

The Highland Council
City of Inverness Area Committee

3 March 2016

Agenda Item	6
Report No	CIA 8/16

Update on key City Centre initiatives
Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure

Summary

This report updates Members on various initiatives, planned or underway, that address three key priorities identified in the most recent public consultation on land use and transport priorities in the city centre: (1) improvements to access and connections; (2) creation of new visitor and cultural attractions; and (3) development of Academy Street and its surroundings. It gives details of 22 current or planned initiatives to address these priorities, which are also mapped in **Appendix 1**. **Appendix 2** presents a range of concept images for upgrading Inverness Rail Station as part of a proposed multi-million pound investment in station improvements. The report also highlights progress in updating the Inverness City Centre Development Brief.

1. Background

- 1.1 At its meeting on 2 September 2014, the City of Inverness Area Committee noted progress on City Centre projects arising from a public consultation on land use and transport priorities in the City Centre. The Committee agreed that work should proceed on City Centre initiatives, focussing on three key themes:
- improvements to City Centre access and connections;
 - redevelopment of key sites to create visitor and cultural attractions; and
 - development of Academy Street and its surroundings.
- 1.2 This report updates Members on a wide range of initiatives, planned or underway, that address these priorities, which have been driven forward through the Inverness City task Force chaired by the Director of Development and Infrastructure. It also highlights re-development of properties and sites to increase the number of people living and working in the city centre. **Appendix 1** presents a map showing 22 city centre initiatives referred to in Sections 2, 3 and 4 of the report and cross-referenced to this map.
- 1.3 Section 5 reports progress on updating the Inverness City Centre Development Brief.

2. Improve access and connections

- 2.1 Inverness Railway Station (Map ref 9)
In September 2015 the Council, Abellio Scotrail (AS) and HITRANS entered

into a joint commission to develop design ideas for improvements to Inverness Railway Station. AS plans to invest up to £2m on station improvements as part of its franchise agreement with Transport Scotland.

- 2.2 Dundee based architects Nicol Russell Studios were commissioned to develop ideas and sketch proposals for a wide range of station improvements, expanding the scope of work originally proposed in the AS franchise bid. Their brief included: improvements to all three entrances and Station Square, a refurbished concourse, expanded commercial and retail opportunities and an improved walking route between the Station, bus station and Rose Street car park.
- 2.3 **Appendix 2** illustrates a range of concept images for improving station entrances, including substantial re-modelling of the main frontage to Station Square.
- 2.4 AS is currently finalising options and costings for proposed changes with a particular focus on improvements that fulfil their franchise commitment, which are due to be submitted to Transport Scotland at the end of March.
- 2.5 In the meantime AS, Council officials and HITRANS are scoping options to secure additional funds to deliver the wider range of improvements. Potential funding sources include:
 - Inverness Townscape Heritage Project funding of £320k, earmarked for improving the public realm of Station Square;
 - Community Links Plus, a Scottish Government grant programme administered by Sustrans to undertake improvements to walking and cycling infrastructure; and
 - the Council's Carbon Clever grant fund, subject to appropriate Committee approval.
- 2.6 It is also likely that the three organisations will make a joint bid to the Scottish Stations Fund (SSF), a £30m grant pot administered by Network Rail on behalf of the Scottish Government to improve the public's access to railway services. It is the responsibility of Scottish Ministers to agree which projects are supported by the fund.
- 2.7 The SSF grant is contingent on the availability of third party funding, albeit not match funding. The Committee is therefore asked to agree, in principle, to future submission of an application to the Inverness Common Good Fund for a contribution to third party funding for station improvements, as part of a proposed partnership bid to the SSF.
- 2.8 Streetscape improvements: Ness Bridge/Young Street (Map ref 8)
Work to resurface and waterproof Ness Bridge and install a new toucan crossing linking Huntly Street to Ness Walk was completed in October 2015.
- 2.9 Streetscape improvements: Castle Wynd and Bridge Street (Map ref 7)
The Council is preparing to carry out streetscape improvements at Castle Wynd and Bridge Street following forthcoming improvements to the external

environment of Inverness Castle (Para 3.4). The project will be funded through an initial allocation of City Deal funding from the UK Treasury.

