

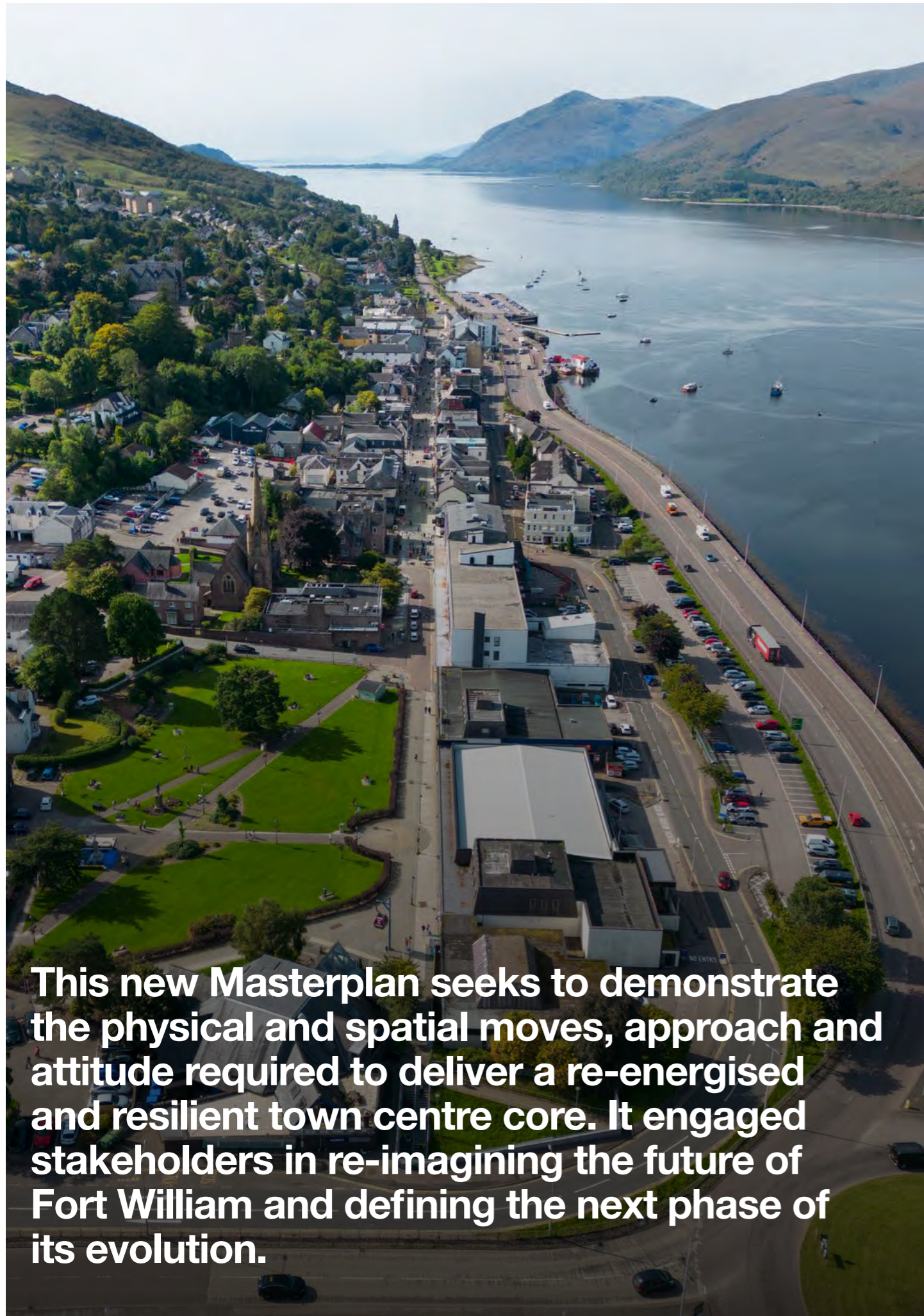
# Draft Issue

January 2024



# Fort William Town Centre Masterplan





**This new Masterplan seeks to demonstrate the physical and spatial moves, approach and attitude required to deliver a re-energised and resilient town centre core. It engaged stakeholders in re-imagining the future of Fort William and defining the next phase of its evolution.**

“...a thriving town centre to benefit community, tourism and commerce.”

## introduction

We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to repopulate the town centre and reintroduce the diverse uses that meet the community’s needs. Reconnecting the community to the centre and focusing development in a core area is not only critical to the wellbeing of that community, it is the most environmentally responsible future we can strive for.

This document provides a framework for the Fort William 2040 Programme Board to deliver the social and cultural ambitions of the community whilst recognising the importance of tourism and the town’s role as Gateway to the Highlands.

It presents a ‘joined up’ approach to new development where uses are positioned in relation to each other to create the vibrancy and activity that is key to a thriving town centre to benefit community, tourism and commerce.

Bringing together the many positive moves currently in development in Fort William through the FW2040 Vision, this masterplan is a clear statement of ambition that is based on best practice and known successes. It is influenced by a depth of market understanding



and is achievable. It offers a shared vision and projects an alignment of intent that will position the town well to apply for future public funding and attract private investment.

### A Town Centre for Everyone

Our town centres offer a rich and authentic environment that, for generations, have been the back-drop to the ceremonies and memorable events of our community. Furthermore, the health of a town centre reflects the health of the wider community or society. An energised town centre that is open to all and where there is alignment, engagement and transparency on decision making will combat

isolation, create opportunity and enrich the lives of the community it serves.

It is critical that we achieve a perception shift in our community and stakeholders and reposition Fort William in people’s psyche and at the core of this proposal is the need to reconnect all of us to our town centre.

This study shows a vision of a better Fort William that meets the requirements of all regardless of age, disability or wealth.

# Fort William 2040 Vision

The Fort William 2040 Programme Board are at a critical stage in the development and implementation of the Fort William 2040 (FW2040) Vision.

## What is the Vision?

Launched in 2018, Fort William 2040 is an ambitious vision for the future of Fort William and Lochaber.

The Vision was developed in partnership with local people, businesses, interest groups and public agencies who worked together to finalise the masterplan and agree how and when future development would be delivered.

Initial discussions were centred on five themes: Transport, Housing, Energy, Tourism and Education, Skills & Talent Attraction. These were refined and evolved in the final iteration of the Vision to be as follows:

## A Great Place to Live

With a unique landscape and distinctive local communities. Sufficient and affordable housing is a key issue for the area, as well as facilities and accommodation for visitors, with a need to attract and retain a diverse range of residents, visitors, and enterprises.

## A Connected Place

Highlights the need to maximise opportunities for a diverse range of transport and other connecting networks including new technologies.

## A Place Facing Water

This theme focuses on the

importance of water and the need to take full advantage of existing water assets to support industry, tourism, and communities.

## A Place with Collective Vision

This underpins all work on FW2040 and is about new ways of working based on strong partnerships and good communication.

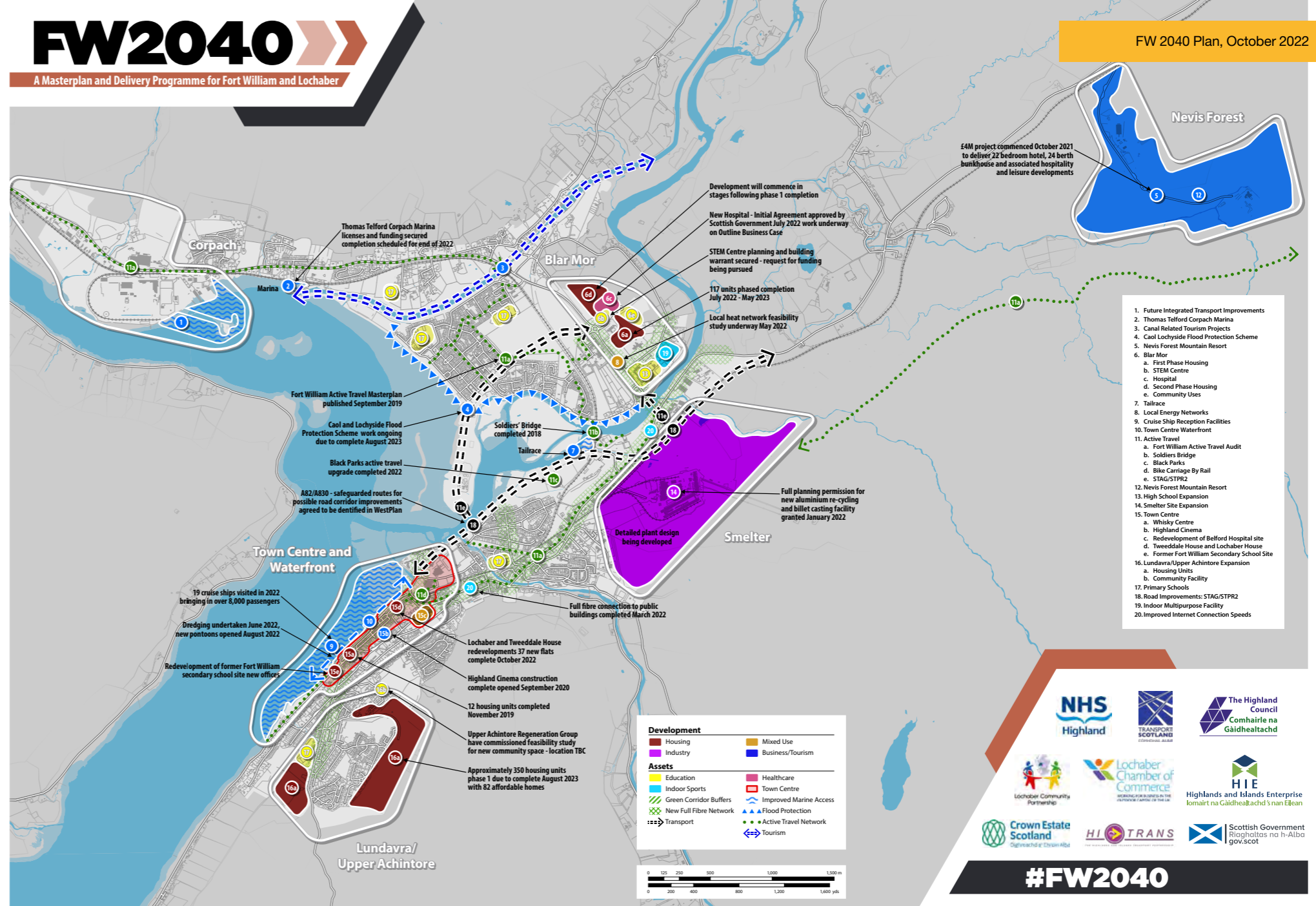
## Addressing the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency

Project delivery partners should work towards Fort William becoming a net-zero town. All of the larger FW2040 projects will be subject to further environmental assessment as they progress. All projects regardless of scale, will be encouraged to consider ways in which they can contribute to the net-zero target.

## The Published Vision

The Vision initially illustrated 31 projects (growing to 35 by 2022), together with a delivery programme and has been constantly updated, published and monitored and, as of June 2023, consisted of 21 projects following the completion of 11 and the removal of a further 3.

A number of projects located within the town centre area are either complete or nearing completion and there is now a need to position Fort William town centre at the core of the FW2040 Programme.



## Relevance of this study

This Town Centre Masterplan and Delivery Framework is one of the stated projects of the wider FW2040 Vision and is absolutely critical as it forms a key component of the FW2040 programme going forward.

“ This Masterplan and Delivery Framework is absolutely critical as it forms a key component of the FW2040 programme moving forward. ”

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# Fort William

## A connected, inclusive & resilient town centre

**This document shows a future Fort William transformed into vibrant mixed use and better connected town centre that meets the needs of the whole community, both within the town and the wider Lochaber area.**

The masterplan strives to forge a community focused future, fostering connectivity, livability, and economic vitality for generations to come.

Through the introduction of new homes, workplace, leisure and essential services, all set within a transformed and greened urban realm, it seeks to redefine Fort William as a benchmark for accessibility and sustainability.



# A town centre connected...

## ...to the Community

An inclusive and accessible town centre with increased levels of living, working and play for all, regardless of mobility or income

## ...to the Water

A town centre that celebrates its location on the shore of Loch Linnhe and makes the most of the opportunity this presents

## ...to the Highlands

A town centre that serves not just its local population but a vibrant hub for the wider region, home to essential civic and cultural services

## ...to Visitors

A energised and attractive town centre that presents itself as a true 'Gateway to the Highlands', building on the strong tourism market to ensure growth and resilience



# context



# Fort William today

**Established as Fort William in 1688, the town lies at the southern end of the Great Glen near the head of Loch Linnhe, one of Scotland's longest sea lochs. The town and its suburbs are surrounded by mountains. It is close to Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in the British Isles.**

The town is centred on the High Street, which was pedestrianised in the 1990s. Connected to this there are several squares: Monzie Square, Station Square, where the long-since demolished railway station used to be, Gordon Square and Cameron Square formerly known as Town Hall Square. There is also Fraser Square that plays host to the Imperial Hotel and has a visual connection to the loch.

The main residential areas immediately adjacent to the town centre, Upper Achintore and the Plantation are located on the steeply sloping area south-west of the high street. Inverlochy, Claggan, An-Aird, Lochside, Caol, Banavie and Corpach outwith the centre are the other main residential areas.

## Climate

Fort William is one of the wettest locations in the British Isles, with December being the wettest month.

## Tourism

Fort William is a major tourist centre on the Road to the Isles, with Glen Coe just to the south, Ben Nevis and Aonach Mòr to the east, and Glenfinnan to the west. Known as 'the Outdoor Capital of the UK' it is a centre for hillwalking and climbing due to its proximity to Ben Nevis and many other Munros. It is also known for its downhill mountain

bike track. It is the start/end of both the West Highland Way (Milngavie – Fort William) and the Great Glen Way (a walk/cycle way Fort William–Inverness). Glenfinnan, 17 miles away, is home to the famous Glenfinnan Viaduct that has become known to millions in recent years as the "Harry Potter Bridge" after it featured in the films of the books by J.K. Rowling.

## Transport

The West Highland Line passes through Fort William. Owing to the difficult terrain in the area, the line from Glasgow to the south, enters from the north-east.

The original railway station, which was opened in 1894, was at the south end of the town. The consequence of this decision was that the town was separated from the lochside by railway tracks until the 1970s, when the present by-pass was built, and the station was re-located to its current position. An overnight train, the Caledonian sleeper, has its terminus at Fort William. The stands for local buses and express coaches are on MacFarlane Way adjacent to the railway station.

The Caledonian Canal connects the Scottish east coast at Inverness with the west coast at Corpach near Fort William.

The Corran Ferry crosses Loch Linnhe, connecting the A82 to A861. Fort William is located on the A82, a major road that runs from Glasgow to Inverness and is one of the principal north-south routes in Scotland. It is mostly a trunk road managed by Transport Scotland, who view it as an important link from the Central Belt to the Scottish

Highlands and beyond. Along with the A9 and the A90 it is one of the three major north-south trunk roads connecting the Central Belt to the North. The A82 creates a barrier between the town centre and the loch side, the station and the north east of the town. The town notably does not present an attractive aspect to the A82 or the loch side.

## Employment

Fort William is the business hub of Lochaber, with companies in a wide range of industries, including aluminium smelting, timber processing, fish farming, forestry and a wide range of local services from building and construction to retail, and of course, tourism.

Just outside the town is a large aluminium plant operated by Alvalde and powered by the Lochaber hydroelectric scheme BSW Timber, in nearby Corpach is the largest sawmilling business in Great Britain and the company's heritage go back to 1848.

