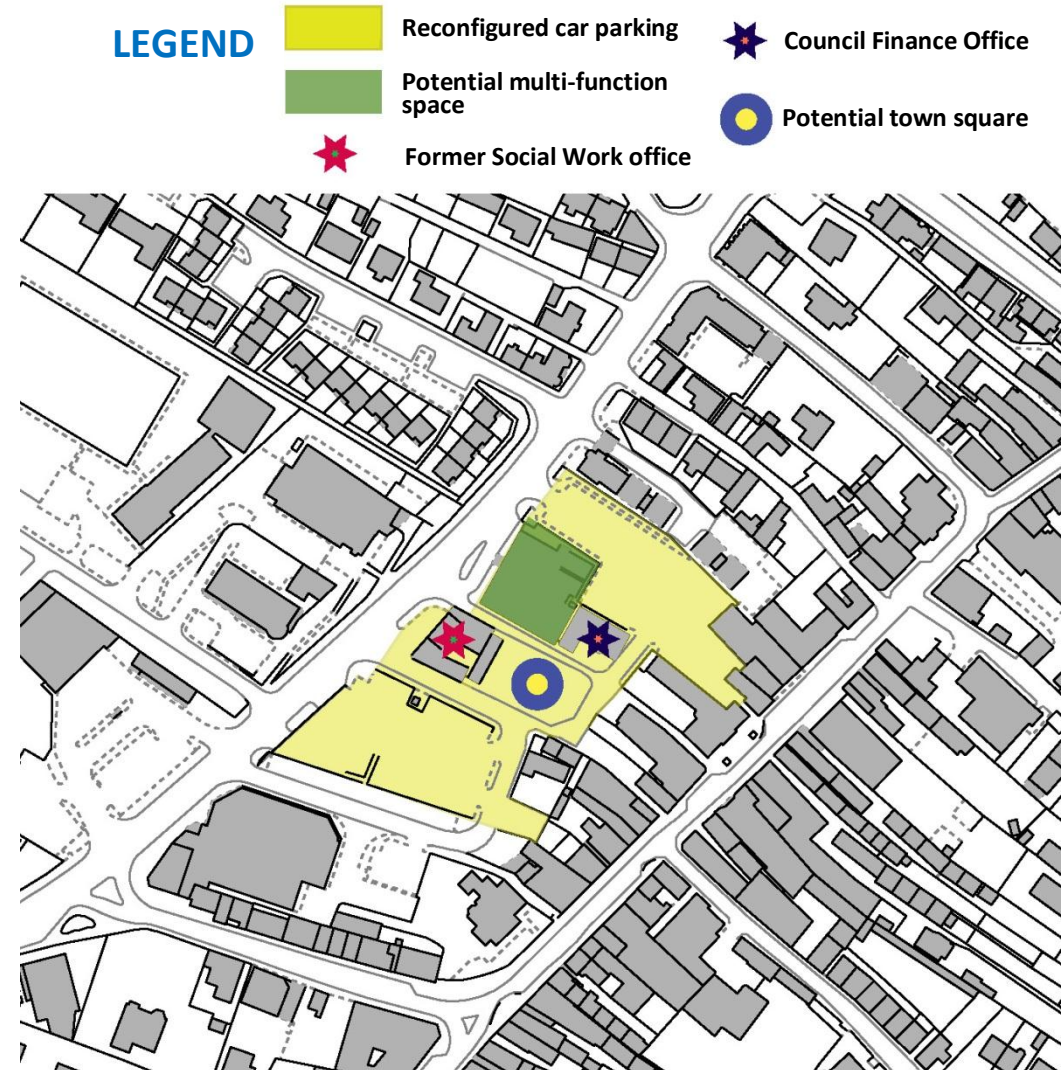
Nairn Town Centre Action Plan

Theme 2: Make better use of area between King Street and the High Street

The proposals below were put forward at the public consultation event to develop this plan. They reflect a need to improve the attractiveness of open space in the town centre and increase vitality by finding new uses for buildings and spaces. This area has significant potential to benefit from the introduction of the Nairn by-pass, when King Street will be “de-trunked” and streets and open space could be made more attractive for walking, cycling, sitting and other social activity.

