

The Highland Council

Skye, Ross and Cromarty Area Committee
19 November 2014

Agenda Item	4
Report No	SRC/034/14

Update on Tain Town Centre Action Plan

Report by Director of Development & Infrastructure

Summary

This report updates Members on progress made in the preparation of a Tain Town Centre Action Plan. In May this year an event was held in Tain where local people were asked to identify the measures that would increase footfall in the town centre and deliver town centre regeneration. This has led to the preparation of a Town Centre Action Plan for the town, setting out a portfolio of preferred projects to increase footfall in the town centre and is intended to assist in applications for funding towards delivering such improvements.

This report seeks approval for a draft version of the Town Centre Action Plan to be finalised and published for consultation. The consultation will enable officers to consider any comments in progressing the Action Plan towards adoption as non-statutory Supplementary Guidance.

1. Background

- 1.1 Members will recall that in late 2013 The Council was successful in securing a bid from Scottish Government to undertake a series of design workshops targeting town centre regeneration. During April and May 2014 The Council held events in Nairn, Tain and Fort William which involved working closely with local communities to identify the best ways of maximising footfall and delivering town centre regeneration.
- 1.2 The Tain Town Centre Action Plan event engaged a range of stakeholders and generated a shared vision for the town centre's future. During the 2 day event on the 7th and 8th May, participants were involved in a range of sessions that sought to draw out their aims and aspirations for the future of the town centre, and prioritise these. The events were well attended, attracting representatives from a range of local businesses, community councils, community organisations, volunteer groups and local schools. Council officers from a range of services were also in attendance to assist participants in the process. The event concluded with a leaflet being circulated setting out the preferred projects and proposals suggested by those in attendance.

2 Action Plan Proposals

- 2.1 A draft Town Centre Action Plan has now been prepared setting out the ideas, projects and concepts identified at the town centre events under 3 main themes. The document focusses on the 14 prioritised ideas and identifies issues relating to their delivery as well as the consideration of other related ideas that were discussed at the event. The Action Plan and themes identified through the event are shown in the Appendix to this report. The themes and proposals are set out in brief below;

Improve town centre environment and diversify activity:

- Provide a mechanism to help deliver shopfront enhancement that reinstates traditional frontages to shops in the High Street.
- Promote a regular street market that can provide an outlet for local arts and crafts complementing local shops as well as attracting visitors to the town centre.
- Bring empty upper floor properties back to residential use.
- Provide a shared surface around the Court and Royal Hotel to support the historic core of the town centre and provide an accessible streetscape.

2.2 Improve movement networks and accessibility:

- Promote a review of traffic management rules and enforcement on High Street to ensure it is operating effectively and fit-for-purpose.
- Improve town centre car parks to make them attractive and safe.
- Ensure linkages to and from the town centre are accessible and well signposted to allow people to move easily and access services.

2.3 Develop new uses for redundant space and buildings:

- Create an attractive urban space that could be used as an outdoor venue for public events
- Promote redevelopment of the Old Picture House as an arts hub that can support a range of arts and crafts endeavours (including theatre/cinema)
- Promote the re-use of Duthac House for a viable use in the longer term. Temporary uses in the shorter term could be considered
- Promote redevelopment of The Grove for community or tourist use
- Investigate the relocation of the Sheriff Court in order to support wider civic use of landmark building (including a use for Tain Museum)
- Promote available space within the BT building for small business and business incubator use
- Promote effective use of the rail station building as a gateway to the town centre

3. Progress to date and timescales

3.1 The draft Town Centre Action Plan has been prepared for consultation. The consultation will enable officers to consider any comments received to progress the Action Plan towards adoption as non-statutory Supplementary Guidance, subject to Members' approval. We will report back to this committee on the feedback received during the consultation and with suggested next steps.

3.2 The Action Plan will be made available on the Council's website along with previous materials produced at the day's events, including the initial outcome document produced on the day.

3.3 It is intended that following the finalisation of all three Action Plans for Tain, Nairn and Fort William that these will all be the subject of public consultation in the same timeframe commencing early in the new year.

