

## **Item 9 - Question Time**

### Response to Mr M Green

The National Review of Town Centres External Advisory Group Report “Community and Enterprise in Scotland’s Town Centres” was published in June 2013. The Scottish Government’s response to it, the “Town Centre Action Plan” was published in November 2013. Key actions contained in the Town Centre Action Plan include:

- an expansion of the rates relief scheme for new businesses to include pubs, restaurants and hotels in a bid to diversify the high street
- Working with COSLA to develop a town centre first principle
- Powers for local authorities to establish Town Centre Investment Zones
- Launching a competition for entrepreneurs to drive forward town centre regeneration ideas
- Powers for local authorities to establish Town Centre Investment Zones
- Working with stakeholders to identify support priorities for Business Improvement District (BID) projects
- £120,000 for Town Centre charettes – grants available to help deliver community design meetings specifically focused on town centre regeneration

As a direct response to the Advisory Group’s report the Council has embedded a ‘Town Centre First’ principle in the Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan (IMFLDP) and the identification of Inverness as a Priority Action Area. Policy 1 of the IMFLDP seeks to protect and enhance the vitality and viability of our existing city and town centres, and to make them vibrant places where people want to visit and where businesses wish to invest. Inverness City Centre will also benefit from a series of consultation events aimed at drawing up a Land Use and Transport Strategy for Inverness. This is aimed at identifying the key sites and transport improvements that will best increase footfall and the quality of the environment in the City. This will include consideration of any proposals that reflect the recommendations of the Advisory Group and the Town Centre Action Plan. Alongside, the Council has submitted a bid for funding from the £120k made available by Scottish Government to run Charrette events in Fort William, Nairn and Tain to identify actions and proposals for delivering town centre regeneration. This could include the re-use of vacant or under-utilised buildings, improving connections to facilities and services and identifying potential catalyst projects for the regeneration of each town.

Officers will continue to review the Action Plan and will consider other ways of implementing its recommendations within the Highland Council area.