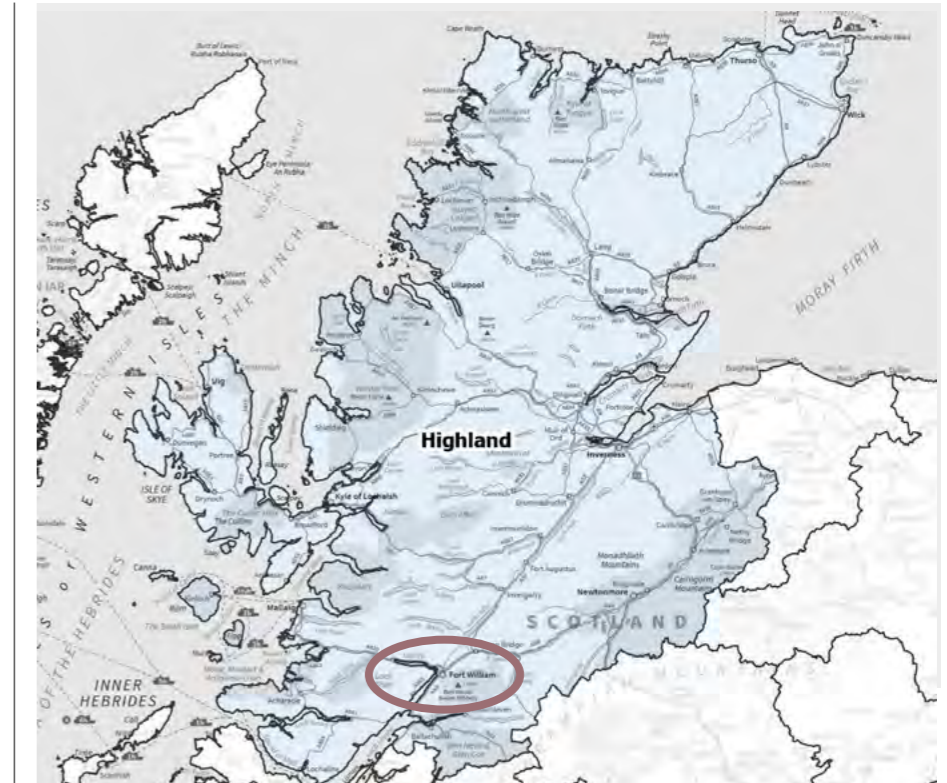
## Education

Lochaber High School is the local high school and serves a large catchment area which includes the surrounding villages. West Highland College is part of the University of the Highlands & Islands. It hosts the School of Adventure Studies (SOAS) offering both FE courses & HE honours degrees.

## National & Regional Context

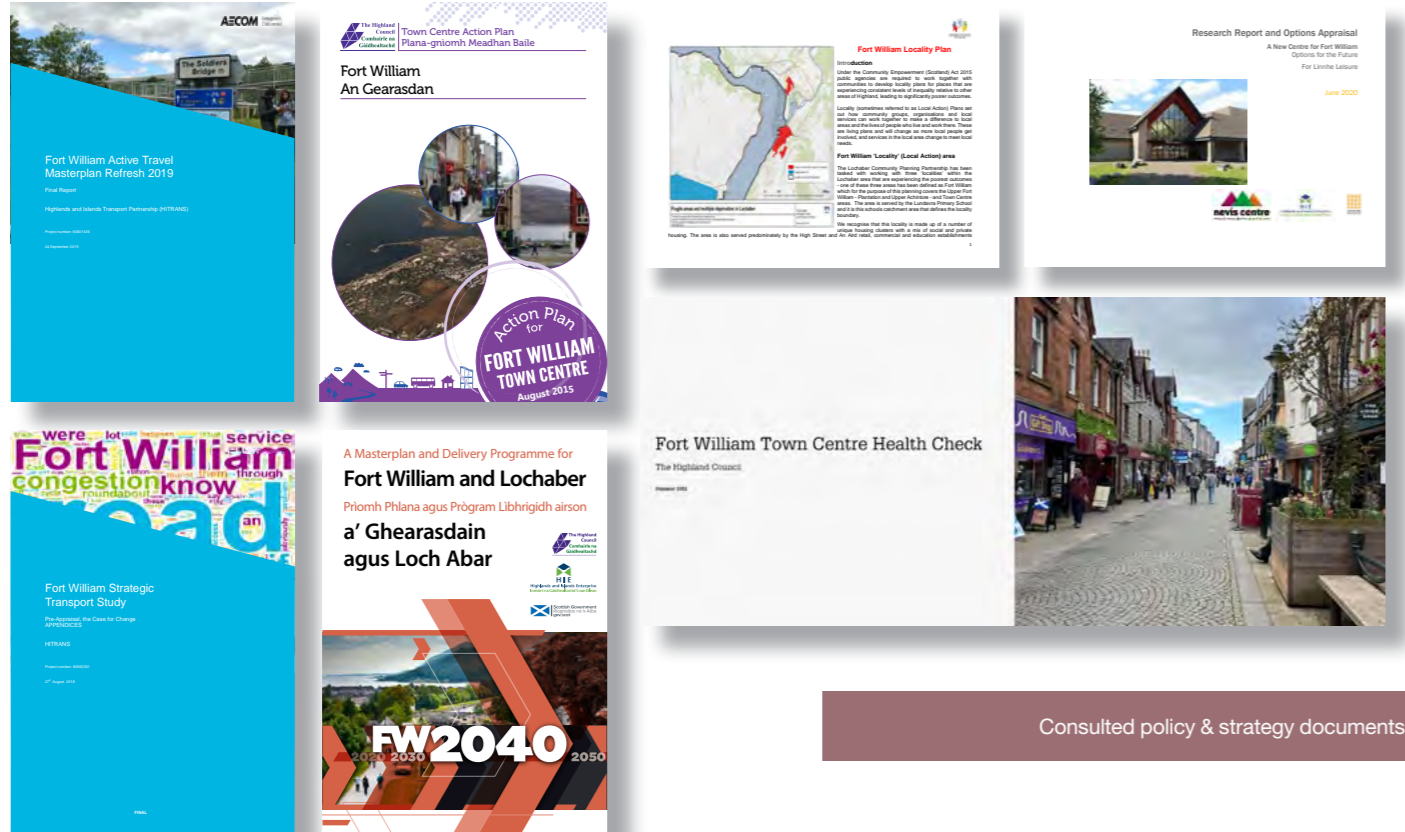
Fort William is located in the Highland Council region and is the principal settlement within Lochaber.

With a population of around 10,500 Fort William is the second largest settlement in the Scottish Highlands, with only the city of Inverness having a larger population. Beyond its own boundary it serves a wider regional population of around 20,000.



Map of surrounding communities





Consulted policy & strategy documents

**There are many place-based strategies and policies concerning Fort William and the wider Lochaber area. This masterplan seeks to provide a physical and spatial place based response that integrates and progresses the town's ambitions.**

These strategies and policies were relevant to the town centre informed the developed project brief and, in turn, the masterplan response outlined later in this report.

The list of documents consulted are as follows:

- Fort William Locality Plan
- FW 2040 Consultation Event Feedback (2022)
- Fort William Town Centre Action Plan (2015)
- Fort William Town Centre Health Check (2022)
- Tweeddale & Lochaber House Housing
- Fort William Strategic Transport Study
- Fort William Active travel Masterplan
- Fort William Wayfinding Strategy

## National Planning Framework 4 (2023)

**On the 23rd February 2023 the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) was adopted by Scottish Ministers. Consequently there is now an even greater need to take a fresh look at Fort William town centre.**

### Key Considerations for Town Centres

Residential uses at ground floor in our centres should demonstrate they will create attractive frontages, would not affect the vitality and viability of a shopping area, and not result in an undesirable concentration of uses or dead frontages.

- Given the need to conserve embodied carbon, NPF4 places a greater emphasis on the reuse of brownfield, vacant and derelict land and empty buildings.
- Proposals for the reuse of existing buildings, including listed buildings and other historic assets, will be supported - taking into account their suitability for conversion to other uses.

NPF4 recognises the value of regeneration to transform our urban places, and improve wellbeing.

The masterplan will be developed taking cognisance of the overarching spatial principles of NPF4:

**Just Transition:**  
Empower people to shape their places and ensure the transition to net zero is fair and inclusive.

**Conserving and Recycling Assets:**  
Making productive use of existing buildings, places, infrastructure and services, locking in carbon and minimising waste.

**Local Living:**  
Supporting local living, through the creation of a place that is well-connected and includes a mix of uses (including housing and associated green space/ play provision) where people can meet the majority of their daily needs within a reasonable distance of their home, preferably by walking, wheeling or cycling or using sustainable transport options.

**Compact Urban Growth:**  
Optimise the use of land through the re-use and/or redevelopment of buildings and/or brownfield sites to support services and resources within the town centre.

**Rebalanced Development:**  
Target development to create opportunities for communities and investment in areas of past decline.

**Rural Revitalisation:**  
Encourage sustainable development in rural areas, recognising the need to grow and support urban and rural communities. Fort William serves an important function to those living a distance from the settlement, therefore it is important that this is also recognised.

“ NPF4 recognises the value of regeneration to transform our urban places, and improve wellbeing. ”

## Challenges & Drivers



### Changing Retail Habits

The changes in consumer behaviour and the reducing demand for retail floor space over previous decades is well documented. Increasing online shopping has also had a significant impact.

There has been a marked decline in national retailers over the past decade (most recently evidenced in the closure of the large M&Co store at the Parade) creating higher vacancy rates: the Town Centre Health Check notes that the vacancy rate has increased from 8.5% in 2018 to 12.3% in 2022.

The proximity to the edge of town retail parks (Fort William and North

Road) that contain among others M&S and Aldi which, by offering free surface parking, have led to a certain amount of diverted trade to the detriment of the established town centre.

At the FW2040 public consultation event of November 2022, in response to the question how often and for what purpose do you visit the town centre? a number of respondents stated that they either only visit the town centre to eat out or that they seldom visit at all as their shopping needs were met by the retail parks.



### Poor Arrival Experience

The first impression any visitor arriving by public transport (train or bus) gets of Fort William town centre currently is a supermarket car park. The High Street is not visible and can realistically only be reached via a dark pedestrian underpass in a poor state of repair. This is due to the presence of the A82 trunk road that cuts this arrival point off from the town centre.

### Lack of connection to Loch Linnhe and the Old Fort

The town centre feels disconnected from Loch Linnhe. It has traditionally turned its back on the loch with limited points of visibility and physical connection to the High Street.

The A82, combined with the Supermarket Car Park make it difficult to visit the Old Fort, a real missed opportunity.



### Lack of Residential Accommodation

Over the course of our stakeholder engagement it has been made clear by a number of those organisations consulted that there is a strong demand but a current lack of affordable residential accommodation within Fort William that is having a detrimental impact on the future prosperity and growth of the town.



## Positive Moves

When compared with other towns and cities throughout Scotland, Fort William town centre already contains a number of key ingredients to promote vibrancy and resilience and these form a great foundation upon which to build this masterplan framework.

A number of these positive moves can be defined as follows:

### Highland Cinema

New two screen cinema and café bar, complete with a covered terrace overlooking Cameron square.

### New Council / HIE Offices

Successful repurposing of the former High School

### Garrison Hotel

Successful repurposing of the former town Police Station

### Whisky Centre Housing

Bringing people back living in the heart of the High Street area

### Tweeddale & Lochaber House Housing

Successful upper floor repurposing of former office space overlooking the Parade and High Street

### E-Bike Scheme

Promoting sustainable active travel at the heart of the High Street

### Black Isle Bar

Conversion of a former church / car showroom into a popular bar at the end of the West Highland Way

### Diversification of the High Street

A growing number of independent quality retailers, cafes and bars bringing a distinctive local flavour

- Highland Soap Company
- Highland Bookshop
- Highland Liquor Co.
- The Wildcat
- Rain



## Potential Future Projects

### Fort William Waterfront Redevelopment

Fort William Marina & Shoreline Community Interest Company

**The Fort William Marina and Shoreline Community Interest Company (FWMSCIC) was formed in 2013 by a group of volunteers with the objective to regenerate the waterfront of Fort William.**

The group has been instrumental in Fort William becoming a regular stop for a number of cruise ship operators. This has resulted in a huge influx of visitors to the town.

It is their stated aim to consolidate Fort William as a cruise ship destination, complete with step ashore facilities, using this opportunity to increase marine tourism and bring economic growth to Fort William and the Lochaber area.

The recent announcement by SSE Renewables of a proposed pump storage scheme at Coire Glas in the Great Glen could bring an opportunity to procure rock that could form the basis of redevelopment of the waterfront at Fort William.

#### Project Aspirations

The FWMSCIC has both short and long term objectives to steadily improve the visitor experience for cruise ship tourists and operators, marine operators and to encourage low impact sustainable tourism to Fort William.

The long-term aspirations for a permanent cruise ship berth and marina, together with a green highway along the shoreside at Fort William, could be achieved and are shown below.



The FWMSCIC has both short and long term objectives to steadily improve the visitor experience for cruise ship tourists and operators, marine operators and to encourage low impact sustainable tourism to Fort William.

## Context

### Analysis - Ground floor uses

**The combined uses map demonstrates the distribution of uses at street level throughout the town centre area.**

Fort William town centre, while predominantly comprised of retail does have a healthy provision of food and beverage offers, although this use is distinctly lacking in the area immediately surrounding the Parade.

The Highland Council Town Centre Health Check of 2022 reported that vacancy rates throughout the town centre increased from 8.5% in 2018 to 12.3% in 2022. Within this figure there were 4 units identified that had been vacant since 2018.

The retail audit identified 138no. retail / business units in the town centre, of which:

- 39 were Leisure Services
- 33 were Comparison Retail
- 17 were Vacant
- 14 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 13 were Retail Services
- 9 were Accommodation
- 8 were Financial, Business and Property
- 5 were Convenience Retail

It noted that the proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Fort William's town centre in

2022 was: Independent and local retailers: 21no. / National retailers: 17no.

Finally, in the category of 'Less desirable services and facilities' (categorised as Charity Shops and Gambling / Betting Shops), the town centre only contains 5no. in total.

The major civic / leisure facilities of the Lochaber Leisure Centre and Nevis Centre are located peripherally to the nucleus of the town centre and the relocation of one or more of these closer to the heart of the town would greatly increase town centre visits and footfall.

Increased levels of residential accommodation would also support the recommendations of the recent Scottish Government publication 'A New Future for Scotland's Town Centres' that calls for the creation of 20 minute walkable neighbourhoods, allowing people to access most of the services and facilities that they need in their daily life, all of which are present in or around Fort William town centre.

Retail	<span style="color: yellow;">■</span>	Culture / Community	<span style="color: orange;">■</span>
F&B / Leisure	<span style="color: cyan;">■</span>	Governmental	<span style="color: lightgreen;">■</span>
Residential	<span style="color: blue;">■</span>	Healthcare	<span style="color: brown;">■</span>
Office / Commercial	<span style="color: green;">■</span>	Transport	<span style="color: darkblue;">■</span>
Hotel / B&B	<span style="color: purple;">■</span>	Vacant	<span style="color: red;">■</span>
		Focus Area	<span style="border: 2px solid red; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span>



**The vacancy rate has increased from 8.5% in 2018 to 12.3% in 2022.**

The Highland Council  
Town Centre Health Check  
2022

An aerial photograph of Fort William, Scotland, showing a coastal town built on a hillside. The town features a mix of traditional stone buildings and modern structures. A large body of water, likely the Firth of Clyde, is visible on the left side of the image, with several boats and a ferry docked. The background is dominated by rugged, green mountains under a clear sky. The text 'what if?....' is overlaid in the upper right quadrant, followed by a horizontal line and the subtitle 'Responding to the analysis and building on the positive moves' below it.

what if?....