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. Implications

5.1 Resource

Resources to deliver the Action Plan are available from the Development and Infrastructure Service budget.

5.2 Legal

There are no known legal implications arising from this report.

5.3 Equalities

An Equalities Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken.

5.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever

There are no known climate change implications arising from this report.

5.5 Risk

There are no known risks arising from this report.

5.6 Gaelic

All headings in the Action Plan will be provided in Gaelic.

5.7 Rural

There are no development-related rural issues arising directly from this report.

Recommendation

The Committee is invited to:

- i. Agree for the draft Tain Town Centre Action Plan to be finalised and published for consultation early in 2015;
- ii. Agree for Members and officers to work in collaboration with community representatives in delivering the outcomes identified; and
- iii. Agree that any minor changes be made in consultation with the chair of the Skye, Ross and Cromarty Area Committee.

Designation: Director of Development & Infrastructure

Date: 5th November 2014

Author: Brian MacKenzie / Scott Dalgarno

Executive Summary

The Tain Town Centre Action Plan highlights a range of proposals and opportunities identified by the community and stakeholders that can deliver regeneration in Tain 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 Tain, for example the relocation of the Health Centre and Care Home, and options being explored for new education facilities. There is also a need to protect and enhance the town's significant built heritage for the benefit of both local community and the tourism industry.

The 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. The Action Plan builds on local stakeholder inputs, knowledge and understanding of Tain town centre, including concepts and ideas recorded. Although the current economic climate makes it more difficult to deliver projects such as these, 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 will need to lead the regeneration of their town centre by continuing to work closely with public sector partners and land owners.

This 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 three key themes:

1. Improve town centre environment and diversify activity
2. Improve movement networks and accessibility
3. Develop new uses for redundant space and buildings.

This 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 Tain Town Centre Action Plan highlights a range of proposals and opportunities identified by the community and stakeholders that can deliver regeneration in Tain town centre. The Plan takes account of the opportunities that will be presented through changes to public service provision in Tain, for example the relocation of the Health Centre and Care Home, and options being explored for new education facilities. There is also a need to protect and enhance the town's significant built heritage for the benefit of both local community and the tourism industry.

The purpose of the Action Plan is to provide guidance on future priorities for the town centre taking account of:

- 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.

The 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. Participants included representatives from community groups, schools, businesses, voluntary organisations and agencies. The Action Plan builds on local stakeholders' input, knowledge and understanding of Tain town centre, including concepts and ideas recorded. Although the current economic climate makes it more difficult to deliver projects such as these, 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 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 Tain Town Centre Action Plan. Section 2 presents the Action Plan configured to reflect the themes and proposals put forward at through public consultation. Section 3 focusses on delivery, highlighting issues and funding sources that enable successful outcomes.

Action Plan Process

The Tain Town Centre Action Plan is part of 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. Tain 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 were prepared for Nairn and Fort William. 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 Tain town centre, including ideas and proposals recorded at a two-day public workshop that took place at the Tain Parish Church Hall, Queen Street, Tain on 7 & 8 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 Tain could maintain its relevance for local people, businesses and visitors. These included a remarkable visual display of "Taintastic" ideas prepared by Craighill Primary School and input from a team of pupils from Tain Academy. Online comments were received from a number of stakeholders who were unable to attend the workshop. Appendix A summarises the workshop process and outputs including images of the school display.

Planning Policy

Local Development Plan policy for Tain is detailed in the Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan (IMFLDP), which sets out the Council's proposed policies and land allocations to guide development in the Inner Moray Firth area over the next 20 years. The development plan highlights the opportunity to re-focus development closer to Tain town centre prior to significant expansion beyond the existing settlement. It confirms that the Council will not support development that is likely to have an adverse effect on the town centre's vitality and viability. Developers whose proposals generate significant footfall must apply a sequential "town centre first" approach to selecting a development site. Where an out-of-town site is proposed the developer must justify why locations in or near Tain town centre are not suitable.

Acknowledging the significant contribution that Tain's historic core makes to the unique character of the town, the IMFLDP identifies a need to prepare a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan. It also encourages residential uses within the upper floors of town centre buildings.