2.10 Inverness City Active Travel Network Route 6 (Slackbuie)

Progress has been made on this project, part funded through Sustrans Community Links in 2015/16, to improve walking and cycling infrastructure between Slackbuie and the city centre (anticipated spend £50k). The Project Design Unit is managing the delivery of the works and these are expected to be completed by the end of this financial year.

2.11 Community Links Programme (2016/17)

The Transport Planning Team has submitted the following bids relating to Inverness Area before the application closure deadline (16 February):

1. Accessibility and Signage: improvements to active travel users in Inverness.
2. Space by Water: walking and cycling improvements in the South Kessock area as part of a wider scheme subject to a successful outcome of a bid for 'Green Infrastructure' funds.

The decision on funding is anticipated in Spring 2016

2.12 Community Links Plus

Following the initial Expression of Interest and the Stage 2 submission to this funding competition the 'Inverness City Active Travel Network' has been shortlisted to the final 5 projects in Scotland. The final Stage 3 submission is now being prepared. The project aims to double the levels of cycling over the three years of this particular programme (2016 -2019).

The Inverness City Active Travel Network is a city wide project with proposed interventions that include:

- enhancing 'East to West' active travel corridor;
- provision of new links to overcome constraints; and
- improving connections to public transport hubs.

In addition, smarter measures will include route mapping, travel planning, engagement with schools and further education establishments, and improved wayfinding and legibility. This project will provide wider benefits including higher quality of public realm, reduction of traffic congestion, air quality improvements, and health benefits.

The announcement for funding is anticipated in summer 2016.

2.12 City Centre Wayfinding

As agreed by this Committee on 10 September 2015, Council has commissioned a consultant to develop a prototype wayfinding map for a sample area of the city centre, funded by the Inverness Common Good Fund. Wayfinding is the term used for signs, maps and other devices that convey information about location and directions to visitors and residents. A stakeholder workshop took place at the Spectrum Centre on 11 February 2016 to inform the preparation of a draft map by the end of March. The prototype map will be used to improve wayfinding in the city centre in the context of anticipated streetscape improvements at Castle Wynd and Inverness Rail Station. In the longer term, wayfinding could consist of an integrated network of

street information panels with maps, directional signs and printed maps, combined with digital mapping to facilitate use of smart technology.

3 Redevelop key sites to create visitor and cultural attractions

3.1 Castle Hill (Map ref 5)

In December 2015, the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service confirmed its intention to vacate Inverness Castle to set up a new justice centre in the city by 2019. This brings the Castle complex a step closer to fulfilling strong public interest in adapting it to a more appropriate use, facilitating wider public access and enjoyment.

3.2 In August 2014 the Inverness Castle Working Group was set up by the Scottish Government and the Highland Council to explore the potential to transform the Castle into an iconic tourist attraction in the longer term.

3.3 The group commissioned an options study whose findings were reported in a public consultation that ran from November 2015 to January 2016. The consultation invited feedback on the future of Castle Hill, including adaptive re-use of its historic fabric. Over 200 responses were received and initial findings indicate strong support for the creation of a museum and art gallery on the site. The outcome of the consultation will be reported in full to the Working Group on 11 March 2016. In due course, it will inform the brief for a forthcoming architectural competition for Castle Hill forming part of celebrations surrounding Scotland's Year of Innovation, Architecture and Design 2016.

3.4 A project delivery group will be established by the Council and the Scottish Government to guide the next stage in the evolution of Castle Hill. A range of community and local interest groups will be asked to input to this process.

3.4 Inverness Castle: North Tower alterations and public realm improvements (Map ref 6)

In April 2015 the Council secured planning permission to open up the Castle's North Tower as a tourist attraction including the creation of two viewing platforms and a tourist shop. This part of the Castle is in Council ownership. A contractor was recently appointed to undertake these alterations along with improvements to the external environment of the Castle, including floodlighting, footpaths and seating. This work is due to be completed by the end of 2016.

3.5 Inverness Town House (Map ref 11)

Following a site start in February 2015, the Council will invest £4.2m over six years to conserve the external fabric of Inverness Town House.