Proposals

6. Establish a new Town Square
7. Provide new multi-function space
8. Reconfigure car-parking to achieve more efficient use of space
9. Bring the Council’s former social work building back into use
10. Convert the Council’s Finance Office to civic use



Theme 2: Make better use of area between King Street and the High Street

Proposals and rationale put forward at May 2014 public workshop

ISSUES AND ACTION

6. Establish a new Town Square



Nairn currently lacks a large, attractive outdoor space that can accommodate community activity in the town centre. A new town square could contribute to the viability of other proposals identified in the Action Plan. A flexible demountable canopy could maximise potential for all-weather use.

- A town square's vitality relies on it being well linked to popular walking routes, well-overlooked and surrounded by active ground floor uses.
- An appropriate location could be identified through the development of a masterplan for the area between the High Street and King Street, which should also set out proposals for buildings, land use, parking and movement, including improvements to east-west walking and cycling links (Proposal 11). The masterplan could be a key tool in identifying opportunities for this area following the de-trunking of the A96 (Proposal 14).
- A new town square has potential to overlap with the provision of a new multi-function space (10). It could also double-up as the new multi-function space (Proposal 7).

7. Provide a new multi-function space



An attractive new multi-functional outdoor space would be an asset for the town centre because it could accommodate a range of economic, social and cultural activities as well as public events. When not in use it could serve as a town centre car park.

- The Council is investigating a suitable location and design for a demountable canopy with a view to preparing cost estimates and identifying funding options.
- Feedback from the public consultation on the draft TCAP highlighted the importance of ensuring the canopy is designed to withstand bird nuisance.
- This proposal could impact on the re-configuration of town centre car parking (Proposal 8).

Theme 2: Make better use of area between King Street and the High Street

Proposals and rationale put forward at May 2014 public workshop

ISSUES AND ACTION

8. Reconfigure car-parking to achieve more efficient use of space



Car parks in this area need to be safer and more attractive with good pedestrian access, attractive landscaping, and improved surfacing, lighting and wayfinding. Consideration could also be given to coach parking.

- Making car parking space more attractive was identified as a **priority** at the public consultation event on the Draft TCAP in March 2015. Consultation feedback considered it to be essential to the vitality of the town centre, capable of setting parameters for other projects to follow. The layout should include dedicated parking for tourist buses. There may be scope for community involvement in tree-planting and maintenance of flower beds/landscaping. Community ownership of the car parks could generate income from, for example, a nominal parking charge.
- Car park rationalisation and/or environmental improvements need to take into account multiple ownership of parking spaces, including spaces dedicated to specific uses, properties and services. A mapping exercise to clarify ownership of open space, including parking, would be a useful starting point.
- The proposal complements Proposal 6 and would enhance the setting of surrounding buildings, increasing potential for adaptive re-use (Proposals 9 and 10). It could also address the need to improve east-west walking and cycling links to/from the High Street (Proposal 11).

9. Bring former THC social work site back into use



This former office building is vacant and its prominent site should be brought back to productive use, ideally serving a community/cultural purpose.

- Restoring these buildings to active use was identified as a **priority** at the public consultation event on the Draft TCAP in March 2015. Feedback highlighted their value as part of the traditional fabric of the town. There was keen interest in establishing an appropriate new use, with preference for community use/ownership or public use, e.g. tourist information. There was little support for demolition, despite concerns over the property's neglected appearance and setting.
- These Council-owned former offices and public toilets were recently advertised for sale and attracted some interest from private buyers.
- This building is suited to residential use, which would be particularly compatible with Proposal 14 to reinstate King Street's original town centre character following de-trunking of the A96.

Theme 2: Make better use of area between King Street and the High Street

Proposals and rationale put forward at May 2014 public workshop

ISSUES AND ACTION

10. Convert the Council's Finance Office to civic use



If adapted to serve a more active public use, this attractive building could support the establishment of a new town square. Any change of use, however, must ensure that Council employees based in this building are re-located within the town centre.

- This proposal was considered undeliverable in the short term at the public consultation event on the Draft TCAP in March 2015. There was particular concern for the potential loss of jobs to the town centre if Council staff had to be relocated.
- This Council-owned B-Listed former school was recently renovated to accommodate 19 Council employees as part of the Council's commitment to job dispersal that promotes economic activity in Highland towns. No Council funding is available to cover the cost of re-locating this team in Nairn town centre.
- New uses would have to be compatible with the building's appearance and layout, and respect the fabric and character of the Listed Building;
- This building has significant potential to become an attractive historic landmark if its setting can be improved, in particular the layout and character of surrounding car-parks (Proposal 6). The Council is currently investigating options for floodlighting the building to highlight its historic character and improve the safety/security of its surroundings.

