

The Highland Council

City of Inverness Area Committee – 3 June 2014

Agenda Item	4
Report No	CIA/15/14

Inverness City Centre Action Plan

Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure

Summary

This report outlines details of a proposed Action Plan for Inverness City Centre which contains a package of priorities for maximising footfall and optimising the role of the City Centre as the key regional destination for retail, commercial and social activity.

The report also summarises feedback received during two recent consultation events aimed at gathering views on the priorities for the City Centre and shows how these views have been considered in drawing up the Action Plan.

The Committee is asked to approve the priorities for the City Centre

1. Background

- 1.1 At its meeting on 21 October 2013 the City of Inverness Area Committee agreed:
 - To contribute to the scoping and content of an integrated land use and transport strategy for Inverness City Centre;
 - That officers should consult with key partners and interested groups and organisations to identify priorities and actions for transport and land use in the City Centre whilst taking account of the opportunities identified in the Inverness City Centre Development Brief;
 - That officers should take forward outputs from Members and consultation meetings to produce an Action Plan which could be reported back to the Committee and incorporated in a review of the Inverness City Centre Development Brief and other Transport Strategies.
- 1.2 In light of the above, two consultation events were held in late March / early April that aimed to gather people's ideas for how best to increase footfall in the City Centre through changes to land use and transport infrastructure. This report presents the outcome of these consultation events (at Appendix 1) and recommends a series of priorities and initial actions for delivering improvements across the City Centre (in Appendix 2).
- 1.3 Inverness City Centre is already recognised as being of major significance within the council's existing land use and transport strategies. The Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan (approved in September 2013)

is the first of three area Local Development Plans which seeks to address the close interrelationship between transport and land use planning. Policy 1 of the Plan seeks to focus a wide range of uses in the City Centre. In addition, the Inverness City Centre Development Brief identifies key sites and areas that need to be improved or regenerated and where spaces between buildings could be improved to maximise sustainable movements and create high quality places. The principles and objectives for achieving an efficient and integrated transport network are set out in the Local Transport Strategy.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of the proposed Inverness City Centre Action Plan is to identify the best ways of increasing accessibility and footfall within the City Centre, and improving the environment to make it a place where people want to live, work, socialise and invest. The Action Plan is being developed through joint working between the Development and Infrastructure Service and key stakeholders and has at its heart an appreciation of the important link between transport and land use planning.
- 2.2 When completed, the City Centre Action Plan will be incorporated within an updated version of the Inverness City Centre Development Brief that will be considered by this Committee before being subject to public consultation.

3. Consultation Events

- 3.1 In late March / early April officers held two consultation events which sought to invite feedback from key City Centre stakeholders and the wider community on their vision for the City Centre in 20 years' time and their priorities for action. This included:
 - a) a stakeholder workshop held on 31 March; and
 - b) a public exhibition held on 3 April 2014.
- 3.2 The stakeholder workshop brought together a group of representatives from local businesses, community organisations, transport operators and public sector partners. The group were invited to describe their vision for the City Centre in 20 years and their 'top three' priorities for improving it.
- 3.3 Outputs from the workshop were documented and presented at the public exhibition where residents and users of the City Centre were invited to comment on the vision and priorities, and make their own suggestions for the future.
- 3.4 In establishing the 20 year vision for the City Centre participants were asked to describe the identity of the City Centre in terms of its users and facilities, access, movement around the centre and the quality of the built and natural environment. Table A below presents a vision statement developed from the ideas and comments put forward.

Table A – Vision for the City Centre

Summary of Ideas for Inverness in 2034	Vision Statement
<p>Improved green and public spaces, path connections and a valued historic environment make the City Centre a more pleasant place to live, work, visit and hold events.</p> <p>The river connects the City Centre to the rest of Inverness and provides a pleasant environment for walking, cycling and relaxing.</p>	<p>“A vibrant and unique City Centre on the river which is...</p>
<p>Better integration between all forms of transport and pedestrians has resulted in the City Centre becoming a hub for movement and connections.</p>	<p>...well connected and accessible...</p>
<p>The City Centre has become a great place to live, attracting a variety of new residents including students and families, expanding the day and night time economy.</p>	<p>...and valued as an attractive place to live,</p>
<p>A business friendly environment has encouraged offices to take advantage of the benefits of a City Centre location.</p>	<p>...work</p>
<p>As capital of the Highlands, Inverness City Centre offers a wider variety of visitor attractions and is more accessible to tourists.</p>	<p>...and visit”</p>

