

# Fort William An Gearasdan



Action Plan  
for  
**FORT WILLIAM  
TOWN CENTRE**  
August 2015





## 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 Action 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 and a nine week public consultation that took place between March and May 2015, which included a public exhibition and facilitated evening meeting. It builds on local stakeholder inputs, knowledge and understanding of Fort William town centre, including ideas and priorities raised and recorded.

Although the current economic climate makes it more difficult to deliver town centre improvements, 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 are required to lead the regeneration of their town centre by continuing to work closely with public sector partners and land owners.

The Fort William Town Centre 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.

The 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 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 partners at a two-day public workshop that took place on 15-16 May 2014. Participants included representatives from community groups, Lochaber High school pupils, businesses, voluntary organisations and agencies. A Draft Action Plan was prepared to reflect the input, knowledge and shared priorities of local stakeholders, 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.

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 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 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 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. A summary of 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 the Draft Action Plan 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 29 April 2015 a consultation event took place at Lochaber House, Fort William 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, Fort William Town Team, Lochaber Environmental Group, and business and cultural organisations. A summary of issues raised and priorities identified through the consultation is available on the Council's website.

## 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).

The West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan also includes the allocation of several sites encompassing the High Street area and an allocation at the waterfront. The Plan identifies the redevelopment potential of sites on the High Street for a variety of uses encompassing community, retail, tourism, business and housing uses. Additionally the development potential at the waterfront is recognised alongside the need to address a range of issues to deliver development in this area.

## Extent of Town Centre



*Figure 1: Fort William, late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, showing streets and urban grain*

The extent of Fort William town centre put forward in this Action Plan is driven by the discussions and considerations of the public consultation. Whereas as its key focus relates to retail, commercial, tourism and administrative activities on the High Street, the plan also takes into account the linkages to the wider area supporting the town centre.



Figure 2: Aerial view of Fort William Town Centre circa 2010

## 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 in spring 2014:

### 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 Glenlochry 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 however suggests 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.

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 through public consultation. It summarises both the rationale captured at the initial workshop and issues that arose from more detailed consideration of each proposal, including priorities and actions identified through public consultation on the draft plan.

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.

## Fort William Town Centre Action Plan

### 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 pedestrian environment between the Fort and the High Street
4. Install a canopy at Cameron Square to promote all-weather use

#### LEGEND

- Tidy-up High Street
- Improve pedestrian environment
- Town centre gateways
- Cameron Square canopy



## Theme 1: Improve Town Centre environment and gateways

### Proposals and rationale put forward at public workshop

#### 1. Improve pedestrian environment between the Fort and the 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 between the Fort and the town centre. Routes to and from the station need to be safer, more legible and better signposted.

### ISSUES AND ACTION

- This proposal was identified as a **priority** at the public consultation event on the Draft Action Plan in April 2015. These improvements would create safer, more attractive pedestrian access between the High Street and the Rail Station, Morrisons supermarket and the Fort. Consultation feedback confirmed keen interest in engaging with Transport Scotland to progress the improvements. The consultation also flagged up a need for safer cycling links and more cycle parking in the town centre.
- These improvements are directly related to Proposal 6 to create attractive pedestrian links to the fort.
- The development of a new link road between the town centre and Coul could increase scope to improve walking and cycling links.

#### 2. 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 at the Square, an inflatable canopy was temporarily installed to accommodate Christmas activity. Fort William Chamber of Commerce covered the cost of canopy hire.
- Feedback from the public consultation event on the Draft Action Plan in April 2015 highlighted:
  - Events staged attracted positive feedback and were considered a big success
  - It may be worthwhile considering whether the town should purchase a canopy because hire costs are expensive.
  - A need to minimise inconvenience to Cameron Square businesses.

## Theme 1: Improve Town Centre environment and gateways

### Proposals and rationale put forward at public workshop

#### ISSUES AND ACTION

#### 3. 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.

- Action to bring empty shops back to use was identified as a **priority** at the public consultation event on the Draft Action Plan in April 2015. Ideas put forward included the creation of pop-up venues, such as art studios or exhibition space; enabling the Town Team to access shopfronts to carry out repairs; establishing a partnership between businesses, the Town Team and the Council to progress improvements; and campaigning on national policy on business rates that affect High Street trading.