Responding to the analysis  
and building on the positive  
moves

# what if?....

....we encourage new residential developments bringing people back to live in the heart of the town centre?



The introduction of more urban living to the town centre will repopulate and reinvigorate the heart of Fort William.

An attempt to stop migration of existing residents as well as the introduction of new businesses will help to position Fort William as a safe place to visit and spend time, both by day and in the evening, due to the general activity and passive surveillance that the new community will bring, supporting an improved F&B and leisure offer.



Intergenerational living: appealing to a broader demographic  
Any new offer should consider the inclusion of a variety of tenures (private for sale, affordable, social housing, elderly - supported / sheltered, student).

This prevents the creation of a monocultural residential offer and will make the town centre attractive to people from all walks of life.

The development framework introduces significant levels of residential accommodation and proposes a variety of types and tenures, ensuring that diverse housing options will be available within Fort William town centre. Further details can be found in the Living Town section of this report.

# what if?....

.....we improve ground floor activation of key streets through the introduction of the right type of retail, public services & alternative uses?

Changing shopping habits such as the proliferation of out of town retail, and the increasingly sophisticated online offer have caused increasing difficulty for many established national chains, leading to an increased number of vacant retail units in our town centres.

Retaining resilient brands and augmenting these with local independent retailers together with convenience retail to support the

expanding residential community can provide a strong, attractive retail mix within a right sized offer.

### Introduce Active Alternative Uses to Retail

Activity at street level is vital to create a vibrant town centre and we can no longer rely on retail alone to fulfill this need.

A number of other uses such as Healthcare, Leisure, Creche/ Daycare, Commercial and Maker

Spaces that historically were located in our town centres can be reintroduced to occupy space vacated by retail, encouraging greater footfall and making these services accessible to all.

The proposals significantly diversify the town centre offer away from retail dominance by including opportunities for workspace, community, leisure and creche/ daycare.





# what if?....

.....we promote the strengthening of the evening economy through the introduction of new F&B / Leisure uses, increasing footfall and activity?



**Our town centres for too long have been dependent on retail at the expense of other uses that encourage activity outwith typical 9am-6pm hours. This has led to the creation of empty and unwelcoming environments once the shops are closed.**

A good evening economy encourages footfall, increases passive surveillance and greatly improves the local economy. It may require a pro-active approach to historical use class and licensing restrictions to bring these areas to life.

This masterplan proposes the introduction of new Food & beverage and leisure uses within Fort William town centre to transform the evening economy. Details can be found in the Vibrant Town section of this report.



# what if?....

.....we provide new performance venues for music & comedy to strengthen the evening economy & tourism offer?



Where existing facilities are located within the town centre area, investigate ways to allow them to have a greater influence through improvements to their frontages, new signage and lighting and the adoption of external space.

Curate specific exhibitions and events that engage the community and entice those from further afield to visit.

This masterplan explores options to provide a replacement for the Nevis Centre within the town centre and this, combined with the proposed extension of the West Highland Museum on Cameron Square will positively impact Fort William.

## Improving & building on existing cultural assets

The introduction of new cultural uses can have a transformative effect on our town centres.

Explore working with existing Institutions and community groups to bring and/or expand galleries / performance spaces / museums to the heart of Fort William.

.....we improve existing & create new cultural offers to benefit the local population & encourage tourism growth?

# what if?....

## ..... we provide new places to safely gather as a community, capable of hosting a variety of events?

**Where community truly occurs**  
Key to the re-energising of any town centre is the creation of gathering places to hold events that attract both local residents and those from further afield.

These external 'rooms' will support a wide series of events in terms of both their scale and flexibility and will encourage a vibrant all year round calendar that takes advantage of seasonal holidays, local historical events and more.

Every town has its own unique narrative and this can be exploited through the staging of events that bring the community together in celebration.

The masterplan proposes improvements to a number of civic spaces at the heart of the town centre, full details can be found in the Legible Town section of this report.



Consideration should be given to introducing healthier, low carbon ways of moving around, such as improved space for walking, wheeling and cycling, and improved public transport. Such changes can dramatically improve how safe and welcoming the town centre feels. Moreover, it would go a significant way to improving accessibility to and use of the town centre by low car ownership groups.

Increasing cycling as a way of moving around is widely recognised as one of the easiest ways to reduce the carbon footprint of transport, and is safer, healthier and more compatible with a welcoming urban centre environment than motor vehicles. It has also become an increasingly popular leisure activity enjoyed by people of all ages and types.

As a sustainable transport form that also has enormous public health benefits we should ensure that it is actively encouraged by providing the right infrastructure and facilities in the town centre.

The masterplan proposes an improved bus station and mobility hub, together with enhanced walking and cycling routes throughout the town centre that can reinforce the biking and hiking culture of Fort William.

**A balanced approach to car use**  
The future trends in transport are likely to include more active travel along with reduced car ownership/dependence.

However, in the shorter term, as well as maximising the share of trips made to the town centre by active travel and public transport, there is still a need to recognise the role of cars, particularly for disabled people and those that do not have access to alternative transport options.



As highlighted elsewhere in this report, there is a large amount of parking within the town centre, and its role, for now, remains relevant particularly given the wider catchment Fort William serves, tourism and its role as Gateway to the Highlands.

Parking numbers within the town centre do reduce as a consequence of the proposals, however, there is still an extensive amount of parking provided, spread throughout the town centre. A potential multi-storey solution over the new bus station is suggested to minimise the loss of spaces as part of the wider transport strategy.



## .....we transform how people travel to & move through the town centre by promoting & facilitating sustainable forms of transport?

**A diverse audience has been engaged through a mix of modes to capture different levels of intelligence around change and ideas for the future.**

A stakeholder consultation event, led by Threesixty Architecture with support from The Highland Council, HIE and the Lochaber Chamber of Commerce was held as part of this project and is described in more detail on the following page.

A number of focused 1-2-1 engagement meetings were also conducted by Threesixty Architecture supported on occasion by Sweco Transport Consultants with a number of key stakeholders, namely:

- Lochaber Chamber of Commerce
- Highlands & Islands Enterprise
- Lochaber Housing Association
- University of the Highlands & Islands (UHI)
- Nevis Centre
- Crown Estates
- HITRANS (with Sweco)
- Angus MacDonald (Moidart Trust)
- Finlay Finlayson (Crannog)
- Fort William Marina & Shoreline Community Interest Company
- FW2040 Active Travel Group
- Transport Scotland
- FW2040 Stakeholders Group
- Fort William Community Action Group



### Stakeholder Workshop 02 October 2023

This well attended event was held for an invited group of key local stakeholders representing local community groups, organisations and businesses.

The afternoon, facilitated by Threesixty Architecture was organised as follows:

**Presentation 1:**  
Project Context, Ambitions, Brief & Analysis

**Workshop 1:**  
What do I need from my town centre?  
(Demographic based analysis)

1. Families with young children
2. Teenagers 13-17
3. Young Adults 18-25
4. Adults 26-60
5. Seniors 60+
6. Tourists & Visitors

**Presentation 2:**  
Initial Concepts & Ideas

**Workshop 2:**  
Feedback on Initial concepts & ideas: discussion, three key statements of feedback & what's Missing?

**Feedback**  
A wide range of ideas were discussed in the initial demographic based workshop groups with a lot of common themes and issues emerging. From this group of participants there was a sense that the town centre needs a diversity of use and activity to bring a wider range of people in at different parts of the day and week.

The initial ideas put forward in the second workshop were positively received in the main, with some concern expressed around the potential loss of parking that would be a consequence of their introduction.

A number of the suggestions made have been incorporated into the masterplan proposals and a full report on the stakeholder engagement can be found within the appendices section of this report.

**Public Exhibition  
15 November 2023**  
The Masterplan proposals were exhibited as part of the 'Around Lochaber in 80 tables' event, part of the Lochaber Ideas Week organised by The Lochaber Chamber of Commerce.

This allowed the entire community to view the developed masterplan and give their feedback. On the day approximately 300 members of the community visited the exhibition.



Stakeholder Workshop - 02 October 2023



Public Exhibition - 15 November 2023



# Methodology



A Vision For High Street Regeneration guidance document

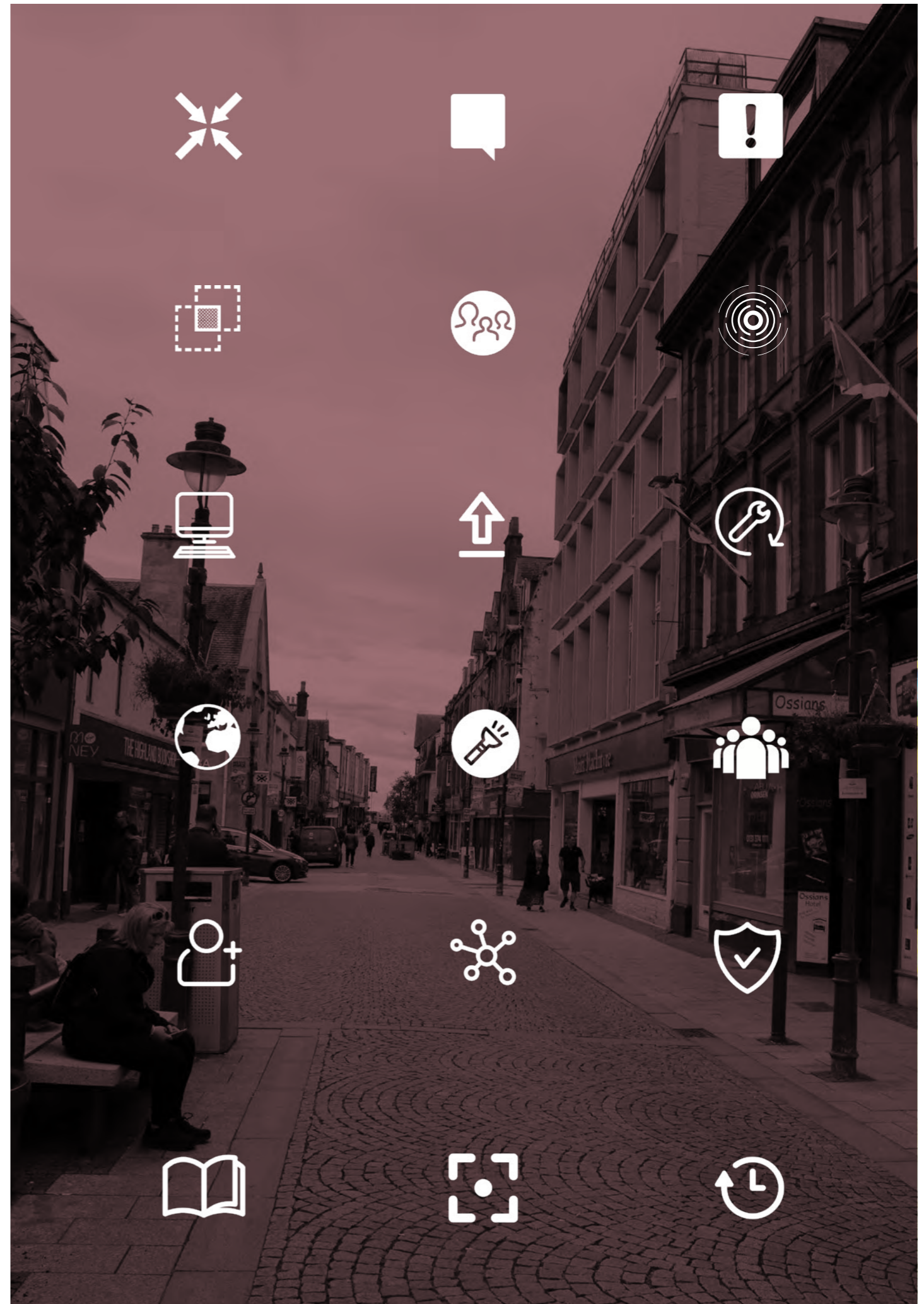
**This document seeks to show the kind of moves that will achieve an aspired quality of place and resilience for Fort William.**

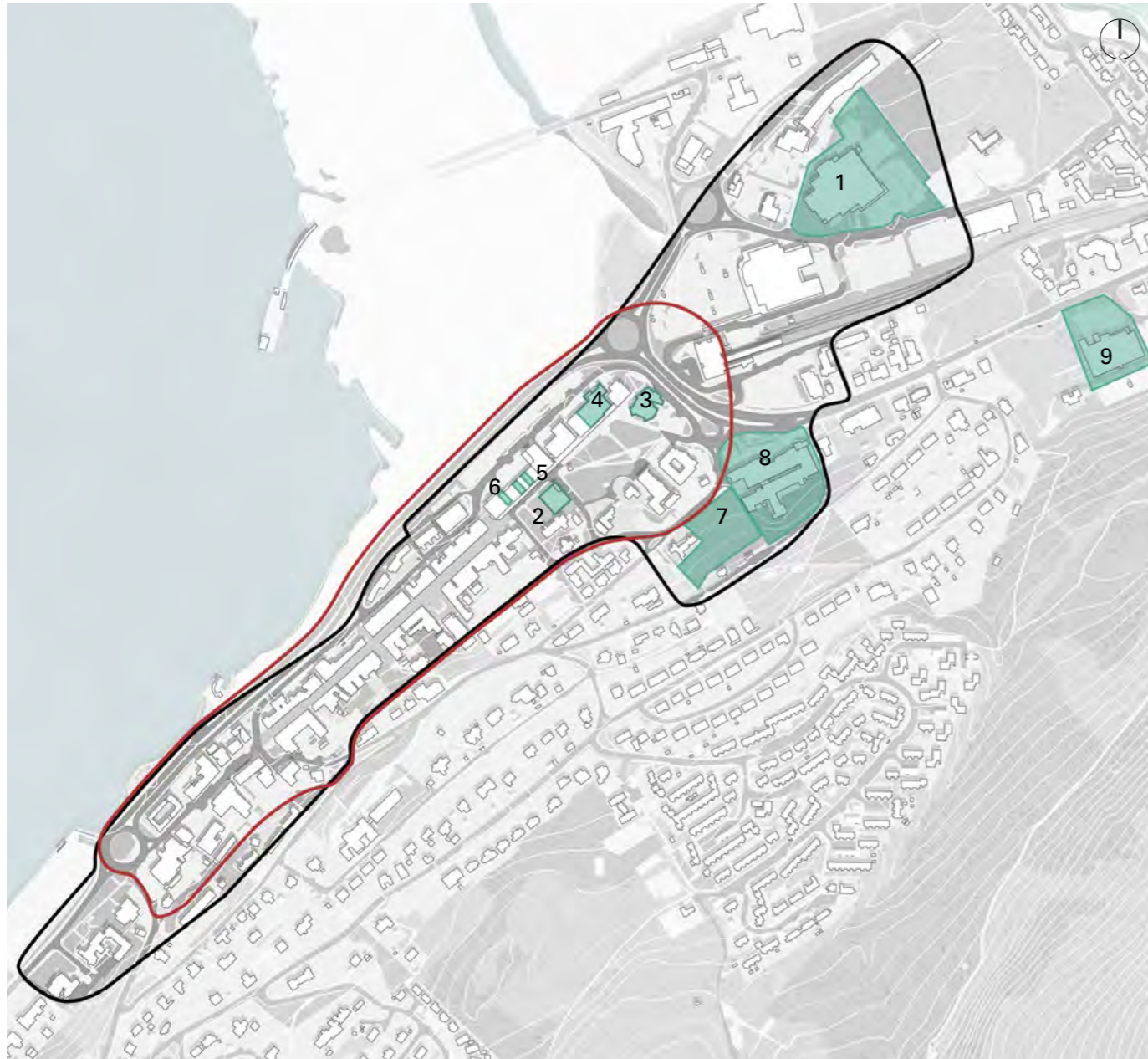
It is built on an understanding of Scottish Government guidance and what is working in other towns but is importantly a Fort William specific solution grounded in a depth of analysis and widespread consultation.

