

The Highland Council
Lochaber Area Committee
27 February 2014

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| Agenda Item | 6 |
| Report No | LA/3/14 |

Fort William Town Centre Regeneration – update on public event

Report by Director of Planning and Development

Summary

This report updates Committee on the Council's recent successful bid to Scottish Government for grant funding towards undertaking a design workshop (or Charrette) aimed at delivering regeneration in Fort William Town Centre. This opportunity follows the recent publication of a review of Scotland's town centres, and a subsequent Town Centre Action Plan published by the Scottish Government.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Council has recently been successful in a bid to Scottish Government for grant funding towards the undertaking of design workshops ("charrettes") relating to the regeneration of town centres and in particular the steps required to increase footfall and investment in the town. This follows the recent publication of the National Review of Town Centres External Advisory Group report: Community and Enterprise in Scotland's Town Centres and the Scottish Government's response to it – the Town Centre Action Plan. The bid proposal was submitted by the Council, in partnership with other interested parties, including Community Councils, businesses and other interested groups.
- 1.2 The grant from Scottish Government provides funding for the appointment of a specialist team of architects, urban designers and community planners to facilitate a community event where local people can shape the future of their town centre. The Council is now progressing arrangements to appoint a consultant team who will work alongside Council officials at the charrette events to capture and express the views of the community and local businesses on regenerating and shaping the town centre in the years to come. The charrette process is an intensive event where the ideas and aspirations of the local community are turned into a masterplan for the future. Uniquely these events are intended to assess the viability and deliverability of proposals so that an Action Plan can be drawn up for delivering the proposals identified.
- 1.3 The Council has already undertaken preliminary pre-event discussions with local community groups and business representatives aimed at eliciting the active support and involvement of local people in promoting and encouraging involvement in these forthcoming events.
- 1.4 This report asks Members to note progress of this work in Fort William, alongside similar work being undertaken in Nairn and Tain. For information, A full analysis of the Scottish Government's Town Centre Action Plan will be reported to a future meeting of full Council.

2 Project Aims

- 2.1 The particular aims of the proposed design workshop (or charrette) for Fort William are to:
- prepare an updated masterplan that identifies projects that can achieve an increase in footfall from both tourism-related visits and local people thereby increasing investment in the centre;
 - identify proposals for optimising access to and from the town centre as well as movement within and around the centre (particularly in the context of a vibrant harbour and beachfront area); and
 - explore mechanisms and funding processes for delivering improvements including the potential for a catalyst project.
- 2.2 In order to achieve these aims, the workshops will:
- review new and existing opportunities for regeneration within the town centre or other related areas;
 - address the balance between discouraging through-traffic but encouraging footfall in the town centre, including understanding requirements for car and coach parking;
 - examine how the public and private sector can make the best of their assets and investments to facilitate town centre regeneration;
 - explore opportunities for increasing Active Travel and Public Transport – improve the quality of pedestrian and cycle links (including alignment with the Council’s Carbon Clever plans) and facilities for public transport;
 - identify improvements to the quality of the built and natural environment, particularly the physical appearance of existing buildings, and opportunities for spaces to meeting and socialising; and
 - identify opportunities to improve utilisation of vacant sites and buildings and underused upper floors for housing.

3. Timescales

- 3.1 Originally, it was proposed to hold the events towards the end of March, however, in order to allow allow more time to sufficiently prepare for and engage communities in these exciting events we have amended the proposed date to mid/late April.

4. Fit with the Programme for the Highland Council

- 4.1 The work outlined in this report contributes to commitments within “Working together for the Highlands”, in particular supporting the development of urban centres and putting local communities at the forefront of these processes.

5. Resource Implications

- 5.1 The grant funding has provided a contribution of £15,000 from Scottish Government towards the total cost of providing the three charrette design workshops. An equal contribution of costs from the Council towards running the events will be made from existing budgets and will assist in providing venues, publicity, graphic design and other support costs.

5.2 There are no known direct legal, equality or climate change implications arising from this report. Effective integration of development opportunities with wider green travel and high design standards are a fundamental means of delivering the Council's carbon clever aspirations, and as such will be actively managed.

6 Recommendation

6.1 The Committee is invited to:-

- note the successful funding bid and current progress in preparations towards the charrette events aimed at delivering regeneration in Fort William Town Centre;
- agree to continue assisting officers in promoting and positively engaging communities, businesses and local interest groups in the forthcoming charrette event.

Designation: Director of Planning & Development

Date: 12th February 2014

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