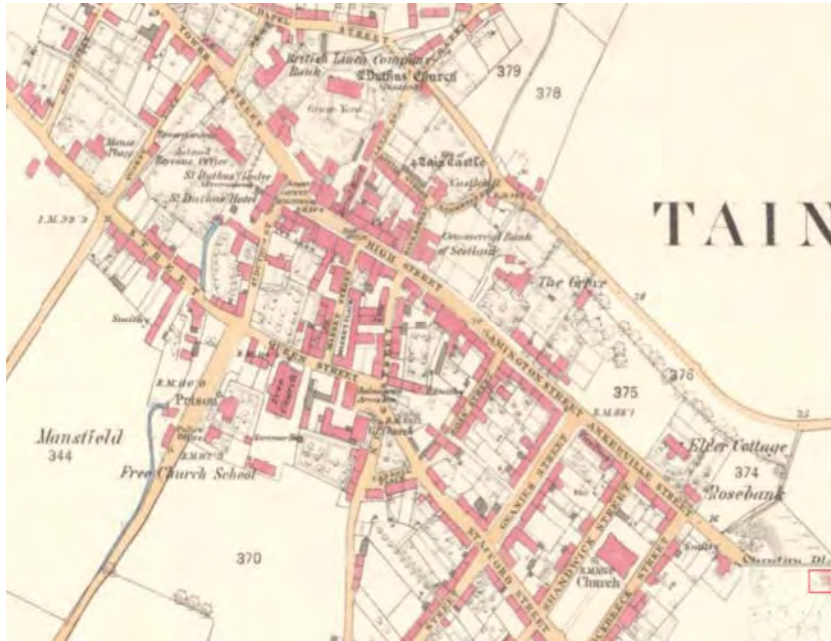


Figure 1: Tain, late 19th Century, showing the structure of places and spaces

Extent of Town Centre

The extent of Tain town centre put forward in this Action Plan is driven by outcomes and considerations addressed in the recent public consultation. Whereas its key focus relates to residential, commercial and administrative activities on the High Street, the plan also takes into account Duthac House to the west, the BT Exchange in the south and the railway station to the north.



Figure 2: Aerial view of Tain 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:

Residential

The Highland Council has a target to provide 5,000 new homes across the Highlands by 2017, including at least 688 new council houses following a 15-year gap in council house-building. Tain is one of the first Highland towns to receive new council houses with the development of a mix of 14 flats and bungalows at Jackson Drive.

Retail

Retail units in Tain town centre are located along a small stretch of the High Street and its immediate surroundings, including Market Street, Morangie Road and Lamington Street. These streets accommodate a wide variety of independent retailers, including shops specialising in bridal wear, crafts, flowers, gardening products, and toys. There is little to no presence of national retailers in the town centre, nor any national retailer currently seeking to locate to Tain.

Since 2010 Tain town centre has displayed a trend of change of use applications from retail to other use classes, – including residential (2), business (2) and hot food takeaway (1). This suggests that Tain may be struggling to attract enough demand in its town centre to sustain its retail offer but is in the process of diversifying its town centre.

Supermarkets in Tain include a newly built Asda (Knockbreck Road), Tesco (Shore Road), Co-op (High Street), and Lidl (Morangie Road).

Across the UK small to medium-sized towns such as Tain 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. According to the Scottish Retail Consortium/ KPMG, in March 2014 total retail sales were 3.8% lower than in March 2013, on a like-for-like basis.

Employment Property

There is very little demand for employment property in Tain and what exists is more likely to require small industrial employment property rather than office space. Tain has a small number of office properties, with no units currently vacant.

Tourism

Tain has five hotels and 13 Bed and Breakfast and Guest Houses.

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 Tain 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 (see Appendix A).

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 three key themes:

4. Improve town centre environment and diversify activity
5. Improve movement networks and accessibility
6. Develop new uses for redundant space and buildings.

Town Centre Action Plan

The Town Centre Action Plan has been configured to reflect the themes and proposals identified in the public consultation. It summarises both the rationale captured at the workshop and issues that arose from more detailed consideration of each proposal.