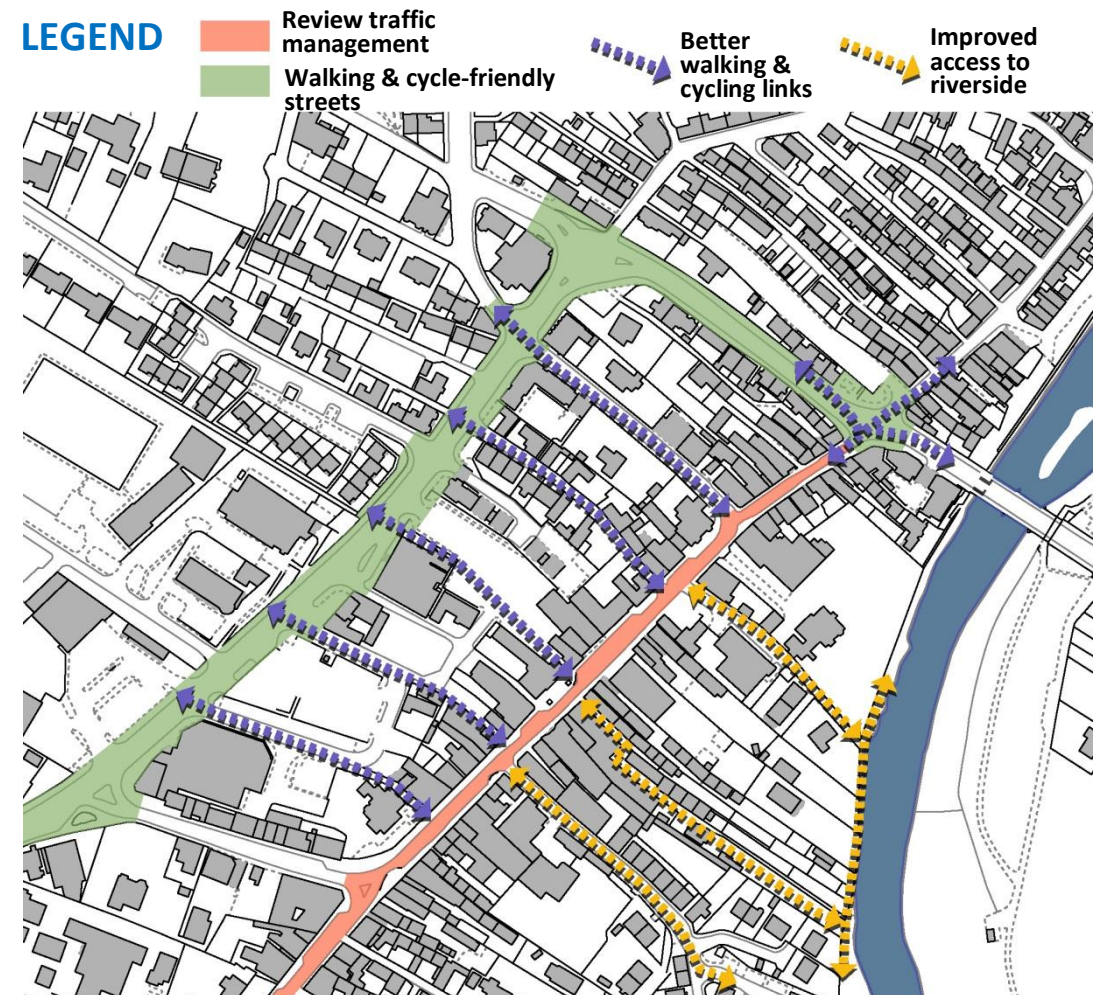
Nairn Town Centre Action Plan

Theme 3: Improve walking and cycling links between town centre and surroundings

The proposals below were put forward at the public consultation event to develop this plan. They reflect a keen interest in signposting and strengthening connections between the town centre and the wealth of assets and attractions that lie within easy walking and cycling distance of the High Street, including the river, fishertown, links, museum, rail station, golf course, harbour, beach and campsite. They are recognition that small improvements to existing walking and cycling infrastructure to extend footpaths and cycle lanes and increase cycle parking could have a big impact on increasing accessibility to and from the wider area.