A successful town centre core supports a vast diversity of functions and the ways we collectively use the town centre are wide ranging and complex. To structure a response around this complexity, we have followed the principles in the guidance 'A Vision for High Street Regeneration' developed

by Threesixty Architecture in collaboration with The Scottish Government, Scotland's Towns Partnership and Revo.

We have employed the methodology and manifesto that structures the analysis and response into key sections and grouped these as described in the thematic response in the following pages.





## Methodology: Areas of Focus

This map highlights a number of key assets and sites of opportunity that have been identified as part of the initial project scope. These are shaded green on the above map and are as follows:

1. The Nevis Centre
2. Former Tesco Store
3. Nevisport
4. Former M&Co store
5. Former TSB
6. Former Council Service Point
7. Site of former Fort William RC Primary (St Mary's)

8. Current hospital site
9. Lochaber Leisure Centre site

We have prepared finer grain design options for a number of these sites / assets and have identified further areas that require a similar focus within the agreed study area as part of the exercise.

The introduction of 'meanwhile uses' and other interventions to support economic and place recovery in the shorter term will be explored, together with longer term sustainable regen options.

Design ideas have been tested against the recommendations of the base research documents and recently completed strategy papers that were supplied to the team at the outset of the project.

## Published Brief

**This study, commissioned by The Highland Council, HIE and the Lochaber Chamber of Commerce has a core brief to demonstrate the physical and spatial moves that show the approach, ambition & attitude that will deliver a re-energised & resilient core.**

It demonstrates an aligned intent that ties together many of the complexities of all the current and emerging published policy and strategy where they are relevant to the study area.

It is offered as a guideline to assess and nurture future development, attract investment and ensure the town centre is the vibrant and attractive environment that the whole community need.

Key elements of the briefed ambition for this project include:

### A Joined Up Vision

Create a framework for the core of the town centre, particularly around the spine of the High Street. Provide a renewed regeneration direction for Fort William which builds on the Town Centre's historic character and heritage to enhance its sense of place, legibility and liveability.

### Resilient

Support the successful evolution of the town centre over the next 10-20 plus years and show how the place can support economic, social and environmental resilience.

### Immersive

An engaging spatial and physical vision of what can be achieved – showing various iterations of the 'art of the possible' providing a framework to assess the suitability (and level of ambition) of future developments. Create a shared vision that maintains ambition and momentum.

### Relevant

Be the 'glue' that ties together the complexities of the body of current and emerging strategies on place and recognised best practice creating resilience and regeneration.

### Collaborative

Work with local stakeholders to reimagine the town centre and produce an ambitious and deliverable new masterplan & development framework to support its resilience, growth and evolution.

### Open for Business

Demonstrate value and council support for development. Identify priorities for intervention and investment with a focus on community wealth building.

### Prioritised

Identify intervention and investment (public and private) that has greatest impact and 'quick wins'.

### Responsible

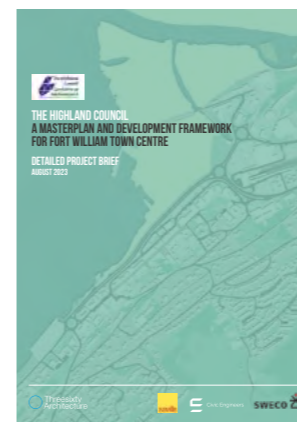
Support the Council's net zero objectives through its approach to accessibility, and the use of resources and infrastructure

### Influential

Inform policy and design considerations and in relation to major planning applications which may come forward over the next 5-20 years.

### Contextual

Develop a vision that considers how to best serve the wider Lochaber community and take cognisance of complementary projects contained within the FW2040 Vision



Published Project Brief



## a masterplan for fort william town centre

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“ a connected place that faces water ”

A place making framework for physical and spatial change that is the “glue” that ties the complexities of all the current and emerging published policy and strategy and reflects an alignment of intent across all major stakeholders, governmental departments and politicians.



# balanced town





# concentrate

Take a deliberately focused approach centred around the heart of the town, where we can repurpose and protect a valued legacy of buildings, support an improving local economy and create opportunity.

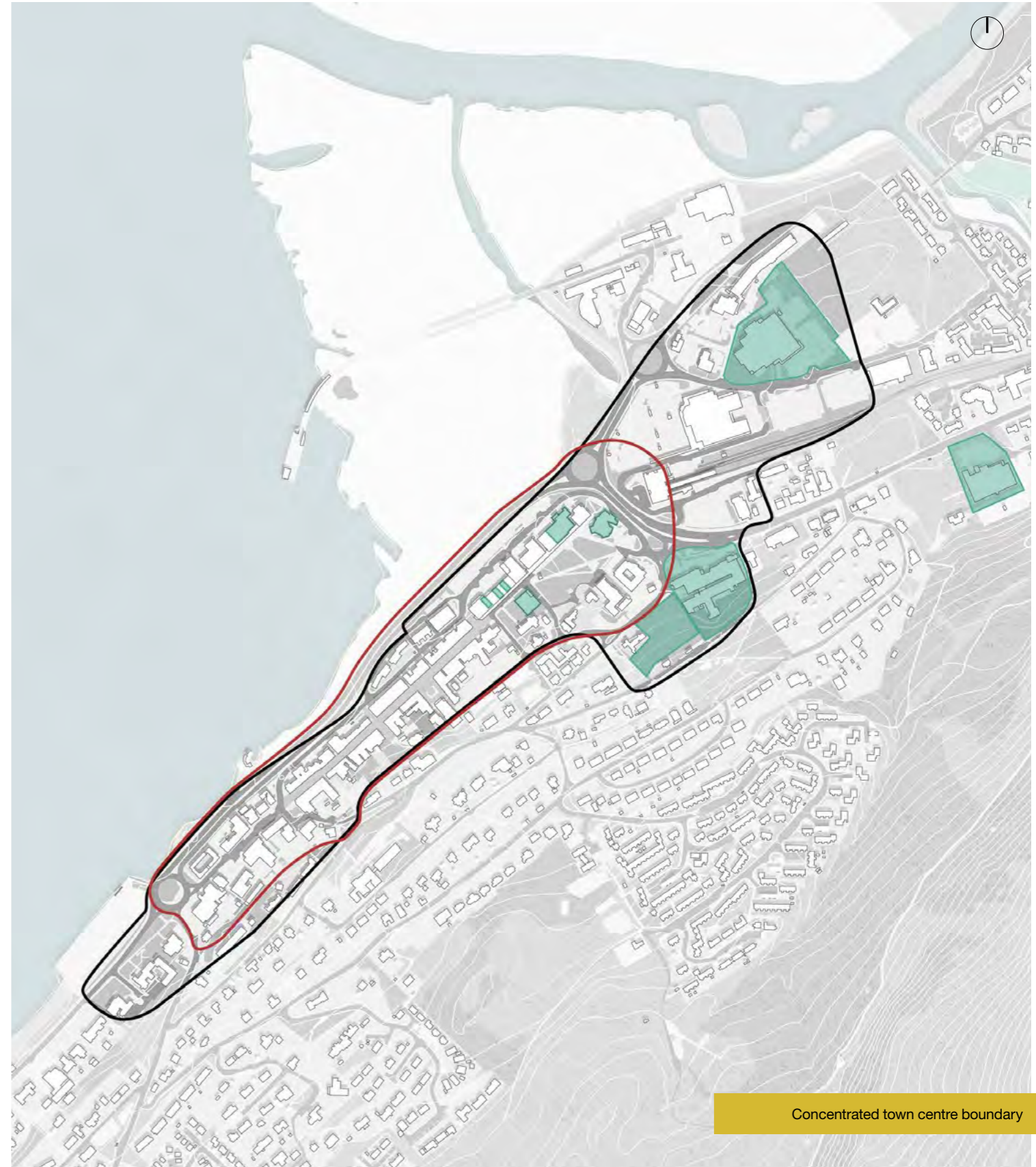
A concentrated and focused approach is the first key principle in the prescribed methodology for Vision Led Regeneration in order to prevent “spreading the jam too thin” by attempting to regenerate equally and simultaneously across the wider town centre.

This study defines a more focussed town centre boundary (red line) that ‘feels’ like the town centre as you experience it on the ground. It extends from the train and bus station area to the north, bringing the edge closer to the High Street, down to the West End Roundabout at the southern end of the High Street.

In addition to this, we identify a number of key areas of opportunity (as shown in the adjacent map) which lie beyond the concentrated town centre boundary (Nevis Centre, Lochaber Leisure Centre, Belford Hospital & former St. Mary’s School site). These have been taken into consideration as part of this study.

- Highland Council town centre boundary 
- Concentrated boundary 

“ This concentration will make transformational change visible, and act as a catalyst for positive evolution beyond this initial boundary. ”





# consolidate

Reduce retail to the right level for a re-energised and diversified town centre with the right-sized (smaller) units supporting the increasing trend for independent, artisanal traders.

The overall requirement for retail floorspace has dramatically reduced and this will continue as department stores and national retailers continue to contract. This has been evidenced most recently in Fort William with the closure of the large M&Co. store facing the Parade, and the contraction of Tesco from their larger unit into an 'Express' offer.

The proximity of both Fort William and North Road Retail Parks has displaced a large proportion of potential retail from the core town centre / High Street and, moving forward, the High Street and surrounding streets and vennels are likely to benefit from continuing to focus on more distinctive and independent retail and food and beverage offers rather than national chain retailers.

This masterplan framework seeks to further strengthen the existing mix of active street level uses of varying sizes throughout the town centre, with a particular focus on the High Street.



Former TSB Unit, High Street



Former Tesco Store, High Street



Former M&Co Unit, The Parade



Vacant unit, High Street



North Road Retail Park

## Future Health of Retail

### Diversify the Offer: Introduce Experiential / Blended / Artisanal / Specialist

Fort William, much like other towns in Scotland, can no longer rely on established national chains to occupy the majority of the available retail space within the town centre.

As previously discussed, the Town Centre Health Check of 2022 indicates that Fort William has already significantly diversified away from a reliance on national chains with a majority of retailers now of a local / specialist nature.

Blended and artisanal retail offers are becoming increasingly popular as people care more about the environmental and ethical provenance of the products they buy and are also looking for an experience beyond the merely transactional.

Carefully curated spaces that offer products for sale alongside a food and drink offer and have the ability to host a variety of events are on the increase.

Further diversifying the retail offer, augmenting with more local independent retailers will provide a strong, attractive retail mix within a right sized offer of retained resilient brands.

The huge tourism market led by Fort William's position at the heart of the 'Outdoor Capital of the UK' also provides a unique opportunity to further accommodate more specialist retail to serve this market.



## Future Health of Retail

### Introduce New Uses: Prevents Creation of Mono-cultural Dead-Zones & Stimulates Footfall



**Activity at street level is vital to create a vibrant town centre and it is clear that we can no longer rely on retail alone to fulfil this need.**

Recently the High Street has had an increasing number of vacant retail units and the introduction of a more diversified offer would not only stimulate footfall but also support the remaining retail activity.

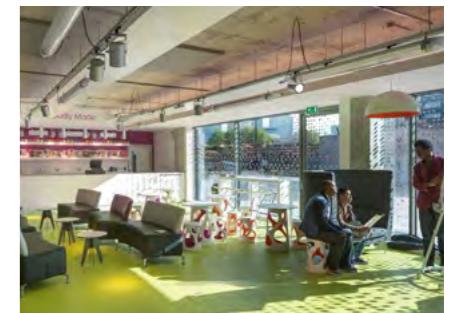
A number of other uses such as Healthcare, Leisure, Crèche/ Daycare, Commercial and Maker Spaces that historically were located in our town centres should be reintroduced to occupy space vacated by retail, encouraging greater footfall throughout the town centre.



This approach will be essential to support one of the key ambitions of the FW2040 Vision (outlined below) to further increase the town centre residential population by making these vital services accessible to all.

***A Great Place to Live: with a unique landscape and distinctive local communities. Sufficient and affordable housing is a key issue for the area, as well as facilities and accommodation for visitors, with a need to attract and retain a diverse range of residents, visitors, and enterprises.***

This is discussed in greater detail in the Living town chapter of this document.





# go bold

While the changing patterns of retail have created new challenges, this shift provides us with a once in a lifetime opportunity to rebalance our town centres. Repurposing a large single use asset can transform a town centre in one bold move, repopulating the heart of the town centre and increasing permeability by breaking down large blocks into new streets and lanes.

Now is the time to reintroduce uses that serve the needs of our whole communities.

**The close grain nature of the High Street affords little opportunity for large scale intervention with the exception perhaps of the mostly vacant retail block and library adjacent to the Parade, a key gateway to the town centre at the head of the underpass.**

Beyond this, a number of the sites identified in the initial project scope that lie outwith the focused town centre area could accommodate mixed use developments of a scale that would deliver significant transformation, such as the current Belford Hospital site, the former St. Mary's Primary School site and the site currently occupied by the Nevis Centre, should a replacement facility be created elsewhere.

One site, not specifically identified at the outset but with great potential is the West End Car Park. This space, directly on the shore of Loch Linnhe could play host to a number of uses including a new culture / leisure offering or a welcome centre for cruise passengers to the town.

Any development here would help to transform the town's relationship with the water, a key theme of the FW 2040 vision and work in tandem with the Old Fort to create a 'dumbbell effect' along the lochside. Arguably the West End Car Park is the only opportunity to engage the waterfront at a significant scale.

We explore the potential of all of these sites as part of this study, considering carefully scale, permeability, views and the right balance of uses in the wider town centre context.



Belford Hospital site, Belford Road



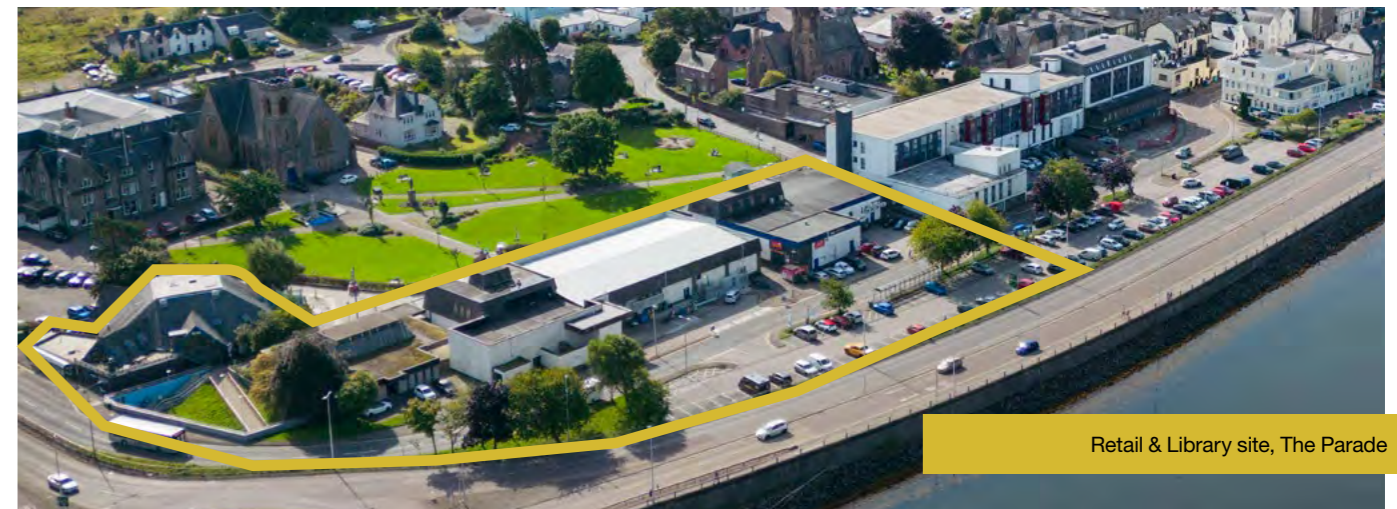
Nevis Centre



Lochaber Leisure Centre



Former St. Marys School site



Retail & Library site, The Parade



West End Car Park

## Go Bold

### Redevelopment opportunities to transform the town centre

As indicated in the introduction, we have explored development opportunities for the sites identified in the adjacent diagram.