4. Priorities for the City Centre

4.1 Participants at both the workshop and exhibition were invited to highlight their priorities for the City Centre to deliver their future vision. In particular, comments were invited on:

- the layout and design of buildings, streets and open spaces;
- the methods of travel to, from and around the city centre;
- the facilities, services and jobs on offer; and
- the availability and quality of space for businesses to grow.

Details of the priorities previously identified by the Inverness Courier’s Re-Invent Campaign and also the Inverness City Centre Business Improvement District were also exhibited for participants to consider.

4.2 Appendix 1 presents a summary feedback received during the consultation categorised according to the ‘headlines’ of the vision statement. Separate columns identify how frequently each issue was raised at either event. The nine key priorities for the City Centre identified through the stakeholder workshop are shown in Table B below.

Table B – Priorities for the City Centre

Vision Statement	Priorities
A vibrant and unique City Centre on the river...	1. Develop major tourist attractions in the City Centre
A well connected and accessible city...	2. Create and promote the use of retail/business space
An attractive place to live...	3. Improve transport connections
An attractive place to work...	4. Create green focal points and promote use of natural environment
An attractive place to visit...	5. Improve and preserve City Centre buildings
	6. Utilise the Castle as a tourist/visitor facility
	7. Development of Academy Street
	8. Redevelop/improve Farraline Park
	9. Improve and develop public/pedestrian spaces in the City Centre

5.4 By identifying overlapping and linked priorities, and through analysis of feedback from both events, three the following priorities emerged:

1. Improvements to City Centre access and connections.
2. Development of Academy Street and its surroundings.
3. Redevelopment of key sites to create visitor and cultural attractions.

Table C summarises what each priority encompasses:

Table C – Description of the 3 priorities

<p>Improvements to City Centre access and connections</p>	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A focus on active travel links and pedestrian friendly zones • Integration of public transport • Possible redevelopment of bus station
<p>Development of Academy Street and its surroundings</p>	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving public/pedestrian space • Improving and preserving buildings • Creating and promoting use of retail and business space.
<p>Redevelopment of key sites to create visitor and cultural attractions</p>	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing existing sites as tourist attractions e.g. The Castle • Possible relocation of key attractions such as the museum • Look into possibility of new cultural/tourist attractions for the City Centre.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 The priorities emerging from the consultation events play a key role in informing the development of a City Centre Action Plan. Some overlap with priorities already set out in Inverness City Centre Development Brief. Some could also be delivered through improving or developing existing infrastructure and connections. The Inverness Task Force is a group of senior officers tasked with delivering regeneration and improvements to the City. The priorities contained in this report have been discussed by the Task Force and, subject to approval by this Committee, are committed to coordinating the delivery of these priorities in partnership with relevant key agencies and partners.
- 6.2 Appendix 2 presents a list of initial actions for each priority for the Committee to consider. Alongside, a number of relevant committed interventions and improvements are highlighted for consideration. These include the River Ness Flood Alleviation Scheme, Carbon CLEVER Cycles Pilot and Millburn Cycle Link. These projects are funded with contributions from a diverse range of private and public sector partners including SSE, Sustrans, HITRANS and the Inverness Common Good Fund.

7. Equality and Environmental Implications

- 7.1 There are no known direct equality implications arising from this report.
- 7.2 Strategic Environmental Assessment has not been undertaken as the City Centre Action Plan would not be considered a qualifying plan, programme or strategy under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.

8. Resource, Climate Change, Carbon Clever, Legal and Risk Implications

- 8.1 Given the nature of this report, there are no direct implications immediately arising with respect to these matters. However, such is the subject matter that significant implications will arise and will need to be considered as integral to decision making going forward.