Proposals

11. Improve walking and cycling links between the High Street and King Street
12. Promote better walking links between the town centre and the river
13. Review and improve traffic management on the High Street
14. Reinstate King Street (A96) as a vibrant town centre street that balances the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles



Theme 3: Improve walking and cycling links between the town centre and surroundings

Proposals and rationale put forward at May 2014 public workshop

ISSUES AND ACTION

11. Improve walking and cycling links to and from the High Street



Improving east-west connections is a key priority for the town centre, as is the need to strengthen walking and cycling links to the coast. The opportunity to create new links should be considered as and when development opportunities arise. Nairn has a rich tradition of pedestrian vennels connecting the High Street to adjacent surroundings. The appearance and condition of some vennels need to be improved, including better lighting, landscaping and where appropriate, tree-planting. Clean, well maintained vennels enhance the character of the town and provide excellent walking links.

- Feedback from the public consultation on the draft TCAP confirmed that vennels are a valued and attractive feature of the town's traditional character. Some are in private ownership, which means that maintenance is the responsibility of the owner.
- The Council has commenced a £130K programme of improvements to street lighting at a number of town centre locations, including some High Street vennels.
- The Nairn Active Travel Masterplan produced for the Council in 2010 suggests a range of potential improvements to promote active travel in the town centre, including a Core Network of active travel routes, pedestrian crossings, cycle parking, cycle lanes/routes and signage.
- This proposal is linked to the requirement to re-configure car parking (Proposal 8). It should also be a key priority in delivering Proposal 14 to reinstate King Street (A96) as a vibrant town centre street.

12. Promote better walking links between the town centre and the river



Although the river is just a few minutes' walk from the High Street, access from the town centre is very limited and some parts of the riverbank are unsuitable for walking. Paths need to be better signposted, more attractive and more accessible. Better links from the High Street, combined with an attractive riverside walk, would be a significant asset for the town centre.

- The proposal to develop walking links, including improvements to wayfinding and paths, was identified as a **priority** at the public consultation event on the Draft TCAP in March 2015. Consultation feedback confirmed that walking to and along the river is a significant priority but privately owned land and the A96 bridge interrupt continuity of riverside routes. Better signage could guide tourists from the town centre to destinations such as the harbour, beach, links, golf courses etc. There is also a need for better walking links between the town centre and the Moray Coast Trail. Community groups are keen to work with funders to expand green infrastructure.
- New paths affecting natural habitats (e.g. the river) are likely to require planning permission and mitigation measures. For more information on path construction and potential sources of grant funding, contact the Council's Access Officer, T: (01463) 255287.

Theme 3: Improve walking and cycling links between the town centre and surroundings

Proposals and rationale put forward at May 2014 public workshop

ISSUES AND ACTION

13. Review and improve traffic management on the High Street



A review of traffic management is needed to address on-street car parking, traffic regulation enforcement, business/retailer servicing and to better balance the needs of all people using the High Street to access businesses, shops and homes. Suggestions include enforcing loading and waiting restrictions and the introduction of shared surfaces at key locations, such as the Court House.

- Following Police Scotland's withdrawal of Traffic Warden Services in 2014, and in line with other Scottish Local Authorities, the Council will shortly employ Traffic Wardens in all Highland towns to place penalty charges on vehicles parked in contravention of Traffic Regulation Orders. These fines are expected to be in place by the end of 2016.
- The Council is proposing to introduce a 20mph speed limit in Nairn town centre and some adjacent residential streets. Initial formal consultation has been completed, including consultation with local Members, statutory consultees and relevant Community Councils. Public consultation will be undertaken in 2015 and the scheme will be implemented, as appropriate, thereafter.
- The Nairn Active Travel Masterplan produced for the Council in 2010 suggests potential improvements to poor traffic management on the High Street including increased space for pedestrians, cycle parking and access restrictions.

14. Reinstate King Street (A96) as a vibrant town centre street that balances the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles



Looking ahead, traffic levels on King Street will reduce significantly when the Nairn by pass is in place. King Street could be reinstated as a lively town centre street providing a safe, attractive route for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles. Improvements should include traffic calming, tree planting and landscaping as well as easy crossing points to the museum, community centre etc.

- Feedback from the public consultation on the draft TCAP highlighted a keen interest in improved landscaping on King Street including, in the short term, the introduction of trees. It was recognised, however, that the wider proposal is a long-term priority, linked to the uncertain timescale for completing the Nairn bypass and its implications for the town. The need to market Nairn as an attractive destination was a key consideration to ensure drivers are encouraged to detour into the town.
- The reinstatement of King Street could be addressed through the masterplan suggested in Proposal 6 above, which should focus on bringing activity to the street, particularly at street level, and balancing vehicle, pedestrian, and cycle movement.
- This proposal is linked to better walking and cycling links to/from the High Street (Proposal 11) and car park re-configuration (Proposal 8).