Ranging from residential to leisure and civic uses, details of all proposals are located in later sections of this report.



#### 1. Lochaber Leisure Centre site

Proposed residential development For further information refer to [Living Town](#) section of the report.



#### 2. Nevis Centre site

- a. Potential new leisure centre (pictured right). For further information refer to [Vibrant Town](#) section of the report.
- b. Potential residential development. For further information refer to [Living Town](#) section of the report.



#### 3. Hospital / Former School site

Proposed residential development For further information refer to [Living Town](#) section of the report.



#### 4. Library / Former M&Co site

- a. Potential civic building (pictured right). For further information refer to [Vibrant Town](#) section of the report.
- b. Potential mixed-use residential led development. For further information refer to [Living Town](#) section of the report.



#### 5. West End Car park site

Proposed leisure development. For further information refer to [Vibrant Town](#) section of the report.





# The Regillible town

# connect

Introduce safe walking and cycle routes and better connect the wider community to their centre better with environmentally friendly public transport. This will reduce car journeys, promote health and wellbeing as well as rebalancing inequality for low car ownership groups.

The future is likely to bring reduced car ownership alongside increased use of electric vehicles. In the meantime, we need to accommodate cars to encourage the wider rural community to use their town centre and maintain equality of access. However, this should not be to the detriment of the quality of urban places. Routes into town and parking should be made legible and consideration should be

given to the careful use of pedestrianisation, striking a balance with access and visibility of town centre businesses.



E-Bike Station, High Street



Viewforth Car Park



Existing Underpass



A82 at edge of Loch Linnhe

**Journeys by car are important within Fort William and its wider rural catchment. There are large areas of car parking around and within the town centre; Morrisons Supermarket, the West End car park, right on the edge of Loch Linnhe, the centrally located Viewforth Car Park and the Middle Street Short Stay Car Park. We consider the balance of accommodating the car with the creation of human scaled urban place, especially in areas identified for repurposing or redevelopment.**

Due to its predominantly rural nature, it is essential that Fort William is well served by a joined up and effective public transport network.

Working with our transport consultants Sweco, we have carried out a high level assessment of the current conditions for transport, accessibility and proximity to services, making reference to both the Fort William Strategic Transport

Study and the Fort William Active Travel Masterplan Refresh. We have also explored opportunities for greater connectivity as part of the town centre masterplan proposals.

At present, anyone arriving by Public Transport at either the bus or train station can only access the town centre via an unattractive series of ramps and stairs that lead to an underpass due to the domineering presence of the A82.

This severs any direct pedestrian link at street level and transforming this arrival experience for the better, encouraging greater visibility and legibility has been a key focus of this study.

This study also introduces new, and the enhancement of existing, legible and permeable routes throughout the town centre.

Sweco was commissioned to provide strategic transport planning support for the preparation of the Masterplan for Fort William town centre.

The key aim of the project is to create a Masterplan setting out development principles which can ultimately deliver a vibrant and attractive town centre where people can live, work and easily move around.

Their full report can be found in the appendices section of this document.

The report provides transport planning advice which:

Sets out the existing transport context, covering all modes of transport and acknowledging the 20 minute neighbourhood concept;

Identifies transport principles associated with the Masterplan and sets out the next steps associated with transport planning input required to inform the next stages:



Mobility Hub Concept

**Recommendations**

It is envisaged that the following transport planning input will be required to inform the next stages:

- Continue dialogue with HiTrans, The Highland Council, Transport Scotland, and other key stakeholders to coordinate the evolution of the town centre transport improvements
- Develop the proposals further with respect to changes to the railway and bus stations including the introduction of an Active Travel Hub
- Liaise with public transport operators to coordinate service provision in relation to planned and emerging development
- Monitor the evolution of the Town Centre against the 20-minute neighbourhood concept, using the established criteria to help guide development and infrastructure decisions

- Detailed assessment of the road network using new trip generation estimates for the Masterplan vision to understand the opportunities and constraints associated with the potential changes to the road network
- Develop a parking management framework which supports sustainable travel patterns but acknowledges the need for parking and access for various vehicle types
- Explore a servicing strategy to minimise the need for large delivery vehicles/servicing vehicles to enter the town centre
- Prepare a Transport Assessment to support the Masterplan in its entirety, with more detailed assessments where required as detailed applications are made for development plots/areas

**Masterplan Concept**

The Masterplan considers better connections between the town centre and the main transport providers, and how the town centre can better relate to Loch Linnhe. It takes account of the various studies for the area and aspirations of HiTrans, The Highland Council and Transport Scotland. All parties were consulted as part of this exercise.

The masterplan includes improvements associated with the railway and bus stations, the relocation of the Nevis Centre, introduction of further development along the western boundary, the connections with and improvements to the promenade, the role of the A82 and the changes to the way parking is provided to serve the town centre.

**Key Changes to Transport Provision Supporting the Masterplan**

The potential key changes to the transport provision serving the town centre and their benefits are detailed below.

**Active Travel**

- Removal of vehicles from the front of the railway station building and introducing an active travel hub supporting better connections between regional and local public transport and active travel trips
- At grade pedestrian/toucan crossing on the A82 Belford Road between the railway station and the town centre
- Relocation of the bus station from Macfarlane Way and the introduction of a high-quality

active travel route connecting into the wider network to the north

- Widened promenade along Loch Linnhe through the reallocation of the A82 road space, encouraging active travel trips towards the Old Fort site and beyond from the town centre
- Formal crossings on the A82 between the town centre and the promenade along Loch Linnhe
- Increasing the level of pedestrian only routes throughout the town centre encouraging higher footfall and managing vehicle movement
- Supporting The Highland Council's Active Travel Strategy for the town.

**Public Transport Provision**

- Improved arrival experience at the railway station through upgrades / provision of a new building
- Relocation of the bus station from Macfarlane way to Nevis Terrace, with services entering and exiting via the same junction on the A82 Belford Road. This can assist with bus journey times and allows for a better-quality interchange between buses, rail users and those travelling actively
- Relocation of Bus stops on Middle Street to best suit access to the town centre, these will be located to ensure there is no loss in service provision

**Vehicle Movement and Parking**

- Reducing the A82 to single lanes along the Loch Linnhe frontage but retaining the two-lane approaches to the roundabouts. This will ensure that the route continues to facilitate the appropriate vehicle types whilst acknowledging the operational needs at the junctions which connect the strategic and local road network
- Removal of a section of Middle Street between the A82 Belford Road and Linnhe Road to facilitate development, with the introduction of a new signalised junction on the A82 near to Linnhe Road, offering an alternative vehicle access to the town centre.
- Relocation of off-street parking within the town centre and Nevis Terrace to a new multi-storey car park on the site of the existing An Aird car park. It is acknowledged that there is still a parking demand and by relocating to a site that can be accessed by high quality active travel routes then it is ensuring that parking and vehicle movement associated with the town centre is managed whilst prioritising active travel trips
- Servicing will be developed as further detail emerges. However, the key principles will include dedicated servicing areas for larger retail with potential for kerbside servicing for smaller retail units and residential area.



# Fort William Town Centre Masterplan

## Positively Contributing to the 20 Minute Neighbourhood



The National Planning Framework 4 (NPF 4) includes a focus on local living and the 20-minute neighbourhood concept.

A 20-minute neighbourhood assumes that an individual can make a walking journey to local amenities and facility within a 20-minute round trip walk. The 20-minute neighbourhood concept has a significant role to play in the vision for the town centre and as such the transport planning input focuses on how the redevelopment of the town centre can support this.

Policy 15 within NPF 4 states the following:

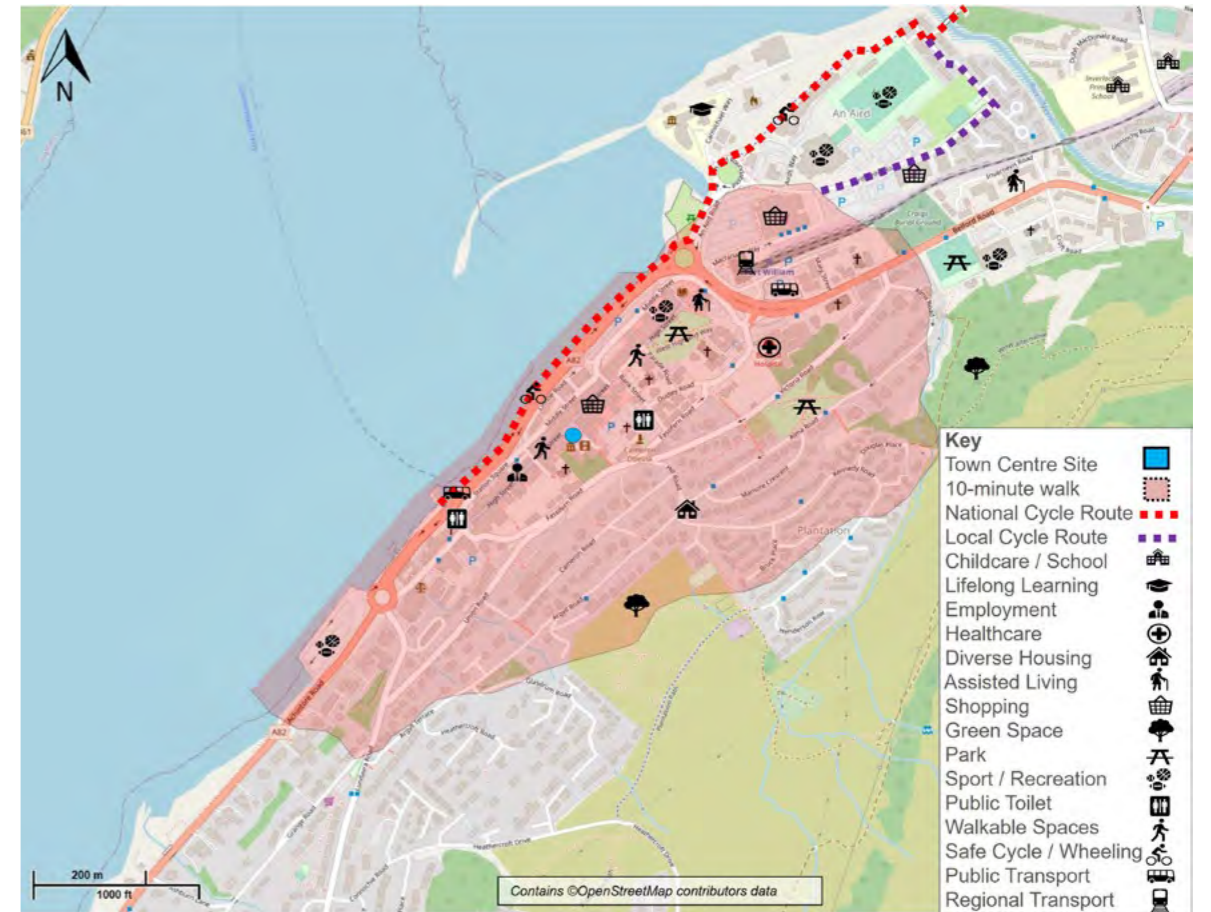
‘Development proposals will contribute to local living, including, where relevant, 20-minute neighbourhoods. To establish this, consideration will be given to existing settlement pattern, and the level and quality of interconnectivity of the proposed development within the surrounding area, including local access to:

- Sustainable modes of transport including local public transport and safe, high-quality walking, wheeling, and cycling networks
- Employment
- Shopping
- Health and social care facilities
- Childcare, schools, and lifelong learning opportunities
- Playgrounds and informal play opportunities, parks, green streets and spaces, community gardens, opportunities for food growth and allotments, sport, and recreation facilities

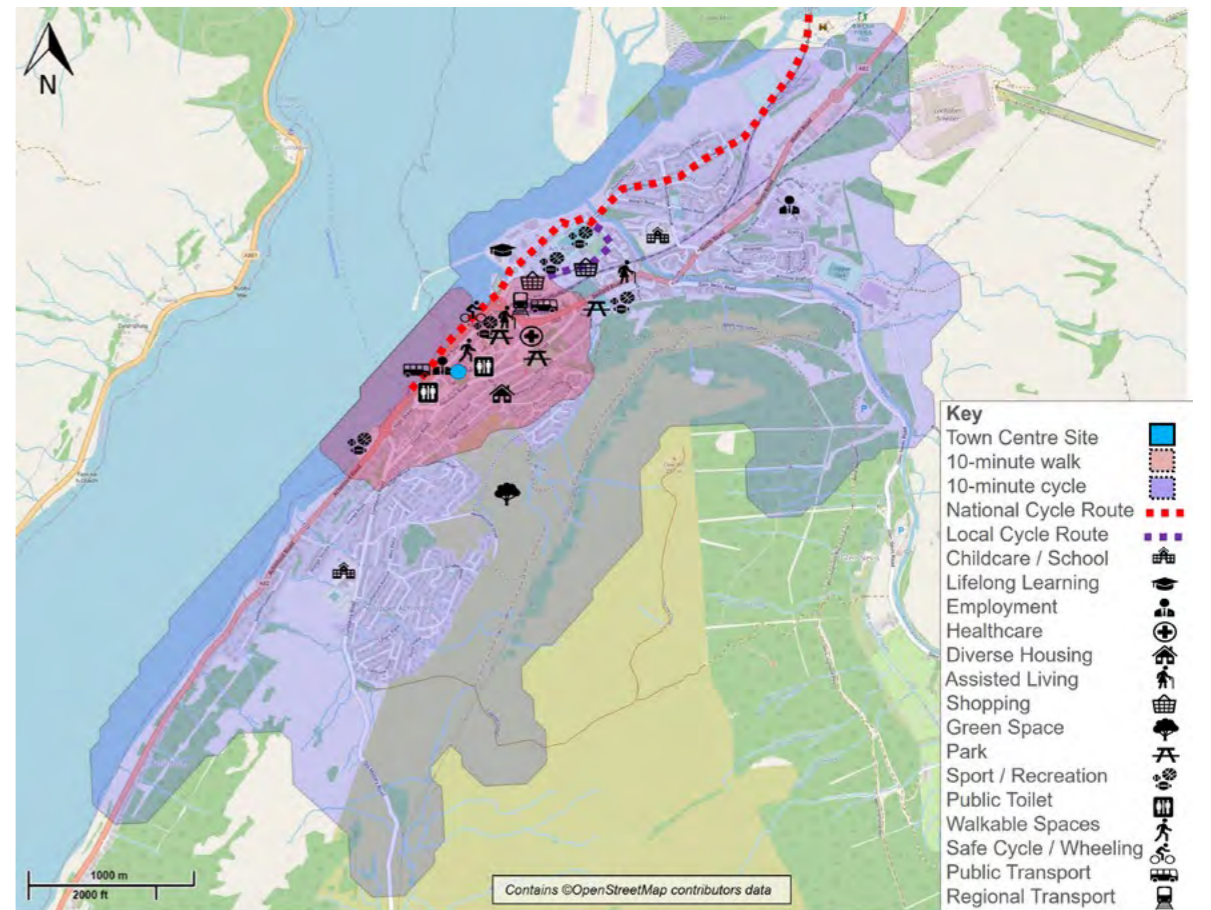
- Publicly accessible toilets
- Affordable and accessible housing options, ability to age in place and housing diversity.’