3.6 Inverness Museum and Art Gallery (Map ref 8)

In December 2015 the Council applied for planning permission to over-clad the façade of Inverness Museum and Art Gallery (IMAG), which dates to the 1970s and is in poor condition. It is anticipated that this improvement will draw attention to and attract more visitors to the museum, art gallery and café. It will also improve the appearance of the streetscape on Castle Wynd. If approved, the project is expected to start in 2016. It will be funded through an initial

allocation of City Deal funding from the UK Treasury.

- 3.7 Public Art Project: River Ness Flood Alleviation Scheme (Map ref 19)
Over £0.75m has been raised to deliver six art projects in association with the city's new flood alleviation scheme. These include proposals for a major new visitor destination on the banks of the River Ness (The Gathering Place) and a children's riverside water feature. A public consultation inviting feedback on the proposals took place at Inverness Museum and Art Gallery between 23 January and 20 February 2016.
- 3.8 All six projects are due to be completed by spring 2017 under the governance of the Inverness City Arts Committee, supported by the City Manager with contracted support from High Life Highland. Project funders are: The Highland Council (£106k), Inverness Common Good Fund (£281k); Creative Scotland (£306k); and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (£66k).
- 3.9 Craft Beer Bar and Hostel: 68 Church Street (Map ref 21)
In August 2015 planning permission was granted to convert a vacant retail unit to a craft beer bar and beer garden. The Brewery has longer term plans to convert the redundant upper floor offices to hostel use.
- 3.10 Glen Mhor Hotel: Micro-brewery and Visitor Centre (Map ref 22)
In September 2015 planning permission was granted to alter and extend its premises on Ness Bank to create a new micro-brewery, pub, visitor centre and restaurant.
- 3.11 Midmills Campus (Map ref 17)
The Council has entered into a joint venture with retirement home specialists McCarthy & Stone to convert and re-develop the former Inverness College UHI complex to form creative hub and new sheltered and affordable housing (45 sheltered flats and 30 age-restricted flats). Planning permission will be subject to securing an appropriate use for the site's important listed building. A public exhibition of development proposals is due to be held in early 2016, prior to submission of the planning application.

4 Develop Academy Street and surroundings

- 4.1 Inverness Townscape Heritage Project (Map ref 13)
£3m will be invested to regenerate the built environment of Academy Street over the next five years through a grant scheme for repair and restoration of historic fabric. The project is funded by £1.49m from the Heritage Lottery Fund, £725k from the Council, and £946k from Historic Scotland via the Inverness City Heritage Trust. As set out in Para 2.5, £320k of grant funding is earmarked for public realm improvements to Station Square.
- 4.2 Victorian Market (Map ref 1)
The Victorian Market is an asset of the Inverness Common Good Fund that is managed by the Council. The Common Good Fund recently spent £1m on refurbishing the Market roof and installing new windows and heating. The Council is currently working with market traders and Inverness Business

Improvement District (BID) to identify ways to sustain and improve the economic viability of the market and attract increased footfall.

4.3 New residential development: 92-94 Academy Street (Map ref 12)

In partnership with the Highland Housing Alliance and a private developer, the Council recently invested £4m on this project, including site purchase, to develop 31 residential units for affordable rent. The first tenants took up residence in December 2015.

4.4 Office and service centre: 1-5 Union Street (Map ref 16)

In autumn 2015 the former Santander Bank building at the corner of Union St and Academy St was brought back to use as a service centre for Serco, the international service company that runs the Caledonian Sleeper train. Serco is creating 20 high quality jobs in the city centre by re-locating its booking office and customer call centre to Inverness.

4.5 Proposed student accommodation: Rose Street (Map ref 12)

Planning permission was granted in 2013 to develop a first phase of mixed use retail/residential development for student accommodation at Rose Street, supplementing accommodation being built for the new UHI Inverness College Campus. Proposals for a second phase of student accommodation were granted planning permission in October 2015. Foundation work on Phase I began in September 2015.