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 Tain 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. The record of short, medium and long term priorities put forward at the public consultation is presented in Appendix B.

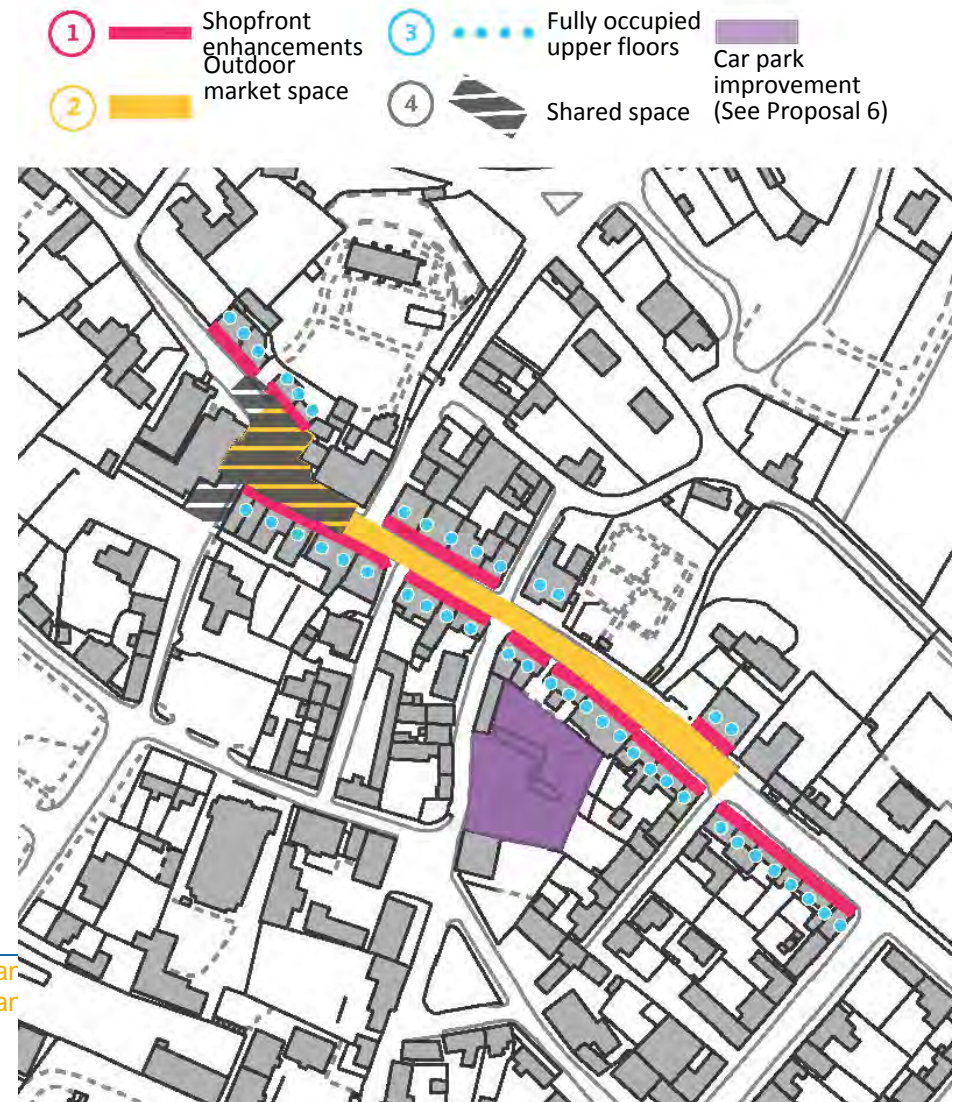
Theme: Improve town centre environment and diversify activity

Tain Town Centre Action Plan Improve town centre environment and diversify activity

The proposals below were put forward at the public consultation event to develop this plan. They take account of the need to safeguard Tain town centre's significant built heritage, increase footfall on the High Street, and enhance vitality by bringing vacant property, particularly dwellings, into active use. This theme overlaps with Proposal 6: Improve town centre car parks.