Analysis has been undertaken to understand how the emerging Masterplan/town centre contributes to the 20-minute neighbourhood. It is necessary to identify a focal point to conduct the analysis. Cameron square is considered, offering a public realm focal point for the town centre. The analysis is presented for both walking and cycling catchments (refer to adjacent diagrams).

- The introduction of improved active travel routes and particularly the connection between the railway station and the town centre will provide very good connectivity between the key features of a 20-minute neighbourhood;
- The Active Travel Hub at the railway station introduces additional active travel and public transport opportunities for the town centre;
- New development within the town centre maximises the opportunity for residents to live and work in the same area, encouraging shorter trips;
- The relocation of the Nevis Centre to the west of the town centre will introduce a new land use in this part of the town, adding to the available facilities within a short walk and cycle of each other.



20 Minute Neighbourhood (Walking)



20 Minute Neighbourhood (Cycling)

## Encouraging Active Travel Fort William Active Travel Strategy



**In order to meet its ambitions to deliver a significant modal shift from car reliance to active travel and public transport, Highland Council have published an Active Travel Strategy.**

In 2019 AECOM were commissioned by Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS) to update the Fort William Active Travel Audit that was developed in 2010.

The main output was an updated Active Travel Masterplan, including recommendations, presented in a concise format to maximise its accessibility and 'buy in' from the general public.

The study area comprised two main parts: the largest settlement of Fort William and Inverlochty and the area to the north which includes the settlements of Caol, Corpach and Banavie. The study area also included the small settlement of Torlundy to the northeast of Fort William.

The Fort William & Lochaber area is branded as the 'Outdoor Capital of the UK', with access to active travel routes and activities, including water sports, snow sports, hill climbing, walking and cycling. In addition to

the multiple mountain bike and off-road trails in the study area, cyclists can also use the National Cycle Network Route 78 (NCN78) which connects Fort William to Oban and to Inverness through the Great Glen along the Caledonia Way.

**Prioritised Action Plan**  
A prioritised Active Travel Plan of 11 points sets out the key measures needed to encourage walking and cycling in the Fort William area.

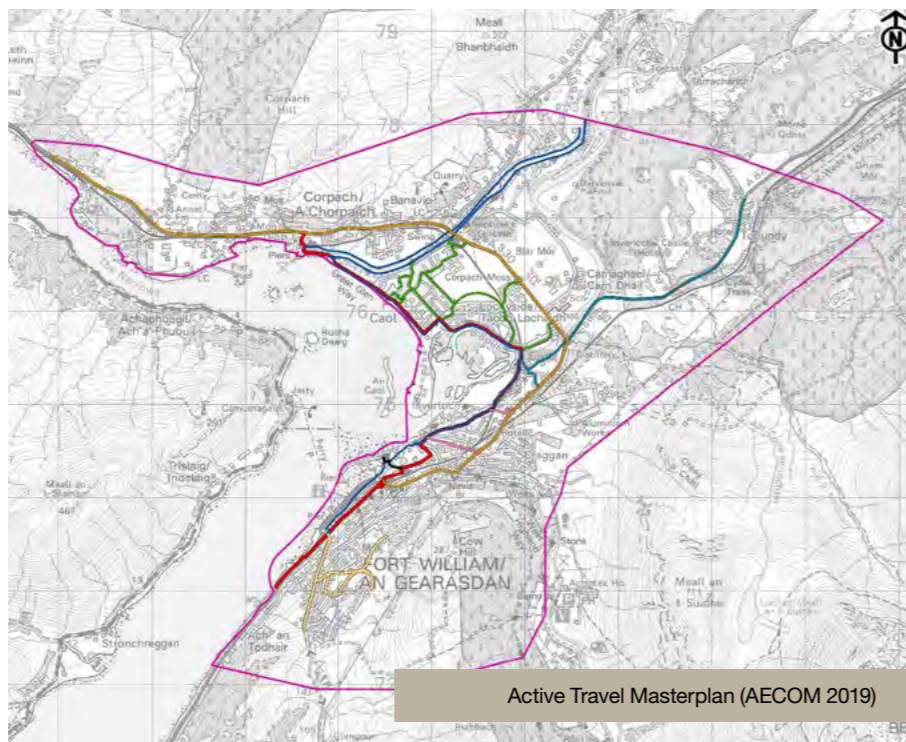
As well as incorporating parts of the strategic walking and cycling network, it also included promotion and 'soft' measures that form part of a package of works to assist in generating modal shift and behaviour change.

This masterplan framework recommends the continued implementation of the Active Travel

Masterplan to ensure that the wider surrounding communities can more readily access their town centre and particularly where it directly physically impacts the town centre in the form of pedestrian improvements (priority 3), cycle parking (priority 4) and the Fort William Spine Route (priority 5).



E-Bikes at Train Station



Active Travel Masterplan (AECOM 2019)

**'Scotland's communities are shaped around people, with walking or cycling the most popular choice for shorter everyday journeys'**

Scottish Government Vision for Active Travel 2030

## A82 / Middle Street Barriers to Connectivity

### Responding to Community Feedback

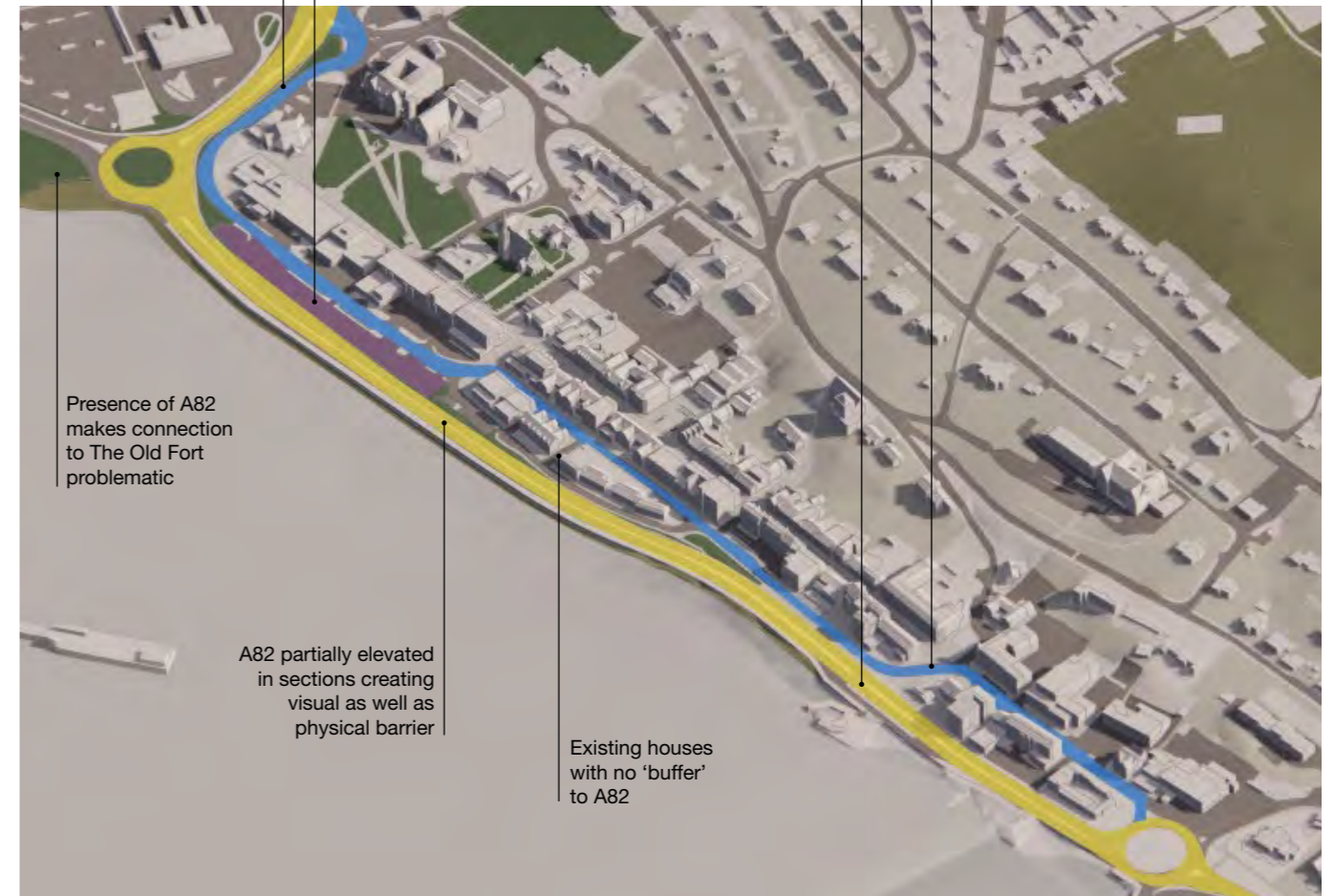
*'We need to improve connections and access to the lochside from the town centre'*

6 lanes of traffic between the Station and town centre due to combination of A82 & Middle Street

6 lanes of traffic and surface parking separates town centre from lochside

Limited crossing opportunities for pedestrians / cyclists

Middle Street merges with High Street reducing number of lanes to lochside



**As established in the historic map analysis on page 81, the town centre has never had a positive relationship with the edge of Loch Linnhe, initially as a consequence of the railway lines running along to Station Square at Gordon Square and more recently as a result of the presence of the A82 trunk road.**

The dual carriageway of the A82 runs along the edge of the loch, often raised above the adjacent street

level creating a physical barrier with very limited opportunities to cross safely and this hostile pedestrian environment is exacerbated by the proximity of Middle Street that runs alongside for a significant stretch.

In many locations, six lanes of traffic must be negotiated between the town centre and the edge of the loch. This is also the case upon approach to the town centre from the area around the train and bus stations. Indeed, the only means of

safely reaching the High Street and historic Parade greenspace is via a pedestrian underpass.

Improving pedestrian connectivity and the physical environment around these elements is a key ambition of the masterplan proposals and two potential options have been explored and are outlined on the next pages.

## A82 / Middle Street

### Mitigating the Impact on the Town Centre: Option 1

This option seeks to improve the pedestrian experience through a combination of two key moves:

1. The removal of a section of Middle Street from its junction with Belford Road through to the rear of Lochaber House
2. The reduction of the dual carriageway section of the A82 along the edge of Loch linnhe to a single lane in either direction between the two roundabouts, commensurate with the remainder of the road both north and south of the town centre.

Part removal of Middle Street



Strategic reduction in lanes on A82



Option 1: Part removal of Middle Street and strategic narrowing of A82 between roundabouts

The potential benefits of implementing this is shown in the adjacent sketch plan and view and can be summarised as follows:

Reduces the number of lanes adjacent to the train and bus station area, making a street level crossing easier

-

Creates a large potential development site that would have active facades to both the Parade and the loch, fulfilling the FW2040 ambition to create a 'town that faces water' capable of accommodating a large scale cultural / community facility at this key gateway location

-

Allows the introduction of a wider pedestrian and cycle route along the edge of the loch, better connecting to UHI and the Old Fort

-

Permits the creation of a greened landscaped strip to the town centre side of the A82 to shield the existing residential buildings and exposed backs of properties, presenting a better 'face' to users of the A82

-

Still permits access to Middle Street and to the required rear parking areas of Lochaber & Tweeddale House



## A82 / Middle Street

### Mitigating the Impact on the Town Centre: Option 2

**This option retains Middle Street but still seeks to reduce the dual carriageway section of the A82 along the edge of Loch Linnhe to a single lane in either direction between the two roundabouts.**

While not as transformational as option 1, there are still a number of potential benefits and these are shown in the adjacent sketch plan and view and can be summarised as follows:

Creates a series of potential development sites that would have active facades to both the Parade and the loch, fulfilling the FW2040 ambition to create a 'town that faces water' capable of accommodating linear residential led blocks to the loch at this key gateway location

Strategic reduction in lanes on A82



Allows the introduction of a wider pedestrian and cycle route along the edge of the loch, better connecting to UHI and the Old Fort

- Permits the creation of a greened landscaped strip to the town centre side of the A82 to shield the existing residential buildings and exposed backs of properties, presenting a better 'face' to users of the A82



Option 2 : Retention of Middle Street and strategic narrowing of A82 between roundabouts



## Public Transport The Current Picture

**Fort William town centre is served by multiple modes of public transport.**

Areas to the north-west of Fort William town centre, and the furthest south in the town, rank lowest on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation Geographic Access domain which measures access to vital services by public transport and private car. These areas have a higher proportion of households without access to a car than the Highland-wide average, therefore a joined up and reliable public transport network is vital.

As part of the engagement undertaken for the HITRANS Strategic Transport Study of 2018, issues with public transport provision were commonly cited.

### Bus Services

The infrequent nature of the majority of bus services within the Fort William area was felt to be limiting the appeal of bus travel and perhaps contributing to geographic exclusion/isolation, particularly for residents of the outlying settlements.

The current bus station has real time information but buses share stances which may confuse some passengers. The waiting area offers limited protection from cold weather, though it is close to the rail station and taxi ranks which offers an opportunity for transport integration.

### Train Services

With regard to train services, the Strategic Transport Study reports that:

*'The timetabling of rail services is such that opportunities to travel by rail to work or study are limited.'*

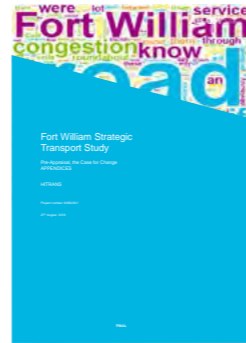
*The limited number of Central Belt rail connections was highlighted by a number of stakeholders and the public, with a notable gap in the timetable from Fort William to Glasgow in the afternoon.*

*The timetable also prohibits the use of rail for a full day trip (for leisure or business) in Fort William from the Central Belt, allowing only five hours in the town.'*

The current station building has a lack of presence, is in poor condition and has a confusing internal layout, encouraging disembarking passengers to leave via the 'side door' leading to the supermarket car park, rather than the front entrance that points you in the direction of the town centre, thanks to the placement of seating as a barrier to this more obvious route.