Recommendation

The Committee is invited to:

- a) Note the outcome of the recent City Centre consultation events in Appendix 1 and agree the three priorities for the City Centre in paragraph 5.4 and Table C of this report.
- b) Review and consider the initial actions (identified in Appendix 2) for delivering the three priorities to inform the next version of the City Centre Action Plan.
- c) Agree for officers to incorporate the Action Plan into a review of the Inverness City Centre Development Brief and reflected in other relevant strategies.
- d) Agree that the Action Plan and the priorities identified are used to inform future capital programme bids; and
- e) Agree for the Inverness Task Force to coordinate the delivery of the City Centre Action Plan.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

Date: 21st May 2013

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Appendix 1 – Summary of Stakeholder Workshop and Public Exhibition Feedback

VIBRANT AND UNIQUE CITY CENTRE ON THE RIVER			
<i>“Improved green and public spaces, path connections and a valued historic environment make the City Centre a more pleasant place to live, work, visit and hold events. The river connects the City Centre to the rest of Inverness and provides a pleasant environment for walking, cycling and relaxing”</i>			
Main ideas raised by public and stakeholders	No. of mentions		
	Workshop	Exhibition	
Redevelop Farraline Park as a public/green space for locals and visitors to enjoy	6	8	
Improve/enhance physical quality of key city centre buildings.	4	8	
Greenery in city centre	3	5	
Develop full potential of the river for locals and visitors to enjoy – provide restaurants/cafes/cultural venues.	4	2	
Link River to city centre by creating pedestrian friendly streets and developing connections from the centre.	3	2	
Preserve B listed buildings	0	5	
Promote identity through street furniture and streetscapes.	3	0	
Create a city garden.	2	1	
Improve public space at Falcon Square	0	3	
Remodel Station Square frontage – remove car parking facilities and create a public space with seating and greenery.	0	3	
New developments should be sympathetic to surrounding buildings.	0	1	
Create new opportunities for open space in city centre by demolishing dilapidated buildings, e.g. Post Office.	0	1	
A WELL CONNECTED AND ACCESSIBLE CITY			
<i>“Better integration between all forms of transport and pedestrians has resulted in the City Centre becoming a hub for movement and connections.”</i>			
Main ideas raised by public and stakeholders.	No. of mentions		
	Workshop	Exhibition	
Develop areas of city centre to encourage pedestrian/cyclist use of the area, with the use of traffic calming measures and creation of shared surfaces.	8	9	
Integrated transport hub that puts active travel, pedestrians and public transport first.	5	6	
Develop Park and Ride facilities- hubs around periphery of centre.	2	9	
Develop a cycle network that focuses on the city centre, with provision of more cycle parking.	1	10	
Improve link between bus and rail station	3	6	

Relocate bus station to sites such as Longman UHI building, nearer Morrison's, or Strothers Lane.	2	7	
Create free parking in city centre	0	6	
Increase short term parking options	1	4	
Reroute buses out of city centre (Academy Street especially).	0	5	
City centre should be car free	2	2	
Coach parking facilities – use car park at back of A & I Welders or allow coaches to park at Bught Park.	1	3	
Create a walking route in city centre- similar to that of Boston.	1	3	
Provision of shuttle buses –provide link between major tourist attractions, and/or between city centre and new UHI campus when it opens in 2015.	0	4	
Multi-storey car parks available within walking distance of city centre	3	0	
Good range of affordable public transport facilities with up to date information provided.	1	2	
Increase provision of disabled bays, as well as discouraging abuse of existing bays.	0	3	
Millburn cross rail link	0	3	
Increase on street parking for business access	0	2	
Traffic flow system – assess how traffic lights function to ensure less stopping time while travelling through city centre.	0	2	
Congestion charge in city centre.	0	2	
Discourage parking along river side.	0	1	
Rationalise traffic flow in and around city centre, including re-opening Rose Street to two-way traffic.	0	1	
AN ATTRACTIVE PLACE TO LIVE			
<i>“The City Centre has become a great place to live, attracting a new variety of residents, including students and families, expanding the day and night time economy.”</i>			
Main ideas raised by public and stakeholders.	No. of mentions		
	Workshop	Exhibition	
Provide affordable accommodation in the city centre.	2	2	
Change empty office units into residential properties.	1	0	
AN ATTRACTIVE PLACE TO WORK			
<i>“A business friendly environment has encouraged offices to take advantage of the benefits of a City Centre location.”</i>			
Main ideas raised by public and stakeholders.	No. of mentions		
	Workshop	Exhibition	
Create more office jobs in city centre/ encourage businesses to move back in to centre.	6	0	
Find uses for derelict buildings	3	3	
Make rents lower, or provide rate relief schemes.	0	5	
Promote re use of redundant upper floors of city centre buildings.	3	1	