4.6 Eastgate Centre (Map ref 4)

Prior to the sale of Eastgate shopping centre in 2015 its owners secured two separate planning permissions to accommodate new restaurants, leisure uses and improvements to the public open space at Falcon Square. Since the Centre changed hands, its new owners have confirmed an interest in pursuing similar development opportunities.

4.7 Proposed new residential development: Glebe Street (Map ref 20)

Planning permission was granted in January 2016 for erection of 60 new privately owned residential units at this riverside site, formerly occupied by a municipal swimming pool, which has lain vacant since the pool was demolished in the 1980s.

4.8 Office refurbishment: 1-5 Church Street (Map ref 16)

Work is nearing completion on an £1.8m renovation of this 1970s office building, including refurbishment of the façade, funded by Inverness Common Good Fund. The property will be let in due course to Skills Development Scotland to create a Skills Centre, bringing 25 jobs to the city centre.

4.9 Proposed new residential development: Raining's Stairs (Map ref 10)

This gap site, abutting the southern edge of Raining's Stairs. was purchased by a property developer in 2015 for development as mixed tenure housing.

4.10 Residential conversion: 99 Church Street (Map ref 14)

The Council plans to enter into a design-build contract with a private developer, who recently bought this property, to convert its upper floors into eight

residential units for affordable rent. Conversion work is expected to commence before the end of 2016.

5 Inverness City Centre Development Brief

- 5.1 With all of the ongoing activity reported in Sections 2 - 4 above, it is an opportune time to complete work on the review of the Inverness City Centre Development Brief (ICCDB), which is Supplementary Guidance that identifies and promotes opportunities for the re-development and enhancement of the city core. The current ICCDB was approved by this Committee in October 2012 and adopted in March 2013.
- 5.2 The review and proposed update is intended to provide more definite parameters for the determination of future planning applications in the City Centre. It will feature an outcomes-based approach to promoting Inverness as: A great place for business; A great place to visit; A great place to live; Accessible and easy to move about; Distinctive and attractive.
- 5.3 The brief will feature relevant Council action to deliver these outcomes and highlight achievements to date.
- 5.4 It will also identify development parameters for key city centre sites such as: Inverness College (Longman), Inverness Rail Station, Royal Mail (Strothers Lane), and development opportunities in the vicinity of Castle Hill.
- 5.5 A draft development brief will be reported to the next meeting of this Committee on the 2 June 2016.

6 Implications

- 6.1 Equality and Rural
There are no known direct equality or rural implications arising from this report.
- 6.2 Environmental
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.
- 6.3 Resource, Climate Change/Carbon Clever, Legal and Risk Implications
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:

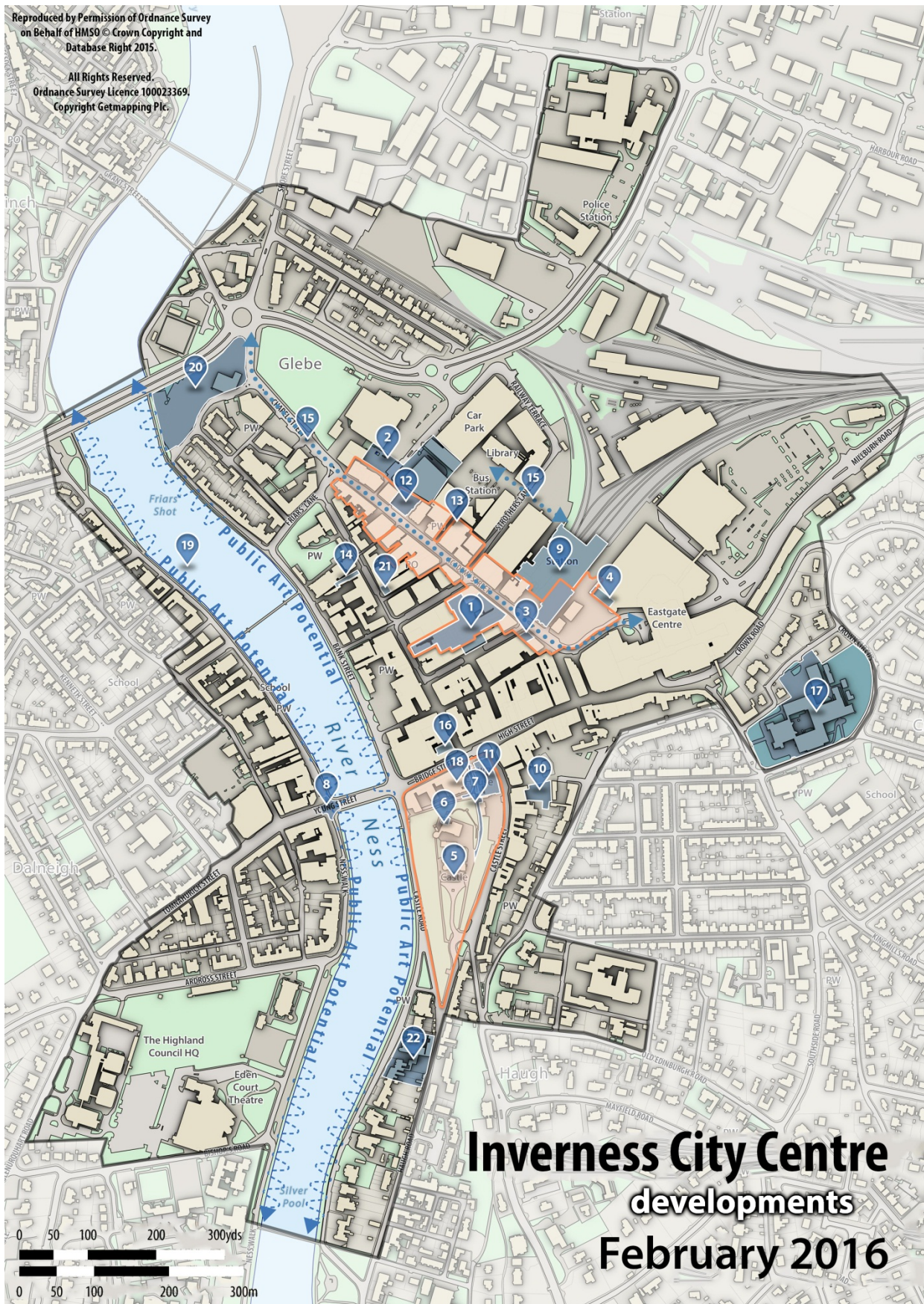
- note progress in address city centre priorities detailed in Sections 2 – 4 and **Appendices 1 and 2**, which identify 22 current or planned initiatives to improve access and connections, create new visitor and cultural attractions and regenerate Academy Street and its surroundings;
- agree in principle to the future submission of an application to the Inverness Common Good Fund for a contribution to third party funding for Inverness Rail Station improvements, as part of a proposed partnership bid to the Scottish Stations Fund; and
- agree to the preparation of a draft Inverness City Centre Development Brief by June 2016.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

Date: 19 February 2016

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Map of 22 city centre initiatives (referred to in Sections 2-4)



MAP LEGEND

1. Victorian Market
2. Student Accommodation
3. Office Development: Academy Street
4. Eastgate Centre
5. Castle Hill
6. Inverness Castle: North Tower alterations
7. Streetscape improvements: Castle Wynd and Bridge Street
8. Ness Bridge/Young Street
9. Inverness Rail Station
10. Residential development: Raining's Stairs
11. Town House Maintenance Project
12. Residential development: 92-94 Academy Street
13. Inverness Townscape Heritage Project
14. Residential development: 99 Church Street
15. Place-making proposal
16. Office Development: 1-5 Church Street
17. Midmills campus
18. Inverness Museum and Art Gallery
19. Public Art Project: River Ness Flood Alleviation Scheme
20. Residential development: Glebe Street
21. Proposed craft beer bar and hostel: 68 Church Street
22. Proposed micro-brewery and visitor centre: Glen Mhor Hotel

APPENDIX 2

Inverness Rail Station: concept images for improving frontage to Station Square



1 - Steel columns



2 - Overcladding of Existing Building



3 - Masonry columns

APPENDIX 2 (cont)

Inverness Rail Station: concept images for improving entrance to/from Falcon Square



Station entrance viewed from Falcon Square



Cross section through station entrance