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 public sector organisations such as HIE and Visit Scotland.

All stakeholders will need to be proactive in sourcing and coordinating funding opportunities. It is likely they will also have to work collaboratively on securing support from external sources such as the Scottish Government, SSE, Highland LEADER 2014-2020, and the National Lottery. Wherever possible, The Highland Council will align its investment in Nairn 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 preparation of this Plan highlighted a wide range of voluntary activity focussed on making Nairn a "go to" place and thriving tourist destination supported by an active, attractive town centre.

The consultation on the draft plan demonstrated that local groups and organisations are committed to taking collective responsibility for town centre regeneration and share a keen interest in increasing fundraising capacity. Facilitated discussion at the public meeting on 23 March 2015 identified the following priorities for taking forward proposals:

- **Achieve effective collaboration:** Local groups are keen to develop a clear way of working, involving a team-based approach. It was agreed that groups would take part in a further event, facilitated by Highlands and Islands Social Enterprise Zone (HISEZ), to agree an appropriate way forward
- **Find appropriate mechanism(s) to facilitate fund-raising and collaboration:** Suggestions included a new Nairn Initiative, a Business Improvement District and a tourism-focussed Destination Management Organisation.
- **Secure support for fund-raising activity:** Funding opportunities exist but, in the absence of a local development officer, groups lack capacity to develop business plans and bids for grant funding. A community-owned asset could generate an income stream to resource fund-raising activity.

A follow-up meeting to the consultation event, facilitated by HISEZ, was held on 12 May 2015 and attended by representatives of all three Nairn Community Councils, Nairn Improvement Community Enterprise (NICE), Nairn Economic Initiative (NEI), Association of Nairn Businesses (ANB), Keeping Nairnshire Colourful (KNC), and Elected Members. The event looked at ways of developing more effective partnerships to seek and secure funding for town centre improvements. It highlighted opportunities for various groups to put arrangements in place, including appropriate representation, constitution and governance to enable community collaboration.

Collaboration with other Highland towns could also generate opportunities such as the potential to pool resources, share best practice and pursue largescale 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 secured through public consultation.

Potential sources of funding and support

Sources of local and national funding that could be of direct relevance to Nairn town centre projects are highlighted in Boxes A and B below.

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.

The Highland LEADER 2014-2020 Programme is expected to launch in late 2015 and is awaiting approval from Scottish Government to open for Expressions of Interest from October 2015.

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.

Further updates on the development of the Highland Programme will be available from the LEADER Team (email: EU.LEADER@highland.gov.uk).

Information regarding the LEADER 2014-20 Programme across Scotland is available at the new Scottish Rural Network website www.ruralnetwork.scot/. The website hosts an Expression of Interest (EOI) form. Submission of an EOI is the first formal step in applying for LEADER funding.

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/>

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>

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 A 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.

The STP website hosts a number of useful resources supporting town centre regeneration, including:

- **Understanding Scottish Places** - an online platform for towns' practitioners and communities that promotes understanding of the function of the towns and provides the opportunity to compare and contrast towns across Scotland.
- **Town Centre Toolkit** – showcasing ideas and examples of how people and organisations in Scotland can make their town centre more attractive, more active, and more accessible.

Until 2015 STP membership was restricted to companies and organisations but the partnership recently expanded to include not-for-profit organisation, including 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. Membership Information on is available on this link: <http://www.scotlandstowns.org/join>

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.

Highlands and Islands Social Enterprise Zone

Highlands and Islands Social Enterprise Zone (HISEZ) is the support and development agency for social enterprises in the Highlands and Islands. HISEZ helps social enterprises and communities towards economic growth and increased sustainability and social impact.

HISEZ IS available to assist businesses, voluntary organisations and the local community, either through the Scottish Government's Just Enterprise contract or through direct consultancy work. It also runs networking events throughout the year in various locations.

<http://www.hisez.co.uk/>

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 is in the early stages 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.

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

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

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Employment & Training

Students Summer Placement Scheme - Comunn
Na Gaidhlig
Flexible Training Opportunities - Skills
Development Scotland
Low Carbon Skills Fund
Training and Recruitment Grant Programme

Education

Wolfson Foundation Secondary Education
Programme
Ernest Cook Trust (UK) Small Grants Programme
Ernest Cook Trust (UK) Large Grants Programme

Energy

The Naturesave Trust

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

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

(con'd)

Employment & Training	Education
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	Energy
	The Naturesave Trust



Getting Involved

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