- In June 2014, in response to issues raised at the public event to develop this action plan, a group of volunteers set up the Fort William Town Team to improve the High Street environment and surrounding areas. Since then the team has recruited dedicated volunteers to undertake a wide range of activities including washing street furniture and signage, clearing litter, weeding, general tidying, and encouraging local businesses to sponsor hanging baskets along the High Street.
- Motivating shop and business owners to undertake shop front/building improvements is an essential process because, although it may require defects to be remedied, the Council can only enforce repairs where property is a danger to the public.

#### 4. 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.

- Action to improve gateway roundabouts, including signage for drivers was identified as a **priority** at the public consultation event on the Draft Action Plan in April 2015. Council officials subsequently brought this to the attention of Transport Scotland. Consultation feedback confirmed interest in a community project to improve appearance of roundabouts and concern that drivers bypass town centre with little awareness of what it has to offer.
- 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.
- Proposal 10 (below) to redevelop the Police Station site has potential to improve an important frontage at this end of the High Street and create a more attractive pedestrian approach to the town centre.

## Fort William Town Centre Action Plan

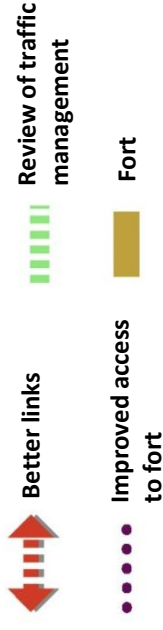
### Theme 2: Improve movement networks between the town centre and surroundings

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

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

#### LEGEND



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

### Proposals and rationale put forward at public workshop

### ISSUES AND ACTION

#### 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.

- This proposal was identified as a **priority** at the public consultation event on the Draft Action Plan in April 2015. Suggestions included: the creation of a circular walking trail + interpretation points linking both ends of the High Street with the waterfront; a Heritage Trail; improved pedestrian signposting; promenade improvements; liaison with Sustrans to identify potential funding opportunities.
- In response to consultation feedback, Council planners brought this **priority** to the attention of Transport Scotland and will continue to press for action.
- In June 2015, the Town Team launched the “Recycle Route”, a short walking route around the town centre signposted by 13 colourfully painted bikes.
- 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.
- This proposal is directly related to: Proposals 3 and 6 to improve pedestrian and cycling links between High Street, station and fort; and Proposal 12 to create an attractive waterfront promenade.



#### 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.

- This is linked to Proposals 3 and 5 (above), which were identified as priorities at the public consultation event on the Draft Action Plan in April 2015. Consultation feedback confirmed keen interest in engaging with Transport Scotland to achieve improvements, such as the introduction of pedestrian crossing points and removing cobbles that are a barrier to pedestrian movement around the Fort and Morrisons supermarket.
- 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).
- The development of a new link road between the town centre and Coul could increase scope to improve walking and cycling links to the Fort.

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

### Proposals and rationale put forward at public workshop

#### 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.

### ISSUES AND ACTION

- Feedback from the public consultation event on the Draft Action Plan in April 2015 confirmed that summer traffic congestion is discouraging local residents from using the town centre. The following improvements were suggested:
  - Make parking available on one side of the High Street from October to May;
  - Open up High Street to traffic /parking from 16.30 daily.
- 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 in place by the end of 2016.
- The Council’s Community Services have already programmed the following improvements to traffic management and pedestrian access in the town centre:
  - Enforced restrictions on delivery times;
  - Removal of cycling prohibition on the High Street;
  - Introduction of bollards to restrict parking at Middle Street; 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 expects to co-locate its main administrative offices, democratic services, Service Point and Registration Offices in the former Fort William Secondary School, a Listed Building on the western edge of the town centre.

#### Proposals

4. Convert Tweeddale House to residential use
5. Promote appropriate redevelopment of Fort William RC Primary School site
6. Ensure redevelopment of Police Station site enhances town centre's western gateway
7. 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 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 ACTION

- Tweeddale House is one of a number of privately owned commercial buildings in the town centre that are currently vacant or partially vacant. The Council currently rents part of the building for office use.
- In June 2015, as part of the anticipated relocation of Council services to the former Fort William Secondary School, the Council secured planning permission to convert the upper floors of Tweeddale House into 22 dwellings, maintaining retail use at street level. The proposed conversion will proceed if the property is bought by the Council.
- In due course, the West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan will set criteria for future development at this site.
- In 2014 the Council purchased the former Whisky Centre, another redundant building at the west end of the High Street, with a view to developing 12 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.