Proposals

1. Promote a shopfront enhancement project that re-instates traditional frontages to shops in the High Street.
2. Promote a regular street market that can provide an outlet for local arts and crafts complementing local shops as well as attracting visitors to the town centre.
3. Bring empty upper floor properties back to residential use.
4. Provide a shared surface around the Court and Royal Hotel to support the historic core of the town centre and provide an accessible streetscape.



Proposals and rationale (based on workshop discussions)

Issues and Options

1. Promote a shopfront enhancement project that re-instates traditional frontages



A shopfront conservation scheme could restore and enhance traditional shopfronts, which are a key feature of Tain High Street and surroundings. Coordinating and improving the appearance of traditional shopfronts is likely to attract more shoppers and visitors to the High Street.

- Historic Scotland (HS) provides partnership funding to Local Authorities to run grant schemes in Conservation Areas that includes support for traditional shopfront repair and reinstatement. Grant-aided work involves restoration and conservation of original shopfront features using traditional materials and high standards of workmanship. See Section 3 for further information.
- More work is needed to identify whether town centre shop owners are willing to contribute towards the cost of this work, which is a condition of securing HS grant.
- Council must prepare a Conservation Area (CA) Character Appraisal and CA Management Plan to apply for CARS funding. In addition the funding bid must demonstrate strong community buy-in to proposed regeneration, including partnership working between local organisations.

2. Develop and promote a regular High Street outdoor market



A market could become a regular attraction in the town centre, increasing footfall and providing a route to market for local home-based arts and crafts businesses.

- A growing number of Highland towns host a regular farmers' market, usually monthly, often increasing town centre activity and footfall.
- Market likely to incur road closure charges and fees for use of public space.
- The Scottish Association of Farmers' Markets provides detailed advice on the procedure for establishing a new market: [Scottish Farmers Markets](#)
- Tain has previous experience of the successful farmer's market that took place at Duthac Centre, Shandwick Street.

Theme 1: Improve town centre environment and diversify activity

Proposals and rationale (based on workshop discussions)

Issues and Options

3. Bring empty upper floors back to residential use



Converting redundant space into residential accommodation is a viable and vital use of upper storeys on the High Street. This could expand the choice of housing type and tenure for Tain residents and could also be used for tourist accommodation.

- A survey needs to be carried out to identify conversion potential: number, size and condition of empty upper floor properties.
- Sound economic argument for property owners: redundant property incurs ongoing maintenance costs whereas rented property attracts income.
- Conversion costs could be met by income from property rental and this work has potential to attract grants to improve energy efficiency.
- Council's Housing team is piloting a Scottish Government scheme to bring empty properties back into affordable housing use. Funding can assist owners to bring their property up to a suitable standard or assist the Council or a partner organisation to purchase properties and bring them up to standard affordable housing use.

4. Provide a shared surface around the Court and Royal Hotel



Shared space would enhance the setting of nearby historic buildings, provide a strong western gateway to the town centre and balance the needs of all street users, including pedestrians, vehicles, and cyclists. It was recognised that this proposal needs to be considered within a wider review of town centre traffic management (Proposal 5).

- Shared space design balances the needs of all street users by reducing traffic management features that prioritise vehicle movement. It has been introduced at key locations in many Scottish cities and towns to enable pedestrians to move more freely and safely.
- This would enhance the setting of this important High Street junction as an outdoor gathering /performance space.
- Traffic volume and safety of all road users are important considerations in assessing a location's shared space potential.

Tain Town Centre Action Plan

Improve movement networks and accessibility

The proposals below were put forward at the public consultation event to develop this plan. They reflect a need to make the town more welcoming and attractive to visitors along with a wish to improve pedestrian experience on the High Street by reducing the impact of heavy vehicles.

Proposals

5. Promote a review of traffic management rules and enforcement on High Street to ensure it is operating effectively and fit-for-purpose.
6. Improve town centre car parks to make them attractive and safe.
7. Ensure linkages to and from the town centre are accessible and well signposted to allow people to move easily and access services.