Use Common Good Fund to buy vacant units and let out at affordable rates.	0	4	
Encourage independent retailers to set up in city centre	0	4	
AN ATTRACTIVE PLACE TO VISIT			
<i>“As capital of the Highlands, Inverness City Centre offers a wider variety of visitor attractions and is more accessible to tourists.”</i>			
Main ideas raised by public and stakeholders.	No. of mentions		
	Workshop	Exhibition	
Develop the Castle area - make it a tourist destination – not courts	8	15	
Indoor attractions needed for night time and during wet weather, e.g. A virtual Highland tour.	2	7	
Relocate tourist information centre to castle	3	5	
Create a Heritage Centre in the castle.	2	5	
Move the museum to the castle	1	6	
Demolish museum and create green space with seating areas at Bridge Street	1	6	
Move art gallery to Midmills	2	4	
Demolish current tourist info centre to enhance views of castle/create public space	0	6	
Install high quality information boards, signage and viewpoints.	1	4	
Create significant pieces of public art in the city centre e.g. murals, plaques relating to historic events.	1	3	
Move museum to Midmills Building	1	2	
Relocate tourist information centre elsewhere in city centre e.g. Victorian Market, vacant units on Church St	0	3	
Assess toilet facilities available for tourists/locals	0	3	
Major visitor attraction with elevated views of the city and beyond.	2	0	
Develop space around the castle, e.g. seating, picnic areas etc.	0	2	
Create a vibrant music and art scene.	0	2	
Relocate tourist information centre to Midmills	1	0	
Create an amenity area above the Town House car park on Castle Street.	0	1	

Appendix 2 – City Centre Priorities

1 Improvements to City Centre access and connections				
	Action	Responsible service(s) / partners	Delivery date	Related initiatives (including funding already committed or secured)
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope possibility for new walking and cycling routes, or highlight where existing infrastructure could be improved. • Analyse existing provision of cycle parking, hire etc., and highlight where there is potential for expansion or improvement. • Source opportunities and secure funding for additional or improved infrastructure. 	<p>Development and Infrastructure;</p> <p>HITRANS;</p> <p>SUSTRANS;</p>	<p>August 2014</p> <p>August 2014</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>SUSTRANS funding (£7,000) has been secured to examine Active Travel Route 6 (Slackbuie to Inverness city centre). The study will be undertaken this year and will form the basis of a community links funding bid in 2015/16.</p> <p>HITRANS/ SUSTRANS recently implemented additional cycle parking at Inverness Train Station and continue to monitor usage in the City Centre with a view to increasing provision where necessary.</p> <p>Millburn Cycle Route is under development using combined contributions of £387,000 from the European Regional Development Fund (EDRF), HITRANS, SUSTRANS and developer contributions, and an additional £350,000 from the Highland Councils' capital programme.</p> <p>Carbon Clever CYCLES is a collaboration between the Council, SSE and Co-wheels to pilot electric bicycle hire scheme in Inverness. £40,000 capital costs will be procured from SSE with additional upfront revenue costs coming from The Inverness Common Good Fund (£5,000), The Chief Executive Services' policy team budget (£5,000). A further contribution of £5,000 is awaiting approval from Inverness Central Ward's Discretionary budget.</p>
2	<p>Options appraisal that investigates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential relocation options for the bus station (in order to use Farraline Park as a civic space). 	<p>Development and Infrastructure;</p> <p>Community Services;</p> <p>Transport Scotland;</p>	<p>August 2014</p>	<p>Work is ongoing to examine viability of alternative bus station locations, potential changes to the existing bus station layout and developing the connectivity between the bus and the train station.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements to the existing bus station in terms of its connectivity with the train station should Farraline Park be maintained as the preferred location. Possible improvements to the public and green space at the train and bus station. Source opportunities and secure funding for additional or improved infrastructure. 	Stagecoach; Network Rail; HITRANS	August 2014 To be confirmed Ongoing	Should options appraisal identify need for improvements to Inverness Rail Station, Network Rail's Station Improvement Fund represents an opportunity for capital investment. Application, with supporting evidence would require to be produced.
3	Develop a City Centre Signage Strategy which will guide pedestrians and cyclists to key destinations through the most appropriate routes, including recommendations for infrastructure improvements. Key destinations for the strategy include Academy Street, the bus station, the rail station and the river.	Development and Infrastructure; HITRANS	To be confirmed	Part of £250,000 "Community Links" funding already secured from Sustrans can be used to enhance city centre signing as part of an overall signing strategy. Smarter Choices, Smarter Places funding (£20,163) has been secured to examine local mapping and signage of active travel options Estimated cost of commissioning consultants to develop the signage strategy to be confirmed, in addition to funding.
4	Maintain watching brief on opportunities to introduce Park and Ride facilities alongside future developments in Inverness and its surroundings, as recommended in the Inner Moray Firth Park and Ride Study (2008), prepared by Halcrow for HITRANS.	Development and Infrastructure; HITRANS	Ongoing	Planned development at East Inverness includes requirement for provision of a park and ride facility in accordance with planning permission 09/00141/OUTIN. Development of further facilities is a long term priority that requires ongoing consideration.