- Feedback from the public consultation event on the Draft Action Plan in April 2015 identified a **priority** to create more good quality greenspace in the town centre.
- 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.
- This site abuts Belford Hospital and its future use is likely to be influenced by any review and programming of changes to NHS Highland's estate. In January 2015, NHS Highland confirmed it is reviewing options to replace Belford Hospital with a new facility at an alternative location in Fort William. This would free up the Belford site for re-development. Re-development of the school site may not take place until a decision is reached about the future of hospital provision in Fort William.

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

### Proposals and rationale put forward at public workshop

#### 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.

### ISSUES AND ACTION

- Action to find alternative use(s) for the property was identified as a **priority** at the public consultation event on the Draft Action Plan in April 2015. Ideas put forward included conversion to a bunkhouse, or WASP studios for artists.
- The building has been vacant since Police Scotland relocated to their new facility at Blar Mhor in January 2014. The adjacent BT building also only partially used.
- The Police Station site was put up for sale in November 2014 and is understood to be under offer. It was marketed for redevelopment as a hotel or 10 (max) residential units. The Lochaber Local Plan confirms the site is suitable for mixed use, which includes retail, office or leisure use, with potential for residential accommodation on the upper floors.
- The recent consultation also identified the **priority** to create more good quality greenspace in the town centre. If planning permission is sought to re-use or re-develop this site, Council planners will encourage the developer to undertake frontage improvements that enhance the pedestrian experience on this part of the High Street. In due course, the West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan will set criteria for future development at this site.

#### 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.

- Action to improve MacRae's Lane was identified as a **priority** at the public consultation event on the Draft Action Plan in April 2015. Consultation feedback highlighted that:
  - Support and cooperation of private property owners are needed to deliver improvements but issues relating to access and ownership are unresolved;
  - Taking the lane into community ownership would be of interest to local volunteers, who may also be willing to organise a community environmental clean-up;
  - If established, a Business Improvement District may have potential to facilitate lane improvements;
  - More good quality greenspace is needed in the town centre.