Theme 2: Improve movement networks and accessibility

Proposals and rationale (based on workshop discussions)

Issues and Options

5. Promote a review of traffic management rules and enforcement on High Street to ensure it is operating effectively and fit-for-purpose.



This review is needed to address: management of on-street car parking; traffic regulation enforcement; business/retailer servicing; and diverse needs of High Street users accessing businesses, shops and homes.

- The Council will shortly update the Traffic Order that controls on-street parking in Tain, including facilities for disabled parking and use of double-yellow lines;
- The Council recently agreed to consult local communities on the proposed introduction of a 20mph speed limit within a number of town centres including Tain.

6. Improve town centre car parks to make them attractive and safe



Town centre car parks need safer, more attractive pedestrian access, better landscaping, and improvements to parking surface and lighting.

- The Council has already identified a need to re-surface King Street carpark. Work will proceed as soon as funding is available. The Council is also scoping options and costs for improving the appearance of this car park.
- Car park work will also contribute to improving the town centre environment (Theme 1);

7. Ensure linkages to and from the town centre are accessible and well signposted to allow people to move easily and access services.



There is a need to improve links and signage between the town centre and Tain railway station and promote key attractions (Tain Museum, Rose Garden, parks and out-of-town attractions, e.g. Glenmorangie Distillery).

- Tain has an acute shortage of signage and other wayfinding features.
- Visitor experience would be significantly enhanced by appropriate travel and wayfinding information signposting landmarks and attractions.
- Wayfinding, combined with strong, attractive routes between key destinations, will benefit businesses, tourists, visitors and local residents and is likely to increase town centre footfall.

Theme 3: Develop new uses for redundant space and buildings

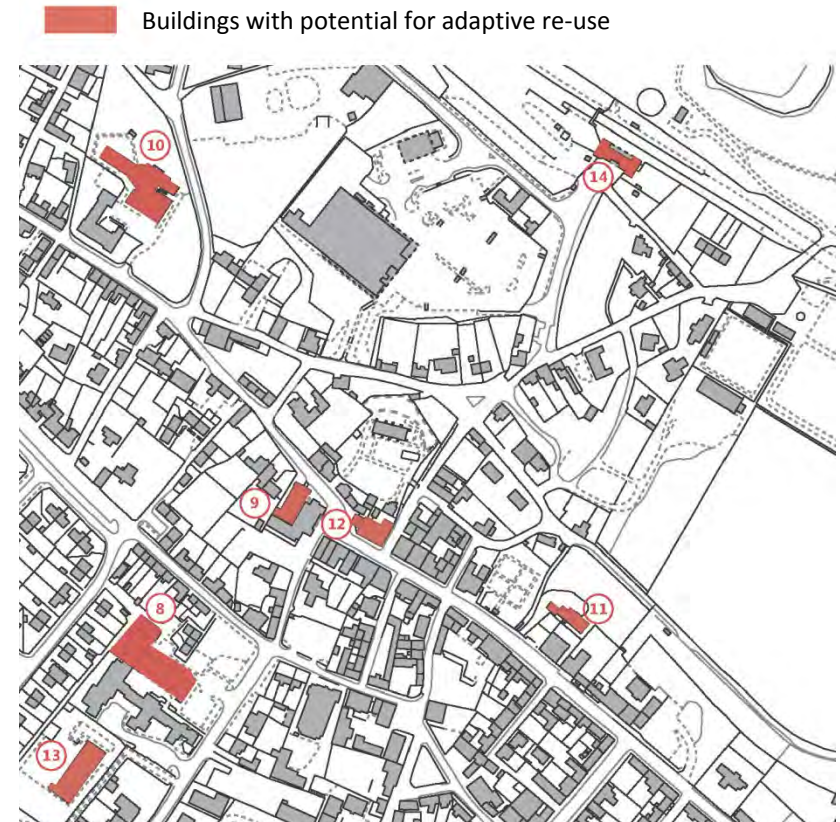
Tain Town Centre Action Plan

Develop new uses for redundant space and buildings

The proposals below were put forward at the public consultation event to develop this plan. They reflect a strong wish to bring properties back to active use, along with associated opportunities and challenges. Tain has recently experienced a sharp rise in the number of vacant properties as a result of ongoing rationalisation of public sector assets and service provision. Meanwhile there is a shortage of affordable accommodation for some activities, e.g. mother and toddler groups.