The report concludes:

*'Together with a range of wider contributory issues, such as an active travel and public transport network that is not supporting as many sustainable travel journeys as it potentially could, there is a case for intervention of varying types and magnitude to support Fort William's continued growth in the future.'*



Existing Train Station



Existing Bus Station



Taxi Rank, High Street

## Responding to Community Feedback

*'We need better transport links, increased bus service provision and better local train connections.'*



Existing public transport provision within town centre

### Bus Services

- 144 - Fort William to Kinlochleven
- 146 - Upper Achintore to Lochaber HS
- 147 - Fort William to Lochaber HS
- 148 - Plantation to Lochaber HS



- 149 - Plantation to Lochaber HS
- 522 - Fort William to Trislaig
- 592 - Fort William to Corpach

- Train Station
- Taxi Rank
- Ferry Landing
- Bus Stop



## Public Transport

### A Transformed Arrival Experience

The masterplan proposes improvements to the public transport network (particularly the arrival experience) within Fort William town centre through a number of initiatives, namely:

#### A New Bus Station

Creation of a new dedicated bus station, on the current Train Station Car Park, close to the existing facility. This would be augmented with an active travel hub, creating a multi-modal facility.

This bus station location has already been proposed as part of the Lochaber Bus Partnership Fund: Appraisal Report of April 2023, prepared for The Highland Council (extract on adjacent page).

#### A Transformed Train Station

Redevelopment of the train station to provide an enhanced passenger experience, improved accessibility, waiting areas, facilities and perhaps incorporating a 'changing places' facility (discussed later in the Responsible Town section of this report). The proposals also suggest the incorporation of a hotel within the new building providing an appropriate massing to both act as a marker from distance and to take advantage of the views that this prominent site would afford. A new welcome space at the entrance to the station is proposed, with planting, seating, shelter and cycle parking.

A new multi-storey car park is proposed for the nearby An Aird car

park site to replace the parking lost at the station connected via MacFarlane way that, now free of buses is reimagined as a pedestrian and cycle friendly landscaped shared surface route.

Beyond this, an element of accessible parking and staff parking would be located close to the new station building.



Dundee Train Station

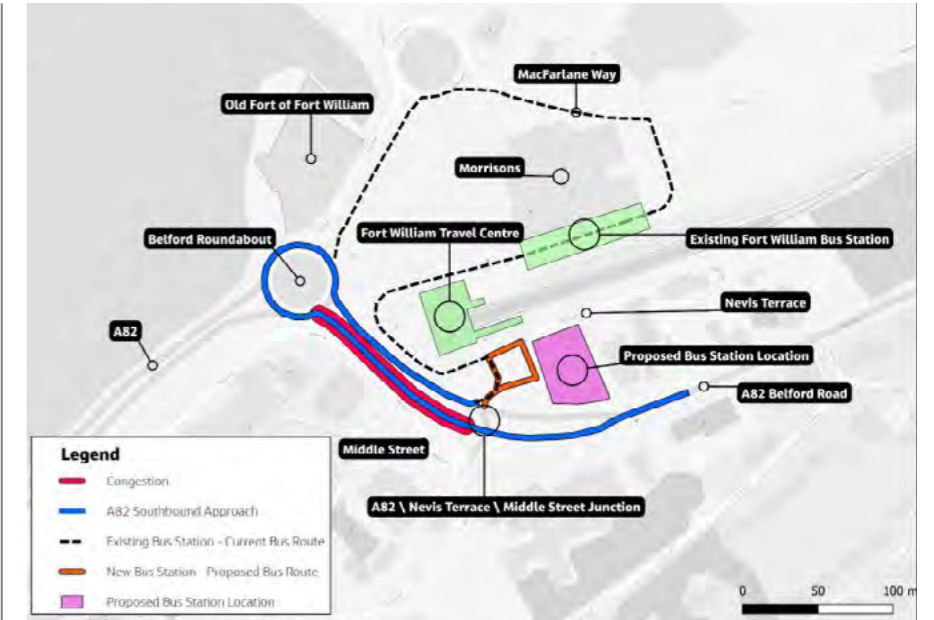


Dundee Waterfront Active Travel Hub



#### Responding to Community Feedback

'The bus station / travel centre needs "a makeover", cleaning, improved signage, improved timetable information and visitor information.'



Extract from Lochaber Bus Partnership Fund Appraisal Report (April 2023) demonstrating preferred bus station location

Multi-storey car park on An Aird site

MacFarlane Way reimagined as a pedestrian and cycle friendly route

New train and bus station building complete with active travel hub and potential hotel above

New bus station accessed via Belford Road as per recommendation of LBPF Report (see above)



Potential New Train / Bus Station Development

## Car Parking

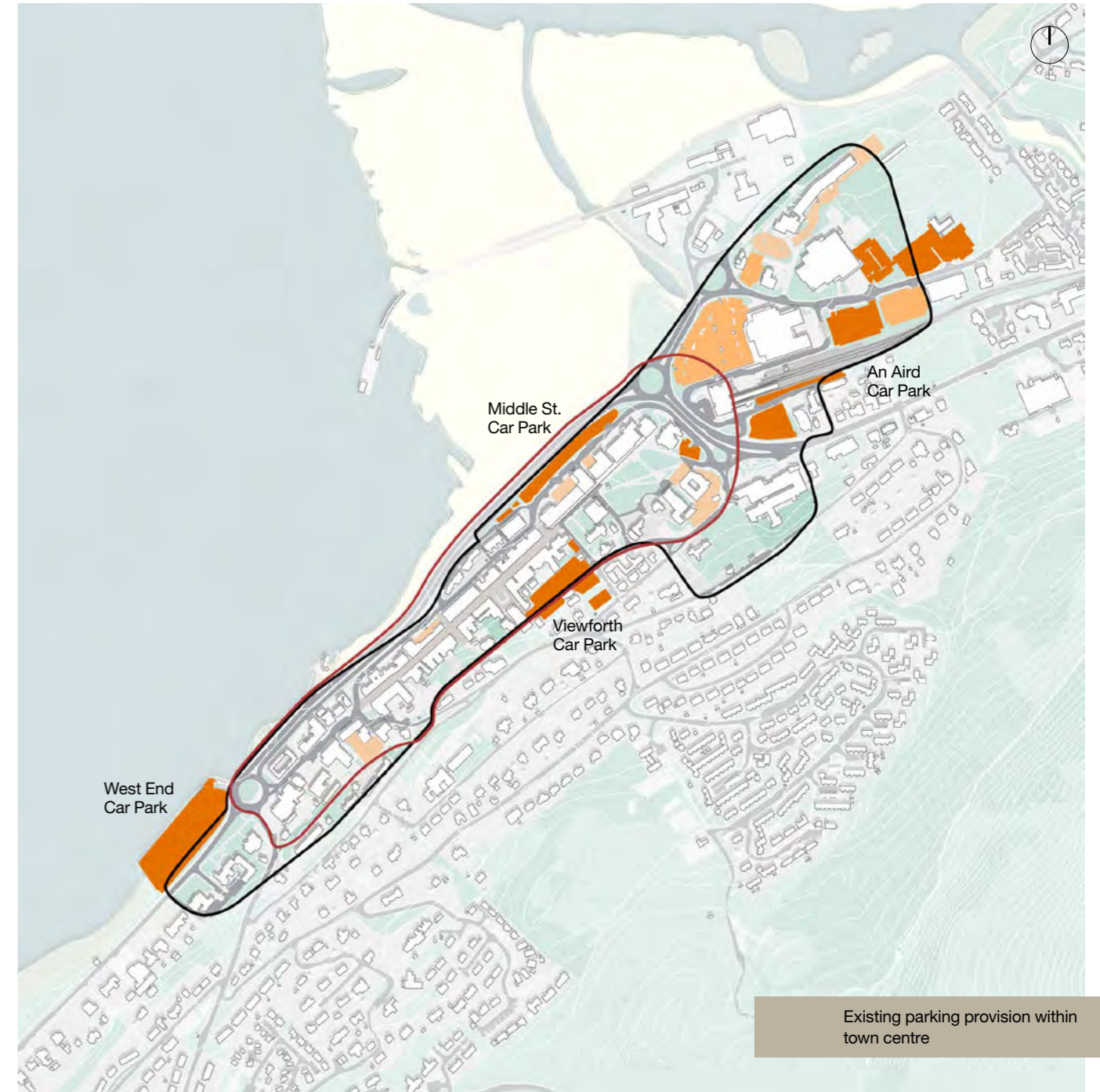
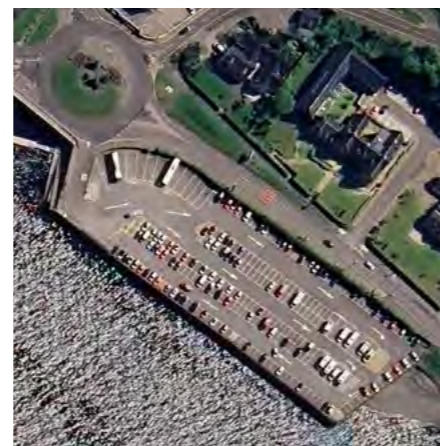
### The Current Picture

**Fort William is the hub of the wider predominantly rural Lochaber community who currently rely heavily on using cars as their primary mode of transportation.**

As a consequence of this historic reliance on the car, Fort William town centre is surrounded by large areas of surface parking, predominantly operated by Highland Council. These are augmented by the presence of the large Morrisons car park adjacent to the train station and Old Fort.

As the published Active Travel Strategy is implemented (a key component of the wider FW2040 Vision), this reliance on car use for

short local journeys should hopefully reduce. When combined with the encouragement of initiatives such as car clubs, the need to sacrifice such large areas within and surrounding the town centre to car parking should be reduced, freeing up space for the creation of people friendly 'place' and developable plots to increase density vibrancy and business resilience.



- Public Car Parking ■
- Retail / Car Parking ■
- Private Car Parking ■

## Car Parking Proposals

The masterplan acknowledges the importance of car parking to the local community and seeks to safeguard parking wherever possible while still providing sufficient opportunities for development to transform the town's relationship with the loch and to create new 'gateways' into the town centre.

The adjacent map demonstrates the proposed public parking picture for the town centre that:

- Retains Viewforth Car Park in its entirety
- Retains the majority of the West End Car Park, but sacrifices an area to incorporate a new 'gateway' building in the form of a leisure attractor
- Reconfigures Middle Street Short Stay Car Park as part of a potential civic / cultural building development
- Retains parking at the current Nevis Centre site that would serve both the town centre and a potential new leisure centre development
- Adds a new Multi-Storey Car Park on the current An Aird Car Park site to replace the train station car park area and to increase parking provision generally
- Disabled parking will be retained throughout the town centre either in or close to current locations to ensure accessibility is maintained. Dedicated areas of accessible spaces are proposed within the Viewforth Car park both at the closest connection point to the High Street and adjacent to Cameron Square.



### Generating renewable energy: Taking advantage of surface parking areas

The retained West End and Viewforth car parks provide an opportunity to introduce solar canopies over the spaces that would not only provide shelter to combat the notoriously wet local climate but also provide the town centre with additional clean energy and the potential to offer more EV charging points powered directly from the canopy arrays above.

France is currently transforming its surface car parks into solar farms nationwide. The French Senate has approved a bill requiring new and existing lots with more than 80 spaces to be at least half covered with canopies of solar panels that sit over the parking spaces.

*"....solar canopies make sense aesthetically and logistically as mass parking tends to be right next to energy-hungry urban areas. It's a no-brainer solution to providing clean electricity without wasting space."*

Joshua Pearce, Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering University of Western Ontario.



- Retained Public Car Parking
- Proposed An Aird Multi Storey Car Park
- Potential reconfigured Middle Street car parking
- Retail Car Parking
- Private Car Parking







# Shift Perceptions

Open up lanes and views that dramatically change how people experience the centre.

This enriches the experience and how we emotionally connect to our environment by providing greater connectivity, permeability and new ways to navigate through our urban centres.

**We consider how we create legibility through the use of the landmarks that exist and the creation of new. A review of historic town maps often reveals opportunities to reintroduce lost patterns that have a depth of cultural resonance.**

The historic street pattern of Fort William town centre follows the traditional herringbone pattern of narrow plots, closes and wynds off of the central spine of the High Street. Although some of these historic lanes and closes have been lost to redevelopment, many still survive and have influenced how this report suggests larger assets can be broken down and fragmented. This reintroduces permeability through human-scaled lanes and connections that both change how we experience the physical nature of the town and how we emotionally connect with it.

Due to the narrow form of the medieval closes and wynds, accessibility, lighting and security must be carefully considered in order to create environments which are safe for everyone.

### Responding to Community Feedback

*'We should improve the unwelcoming and poorly maintained lanes from Middle Street onto High Street'*









## Pedestrian Movement The Current Picture



The map above shows the extent of the pedestrianised High Street, the limited number of lanes and vennels, many in poor condition that radiate from this spine and highlights the barrier to movement that the A82 in its current configuration forms.

On a more positive note, it also demonstrates that the town centre is very compact and that the majority of its facilities and services can be reached within a 5 minute walk.

- Primary Pedestrian Route 
- Poor Quality Route 
- Important Town Element 
- Walking Route 
- NCR 78 Cycle Route 
- Barrier to Movement 

## Urban Grain Development of the Town Centre

The historic maps below show the development of Fort William town centre from around 1870 to present day.

From this analysis it is clear that;

1. The High Street has always been the dominant 'spine' of the town
2. Fort William has always turned its back on Loch Linnhe, particularly from 1894 when the railway arrived in the town and the tracks

ran along the edge of the loch to Station Square in the west end of the town. More recently, this severing of the town from the loch has been exacerbated by the retreat of the railway line and its replacement with the A82.

The maps also demonstrate how the town has expanded over time, particularly to the south where new residential developments have been created on the challenging topography at the foot of the

mountain range due to a lack of available flatter land thanks to the towns setting between the loch and mountains.

It is therefore imperative that any masterplan seeks to maximise development opportunities within the heart of the town centre to mitigate these natural constraints and minimise further unnecessary 'spread'.



## Pedestrian Movement

### An Improved, Permeable Public Realm



**The masterplan proposes a series of potential interventions within the urban grain that positively transform the pedestrian experience.**

This new urban realm plan for Fort William is the glue which will hold all the elements together to create a

coherent and attractive environment for the town centre to function well.

Improvements to existing streets and spaces are proposed that, in tandem with a series of new permeable lanes and spaces strengthen connections from the High Street, the spine of the town centre to the edge of Loch

Linnhe and in turn the Old Fort, and to the train and bus station, thanks to the removal of the existing underpass.

The potential combination of moves is shown on the plan below.

## harbour promenade, oslo

Only a few years ago to be able to walk along the Oslo harbour for almost 10 km, with no interruptions was unimaginable. However, shipyards and heavy traffic have given way to pedestrian walkways, and benches, and a scenic harbour promenade is very much a reality.

The route reconnects old and new parts of the city with a variety of experiences, to be enjoyed along the way.

**Orange towers show the way**  
Information markers with a shipping container aesthetic are set up at regular intervals along route to make sure you find your way.

These are decorated with art and information on nearby attractions and the historic significance of the area. Other interventions such as coffee kiosks and bench seating creating pause points are also branded to provide a consistent language to aid navigation.



New planting, seating and elements of shelter introduced to Station Square / Gordon Square. Road surface changed to emphasise pedestrian priority

New planting with incorporated seating and elements of shelter introduced to High Street

Monzie Square accessible parking relocated adjacent to Mairi MacIntyre building

Additional seating and new sculptural canopy added to Cameron Square

New paving, lighting and murals to existing vennels

New paving, seating and planting to define Fraser Square and route to loch

High Quality shared surface paving introduced surrounding former Tesco building and Church

New wayfinding elements linked by common colour (refer to case study above)

New pedestrian lane to edge of loch from the Parade

Better connections to edge of Loch transformed into a greened promenade with seating and shelter

Extended 'boardwalk' provides enhanced connection to the Old Fort



Plan of town centre from Train Station to Gordon Square

New green planted terraces complete with seating added to space to connect with landscape above

Monzie Square reimagined as a greenspace complete with childrens play

Terraced seating platforms complete with planting introduced to Fraser Square

Childrens play area and sensory garden added within Parade

Potential covered colonnade to new civic building provides much needed shelter

Extended Parade provides additional green space opens views to High Street

New arrival space in front of train station and level crossing to High Street to replace underpass



## Gather

Re-energise the centre by providing urban places that enrich day-to-day life and accommodate events that will attract local residents and visitors from outside the town. These external 'rooms' should encourage vibrant, year-round use.