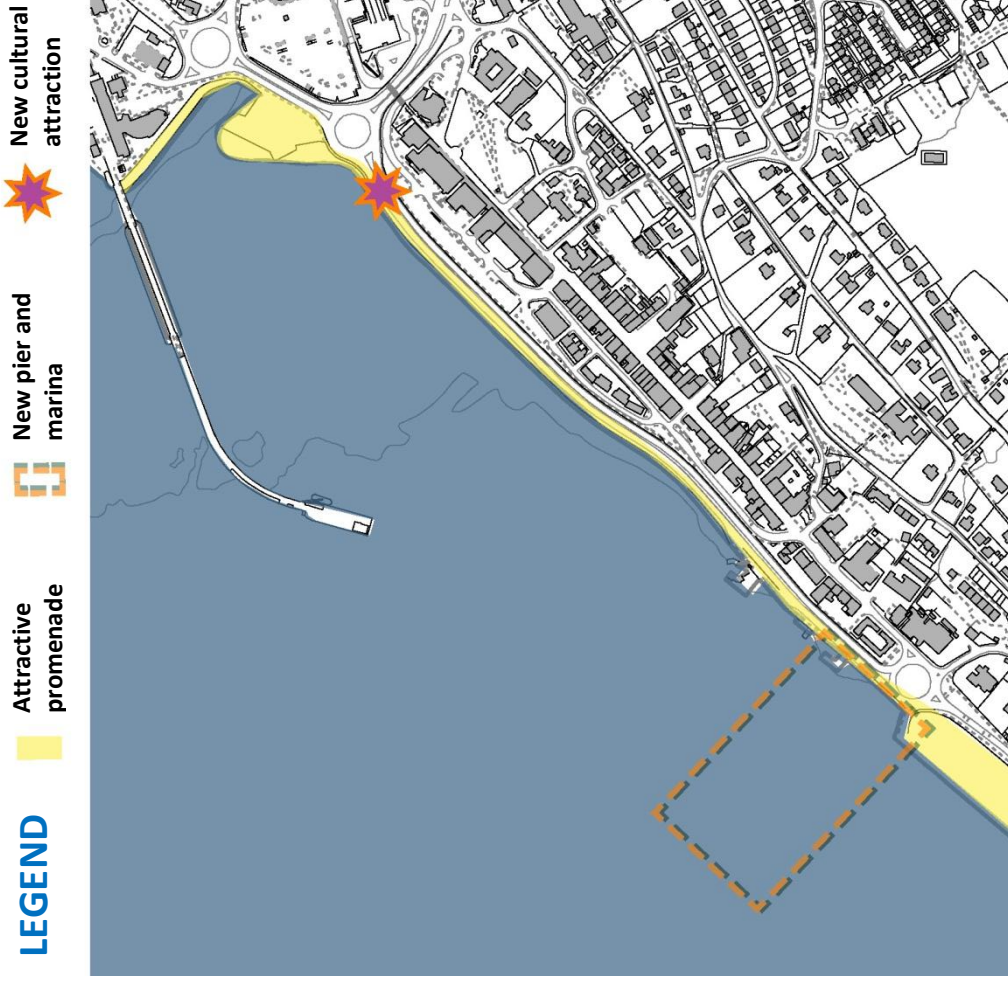
## Fort William Town Centre Action Plan

### 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

8. Create an attractive waterfront promenade
9. Develop new west pier and marina
10. Develop appropriate new cultural attraction at east end of Promenade



## 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. Road closure would need to be undertaken on a trial basis in the first instance to determine feasibility.

### ISSUES AND ACTION

- Feedback from the public consultation on the Draft Action Plan in April 2015 confirmed keen interest in pursuing Transport Scotland about:
  - Extending the shoreline to provide a promenade and further parking, and
  - Providing a pedestrian bridge at Middle St / Ossian Hotel.
- Council planners queried Transport Scotland in response to consultation feedback and will continue to press for information on the feasibility of A82 lane closures, including implications for infrastructure and potential impact on traffic flows, congestion and road safety.
- It would make sense to assess the impact of temporary closure of two lanes before developing a permanent solution. Identification of appropriate trial event is required.

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



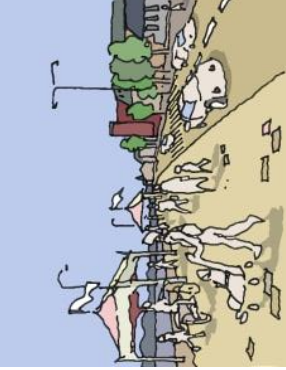
A western pier and marina could have potential to accommodate cruise ship berthing as well as marina facilities for small pleasure craft. Fort William is well-placed to become a significant cruise and sailing destination due to Loch Linnhe's outstanding scenery and water depth, and current strong demand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

- Action to repair the town pier was identified a **key short term priority** during the public consultation on the Draft Action Plan in April 2015. The development of a new pier and marina is also a **priority**, reflecting keen interest in attracting visiting boats/ships including the Waverley Paddle Steamer (WPS). The consultation highlighted options for small scale waterfront enhancement, including a new breakwater/ marina requiring additional infrastructure for vehicle access and parking. Communities developing or considering similar projects include Lochaline, Arisaig and Kyle of Lochalsh.
- Visits by large boats including WPS were suspended in 2013 when a structural inspection of the town pier identified necessary repairs that, to date, have not been carried out. The Council currently leases part of the pier and is investigating options to extend this lease to include long term operation, maintenance and development of the pier.
- The Council recently commissioned a study on the feasibility of obtaining a Harbour Revision Order to regulate marine traffic on Loch Linnhe, which could attract more cruise liners, leisure vessels and commercial traffic to the area. This study will be completed in 2016.
- Proposals for largescale waterfront development were produced in 2009.

## Theme 4: Maximise the potential of the waterfront

Proposals and rationale put forward at public workshop

### 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.

### ISSUES AND ACTION

- Significant improvements to pedestrian routes and parking facilities would be required to deliver an attraction at the east end of the promenade.
- Early engagement with Historic Scotland is necessary for any proposed development near the Fort.

## 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.

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](mailto: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/](http://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/>

## 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>

## **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.

## 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/>

### 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.

## 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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(01463) 702298

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