Proposals

8. Create an attractive urban space that could be used as an outdoor venue for public events
9. Promote redevelopment of the Old Picture House as an arts hub that can support a range of arts and crafts endeavours (including theatre/cinema)
10. Promote the re-use of Duthac House for a viable use in the longer term. Temporary uses in the shorter term could be considered
11. Promote redevelopment of The Grove for community or tourist use
12. Investigate the relocation of the Sheriff Court in order to support wider civic use of landmark building (including a use for Tain Museum)
13. Promote available space within the BT building for small business and business incubator use
14. Promote effective use of the rail station building as a gateway to the town centre.



8. Former health centre
9. Old Picture House
10. Duthac House
11. The Grove

12. Tain Sheriff Court
13. BT Building
14. Tain Rail Station

Proposals and rationale (based on workshop discussions)

Issues and Options

8. Create an attractive urban space that could be used as an outdoor venue for public events



Workshop attendees wished to see the former health centre site retained for public use. Options include a multi-functional outdoor space, which would be an attractive asset for the town centre, providing car-parking when not in use. Alternatively the site could accommodate start-up businesses, a gym or artist studios.

- Recently vacated former health centre owned by NHS Highland.
- Need to clarify NHS plans for future use of building and/or site.
- Site may be suitable for re-development as housing.
- Other venues may have potential to accommodate outdoor uses including: Duthac Centre; grounds of Duthac House; High Street; Rose Garden.
- Vacant retail properties (e.g on Stafford Street) may have potential to accommodate some required uses.
- Differing views on potential use highlights case for further consultation on community needs, which could also inform options appraisals for other vacant properties.

9. Promote the redevelopment of the Old Picture House as an arts hub



This redundant building is an important part of Tain's built and cultural heritage and has considerable potential to serve as a venue for film, performance and exhibitions. Substantial investment is required to undertake necessary repair and restoration including bringing the building up to current access standards.

- Cinema closed in 1968 and now redundant.
- Owned by Tain Heritage Trust responsible for a longstanding campaign to secure funding for repair, restoration and re-use.
- Similar community-led projects to restore and convert former cinema buildings in Scottish towns have received support from a wide variety of funders including Historic Scotland, the Big Lottery, Scottish Rural Development Fund Creative Scotland and the Heritage Lottery Fund. Examples include: The Birks Cinema, Dunkeld; The Picture House, Campbeltown; The Hippodrome, Falkirk.
- More information on potential funding sources is available in Section 3. Funders usually require evidence of a project's long term sustainable use, e.g. a viable business plan.

10. Develop a viable re-use for Duthac House in the long term while accommodating temporary short-term uses



Longer-term viable uses for Duthac House need to be investigated and should not rule out residential conversion or the potential to relocate the Court here from the High Street. In the meantime there may be scope to accommodate small scale uses that support small businesses and local community initiatives, providing both short term and temporary occupation.

- Listed building, former Council-run care home, partially occupied with arrangements in place to be vacated in the near future.
- Substantial garden grounds.
- Temporary buildings within grounds (some under construction) are used by Council for educational purposes, including a children's nursery.
- As yet no long term plans for the property's future.
- Options worth investigating for temporary use include an independent backpacker/youth hostel because this could make efficient use of existing care-home facilities.

11. Promote redevelopment of The Grove for community or tourist use



Due to its dilapidated condition the Grove requires significant investment to bring the house and grounds back to productive use. The possibility of having to re-develop the site cannot be ruled out.

- Large traditional detached house and grounds in private ownership.
- Located in Conservation Area (but not listed), which could limit options for re-development.
- Extensively damaged by fire in October 2014.
- Property vacant for many years and in need of very substantial repair and renovation.
- Prominent town centre location ideally placed to increase footfall on the High Street.

