

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

15 May 2013

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| Agenda Item | 14 |
| Report No | PED 39/13 |

CONSERVATION AREA REGENERATION SCHEMES

Report by Director of Planning and Development

Summary

This report updates Members on the delivery of Wick, Pulteneytown Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS), Dingwall CARS, and the proposed Academy Street, Inverness CARS / Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI).

Both CARS and THI programmes support the Council's Single Outcome Agreement commitments to help build a competitive, sustainable and adaptable Highland economy and help sustain Highland communities.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Wick, Pulteneytown, Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (Wick CARS) ran from 2007 to March 2013. The project secured an offer of £1.5m grant from Historic Scotland (the Council provided revenue funding from the Planning and Development Service for 50% of the CARS Project Officer salary) to bring about regeneration through the repair and reuse of historic buildings.
- 1.2 The Dingwall Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (Dingwall CARS) was launched in September 2011 and will run until March 2016. The project secured grant offers totalling £570,000, comprised of £420,000 from Historic Scotland and £150,000 from the Highland LEADER 2007-2013 Programme. As match funding, The Highland Council provides revenue funding from the Planning and Development Service for 50% of the CARS Project Officer salary.
- 1.3 As reported to Committee on 19 September 2012, the Council submitted both a CARS application to Historic Scotland and a THI application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for Academy Street, Inverness. Both funding applications have now been determined and the respective decisions are discussed in section 4.

2. Wick Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme

- 2.1 The Wick CARS ended on 31 March 2013. During its lifetime the project operated two separate grant schemes:
 1. A large grant scheme focused on vacant and 'at risk' priority buildings which require a funding in order to enable them to be brought back into use.

2. A small grants scheme was available to property owners within the conservation area for smaller repair works to their buildings.

2.2 Wick CARS has been invested in five large grant projects and over 30 smaller grant projects which have contributed to preserving and enhancing the Pulteneytown Conservation Area. In addition, a range of education and training events were held during the implementation of the Scheme. The final audited accounts and associated regeneration outputs report will be submitted to Historic Scotland by the end of May 2013.

3. Dingwall Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme

3.1 Dingwall CARS aims to support regeneration through investment in the historic environment. The project is currently focussed on completing all work eligible for Highland LEADER grant because of the time requirement to draw down this funding by December 2013. This comprises:

1. Dingwall Townhouse repair and conservation work
2. Training in Traditional Building Skills
3. Shop Front Grant Scheme
4. Small Building Repair Grants
5. Community Engagement / Education

3.2 Dingwall Townhouse repair and conservation work

Conservation specialists LDN architects were appointed in January 2013 to develop and lead a major programme of external repair work to the historic tower at the centre of the Townhouse. Proposals include the restoration of the Town clock and a comprehensive programme of masonry repair to reinstate the original lime harling. Tenders are due to be invited in mid-May, with building work anticipated to start in July for completion in October 2013.

3.3 Training in Traditional Building Skills

The project is funding up to 30 places on three training courses taking place in June 2013 at the Scottish Lime Centre Trust, Charleston, Fife:

- Making and Using Traditional Mortars, 13-14 June
- Traditional Roofing techniques: 6-7 June
- Traditional Sash & Case Window Repair: 6 or 7 June (tbc)

To date local employers, tradesmen/women and craftsmen/women have expressed interest in securing 25 trainee places, with more interest expected when the formal application process is launched (29 April 2013).

3.4 Shop Front Grant Scheme

Although this scheme has been warmly welcomed by High Street traders, to date property owners have been reluctant to commission the necessary professional work to inform and enable them to apply for grant. To encourage the take-up of shop front grants, the scheme is offering enhanced support to eight businesses, including the production of surveys and pricing packages by the end of May 2013.

3.5 Small Building Repair Grants

To date the CARS scheme has awarded small building repair grants to two property owners of £5,110 and £1,575. Confirmation is expected at the end of May that the Highland LEADER Programme will match-fund these grant offers, bringing the total grant award to 80% of grant-eligible costs.

3.6 Community Engagement / Education

CARS is working with Dingwall Academy's Art Department on a design project and competition to raise pupils' awareness of the town's historic built environment. Each of the school's 250 third year (S3) pupils is producing a competition entry to design a new Mercat Cross for the High Street. Historic Scotland is providing tuition in stone masonry skills. An award ceremony and public exhibition showcasing the best 30 designs will take place at Dingwall Town Hall on 14 and 15 June 2013.

4. Proposed Academy Street, Inverness – CARS / Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI).

4.1 Historic Scotland advised the Council on the 28 December 2012 that it had been unsuccessful in its attempt to secure a CARS grant for Academy Street, Inverness. The fifth round of funding saw 25 applications seeking £24 million from a £10 million funding allocation. Historic Scotland was supportive of the Council's aspirations for Academy Street but deemed that there was a better mechanism, using existing funding streams available in Inverness, than the CARS to support the proposals. Historic Scotland has indicated that they would like to try and support the Academy Street project through a potential mixture of Inverness City Heritage Trust funds and the Historic Scotland Building Repair Grant. This in turn has the potential to act as match funding for any future HLF award. Dialogue remains on-going between Council Officers, Inverness City Heritage Trust and Historic Scotland in order to understand how the available funds can be best utilised.

4.2 The Heritage Lottery Fund advised the Council on the 19 March 2013 that it had been unsuccessful in its attempt to secure a THI grant for Academy Street, Inverness. Again, the funding allocation was heavily over subscribed which resulted in only two THI schemes being awarded in Scotland. The HLF has offered to work with the Council with a view to resubmitting a revised proposal under the new THI programme which has a deadline of 31 August 2013. A meeting with HLF will be held in due course to better understand the new programme and whether or not it is appropriate to resubmit. A further report will be brought to Committee on 14 August 2013.

5. Implications

5.1 Resource: There are no financial implications arising from this report.

5.2 Legal: There are no legal implications arising from this report.

5.3 Equality: There are no negative equality implications arising from this report.

- 5.4 Climate Change: The repair and re-use of existing buildings through each of these schemes fulfil the delivery of Council priorities for sustainable development.
- 5.5 Risk: Highland LEADER funding for Dingwall CARS is time limited and must be utilised by October 2013. Efforts are therefore underway and focused on ensuring that projects eligible for LEADER funding are progressed as a matter of urgency.

6. Recommendation

6.1 The Committee is recommended to:

- (i) note progress to date with the Wick, Pulteneytown CARS, Dingwall CARS, and Inverness CARS/Townscape Heritage Initiative; and
- (ii) agree that officers continue to work with the HLF on a political resubmission for a THI grant for Academy Street, Inverness.

Designation: Director of Planning and Development

Date: 30 April 2013

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