2 Development of Academy Street and its surroundings				
	Action	Responsible Service(s)/Partners	Delivery date	Related initiatives (including funding already committed or secured)
1	Secure Heritage Lottery Funding to support regeneration of Academy Street.	Development & Infrastructure; Inverness City Heritage Trust; Inverness BID	Ongoing	The council has secured a stage 1 pass from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards a £1, 670,000 Townscape Heritage project for Academy Street. The Townscape Heritage project proposes to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Bring vacant buildings back into use •Reinstate original shop fronts •Improve historic public spaces •Provide education and training opportunities •Provide business support services
2	Coordinated action to maximise re-use of redundant city centre floorspace: Purchase and develop 92-94 Academy Street as affordable housing. Ongoing engagement with property owners based on recent surveys of vacant office and retail space. Ongoing work to identify opportunities to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • secure funding from SG Town Centre Housing Fund and Regeneration Capital Grant Fund; • Use Empty Homes Initiative funding to bring vacant property into use. 	Development & Infrastructure / Highland Housing Alliance Development & Infrastructure Development & Infrastructure	Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing	The Development and Infrastructure Service has carried out a survey of existing vacant office and retail property to inform further discussion with owners. On 14.05.14 the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee gave approval for the Council to purchase the site at 92/94 Academy Street for development of 31 housing units. In 2013 the Council was awarded £400,000 from the Scottish Governments Empty Homes Loan Fund to bring empty properties back into affordable housing use.
3	Carry out a traffic modelling study to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse the capacity of city centre roads and junctions. 	Development and Infrastructure	August 2014	Work is currently ongoing within the Development and Infrastructure Service to complete the traffic modelling study.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess where areas of the city centre can be developed to optimise movement by all modes of transport. 			
4	<p>Use traffic modelling study results to develop a Capital Programme project, consisting of a preliminary design and cost estimate, to improve street layout, circulation, and lighting on and adjacent to Academy Street.</p> <p>Seek funding from Capital Programme to deliver the project.</p>	Development & Infrastructure	January 2015	<p>Work is currently ongoing within the Development and Infrastructure Service to complete the traffic modelling study.</p> <p>The estimated cost of preliminary consultancy work to develop this project has yet to be confirmed.</p>

3 Redevelopment of key sites to create visitor and cultural attractions				
	Action	Responsible Service(s)/Partners	Delivery date	Related initiatives (including funding already committed or secured)
1	<p>Options appraisal for new city centre culture and visitor attractions to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse appropriate uses and development potential of sites suitable for adaptive re-use; Identify relevant funding options. 	High Life Highland	Longer term Priority	High Life Highland is currently assisting a project group in an options appraisal.