12. Investigate options for re-locating Sheriff Court and enabling wider civic use of landmark building



Relocating the Court could enable this landmark building to become a significant visitor attraction, provide new accommodation for Tain Museum and turn this part of the High Street into an important tourist hub.

- Ownership split between the Scottish Court Service (court accommodation) and The Highland Council (building flanking Castle Brae)
- Part of the Council's property is leased to Tain Museum.
- Council Chamber frequently used for Council /Community Council business.
- Court Service has recently invested in substantial building renovations, including double-glazing.
- Court activity congests pavements and roadway at certain times of day/week but also brings trade to town centre businesses.
- Finding a new use for the courthouse may bring less immediate benefit than re-developing a redundant building because it has a viable use, is fit for purpose, draws people to the town centre and creates footfall on the High Street.

13. Promote available space in BT building for small business and business incubator use



There are very few opportunities for new and existing small businesses to acquire office space in Tain. Unused space in this telephone exchange could be converted into business incubator units.

- Former telephone exchange, owned by BT, which still uses some accommodation.
- BT expected to dispose of a portion of the site in the near future.
- A property market review undertaken for this Action Plan revealed little demand for employment property, particularly office space, in Tain. Possible demand for small industrial space.
- More work needed to identify demand for and viability of renting space to small and emerging businesses, including options for business start-ups, e.g. pop-up units.

14. Promote effective use of the rail station building as a gateway to the town centre



The rail station's current redundant status does not present a welcoming gateway to Tain for visitors arriving by rail.

- Property owned by Network Rail but no longer in use for rail travel.
- A private developer has started work on converting this building into a restaurant having been granted Planning Permission in May 2014.
- Pedestrian route from rail station "gateway" to town centre would be substantially improved by bringing THC-owned site on Station Road into active use (formerly occupied by Tain Environmental Garden).

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 the NHS Highland and HIE.

Tain has a strong track record as a forward-thinking community whose active voluntary sector is already responsible for maintaining key assets such as the Rose Garden, public flowerbeds and a fine display of hanging baskets. The town is also celebrated for a vibrant arts and crafts sector, which is instrumental in attracting visitors.

Wherever possible, The Highland Council will align investment in Tain 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, Historic Scotland, 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.

Potential sources of funding and support

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.

Appendix C presents a list of funding sources prepared by Scotland's Towns Partnership, a membership organisation that represents and promotes the diversity of Scottish towns and supports organisations and groups that have an interest in or ownership of them. Detailed, up-to-date information on these funding streams is available from the Council's Ward Manager.

Sources of funding that could be of direct relevance to Tain town centre proposals include:

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.

Following recent public consultation Highland LEADER finalised a Draft Local Development Strategy and Business Plan for the new 2014-2020 LEADER Programme that will determine the kinds of projects this funding can support over the next six years. The draft strategy has been submitted for approval by Scottish Government, whose feedback is expected before the end of 2014. If approved, the 2014-2020 LEADER Programme will 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.

Historic Scotland

Historic Scotland's programme of Conservation Area Regeneration Schemes (CARS) provides financial assistance, over a five year period, for Conservation Area based regeneration and conservation initiatives undertaken by Local and National Park Authorities, community groups and other 3rd sector organisations experienced in delivering multi-funded projects. Since 2005 Historic Scotland has awarded £27m of investment in CARS schemes. At present 28 schemes are in operation across Scotland including one in Dingwall.

A Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan must be in place to bid for funding to run a CARS project. The bid must reflect priorities set out in the management plan and evidence partnership support and buy-in from key local stakeholder groups.

A CARS project can fund:

- A repairs programme for priority projects.
- A small grants scheme (such as to homeowners or retailers).
- Community engagement through education programmes and training opportunities in traditional skills.
- Training opportunities for traditional craftsmen.
- Public realm conservation and restoration.
- Administration costs including the appointment of a dedicated project officer.

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.

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.

Big Lottery

The Big Lottery programme *Investing in Communities: Growing Community Assets* is 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.

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.