Provide 'place not just space' with active edges, human-scaled enclosure, and greening for play and wellbeing. Enhance these places with degrees of shelter to allow all-weather use, safe gathering and social distancing when required.

**Fort William town centre is fortunate to contain a number of significant public spaces at its heart with distinct natures. The most significant of these are the Parade, a historic green space and Cameron Square, a hard landscaped civic square surrounded by cultural and leisure uses and with a canopy at its centre to encourage year round use. A third space, Gordon Square, not only marks the start / end of the West Highland Way but is the only one of these spaces with a direct visual connection to Loch Linnhe.**

We propose enhancing these existing spaces to maximise their potential through an analysis of the uses that surround them, the possibility of improving finishes and the incorporation of additional seating, planting and shelter.

A key focus of this study is to propose the creation of new 'place' wherever the opportunity arises throughout the town centre, such as

creating a more pedestrian friendly Monzie Square, another space directly connected to the High Street with a visual connection to the loch.

The lack of any meaningful public space at the edge of the loch has been identified in a number of the strategy documents and the creation of a new promenade is a central ambition of the FW 2040 Vision. As part of this study, we explore the transformation of this edge, strengthen its relationship to the High Street and seek to create new 'gateways' to the town centre.

# Gathering Spaces

## The Current Picture



Existing civic & greenspace within the town centre



- Key civic space
- Key civic greenspace
- Cemetery
- The Old Fort
- Active greenspace

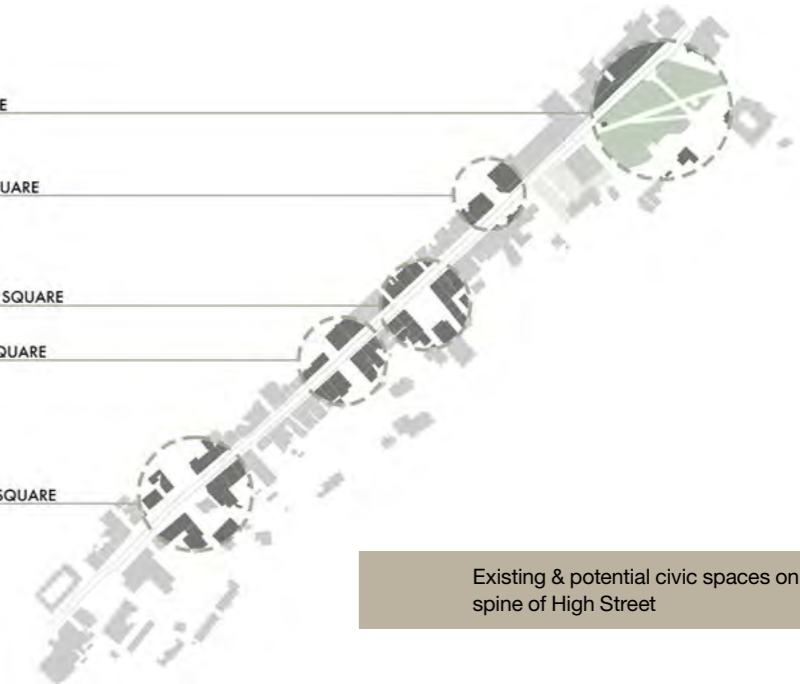
### Responding to Community Feedback

*'We need better multi-use spaces for community events / festivals / markets and high quality street furniture'*

The masterplan has identified a number of existing spaces that could be improved to provide much needed human scaled gathering spaces within the town centre, particularly connected to the central High Street 'spine'.

The Parade, the principal green space is dealt with later in the 'Responsible Town' section of this report.

1. THE PARADE
2. FRASER SQUARE
3. CAMERON SQUARE
4. MONZIE SQUARE
5. GORDON SQUARE



Existing & potential civic spaces on spine of High Street



## Fraser Square / Cameron Square Existing Townscape Analysis

The adjacent townscape analysis has informed the masterplan proposals to improve the quality of urban space within Fraser Square, to create a more pedestrian friendly greened space.

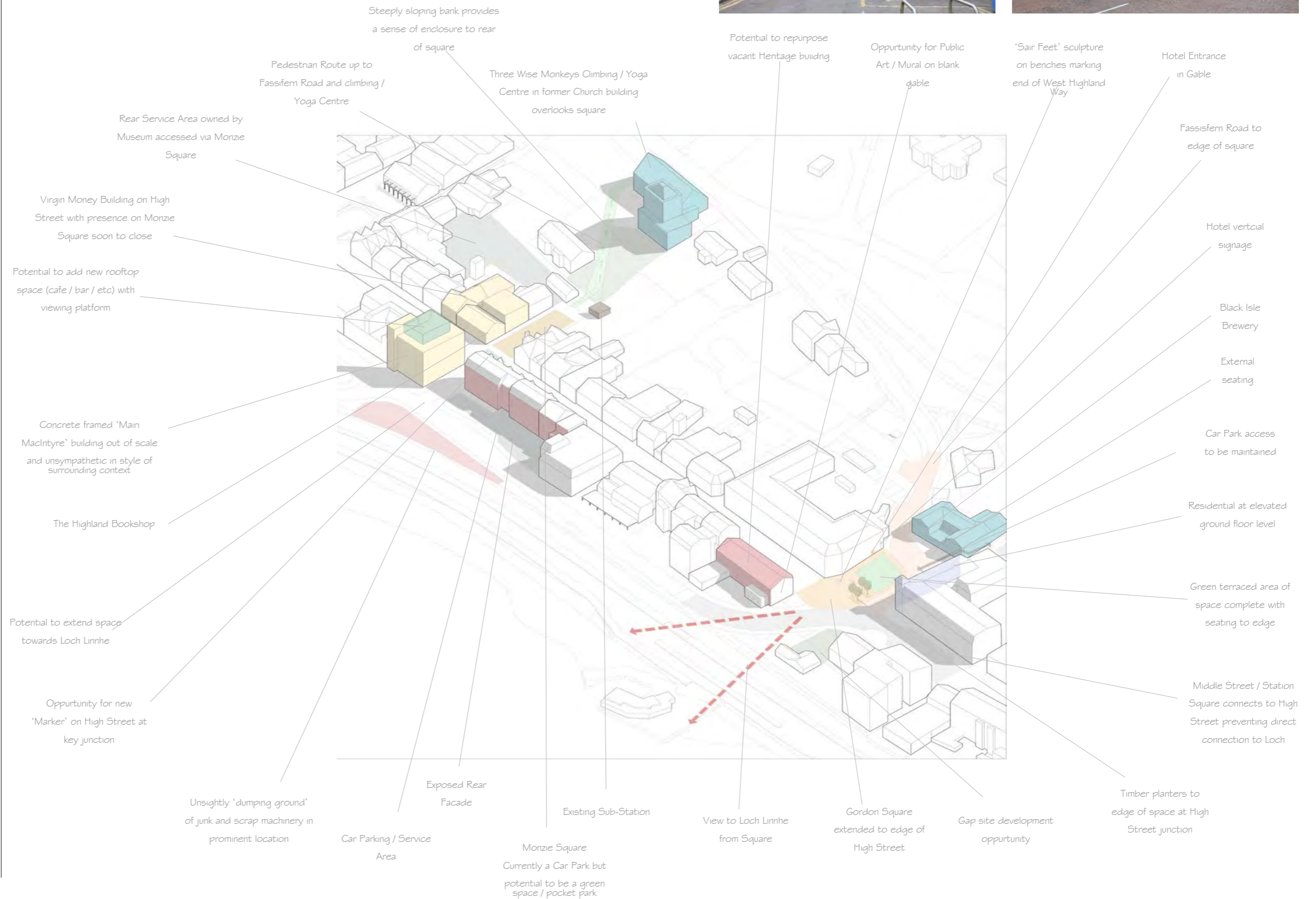
It also demonstrates the many positives inherent in the main civic space of the town, Cameron Square (formerly Town Hall Square).



## Monzie Square / Gordon Square Existing Townscape Analysis

As with the previous diagram, the adjacent townscape analysis has informed the masterplan proposals to improve the quality of urban space within Monzie Square, to create a more pedestrian friendly greened space that better connects to the natural backdrop and contains elements of childrens play.

It also demonstrates the opportunities to improve Gordon Square, the official start / end point of the West Highland way.



## Fraser Square

### Seating and shelter with a heritage backdrop



#### Recommendations

- Change surface material of space to more clearly define it from the rest of the High Street
- 
- Introduce planted seating platforms to sloping part of site heading toward Loch Linnhe
- 
- Create dedicated pedestrian crossing points at Middle Street and Linnhe Road
- 
- Continue new surface material to apron of Imperial Hotel and new space leading to A82 crossing point
- 
- Introduce additional bench seating and planters to better define space
- 
- Consider public art gable treatment to flank elevations framing space (The Crofter Bar & Lochaber House)
- 
- Introduce a 'canopy of lights' between buildings to encourage evening use
- 
- Replace and extend Canopy to Lochaber House and widen existing step area to create covered amphitheatre style seating



## Cameron Square

### A multi-functional events space



#### Recommendations

- Extend surface material of space over High Street to define square and increase effective area
- 
- Replace existing central canopy structure with sculptural retractable canopy or canopies complete with service plug-ins within their structure to support events and markets etc.
- 
- Soften the space with the introduction of large format planters to flanks that can be moved when required for events
- 
- Encourage the West Highland Museum as part of its proposed expansion to engage more actively with the space



Canopy Precedent:  
Meeting House Square, Dublin





## Monzie Square

A new greenspace at the heart of the High Street



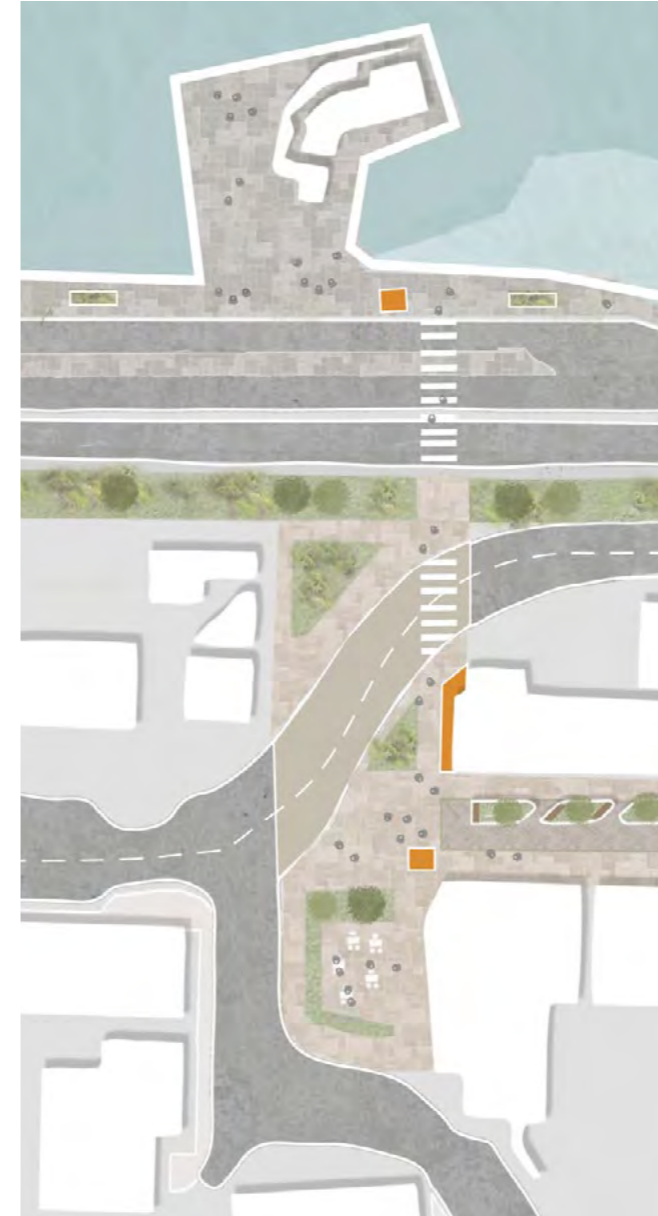
### Recommendations

- Extend surface material of space over High Street to define square and increase effective area
- Relocate Accessible parking from depth of space to area adjacent to Mairi MacIntyre building
- Transform square into greenspace complete with covered seating and childrens play
- Introduce new green terraces to rear of space to interact with existing steps and path up toward the climbing centre
- Continue new surface material to proposed A82 crossing point and create dedicated pedestrian crossing point at Middle Street
- Consider Public art gable treatment to flank elevation of the Highland Bookshop / Former Virgin Money block
- Introduce a 'carpet of lights' between buildings to encourage evening use



## Gordon Square

Sub-Title Here



### Recommendations

- Extend surface material of space over High Street to define square
- Consider Public art gable treatment to blank elevation framing space (see below)
- Introduce new landscaped areas either side of Middle Street complete with seating to perimeter to soften space
- Create dedicated pedestrian crossing points at Middle Street with introduction of 'raised table' to calm traffic
- Continue new surface material to existing A82 crossing point leading to the town pier & Crannog Restaurant
- Introduce additional planting within existing grass covered terraces
- Add new dynamic lighting to planters and within paving to encourage evening use of space by adjacent bars and restaurants (Wetherspoons & Black Isle Bar)



# Living town

# repopulate

**Introduce significant levels of town centre homes. Create mixed-use blocks with a variety of tenures (private for sale, affordable, social housing, student, elderly / supported / sheltered). Bring life back to upper levels over retail space through residential conversion.**

From the feedback received as part of the Fort William Community Action Group consultation in 2019 (contained in the Fort William Locality Plan), there is a perception among the local population that there is a lack of housing and affordable options to rent or buy.

Fort William town centre has already benefitted from the introduction of new homes right on the High Street thanks to the repurposing of Tweeddale House and Lochaber House, and the new build development on the Whisky Centre site, completed in 2019.

There are a number of upper storeys along the High Street that contain housing and this study identifies further opportunities to maximise this within the town centre, providing the added benefit of increasing footfall and providing greater passive surveillance.

Within the comments received as part of the FW2040 consultation there was a call for the introduction

of additional residential accommodation for the aging population (including care home provision) in a central location to ensure care needs were being met.

This masterplan shows a framework that focuses on the introduction of residential in a variety of types, tenures and affordability, influenced by market intelligence developed by Savills. This ensures that we appeal to as wide an audience as possible.

These proposals are largely focused within the town centre area and on the identified sites of the current hospital and adjacent former St. Mary's Primary School.

This executive summary provides information on Fort William's residential property market, population and household affluence. The full report is contained in the appendices section at the end of this document.

### Highland residential market

The factors that have impacted the wider Scotland market (economic uncertainty, high inflation and a spike in mortgage rates) have also played out across Highland, with a drop in transactions this year. With more availability, it is likely to remain a price sensitive market going forward as buyers are exercising more caution in their budgets and price offers due to stretched mortgage affordability. Having said that, availability remains below pre-pandemic levels and an underlying lack of choice will continue to apply upward pressure on prices going forward.

### Fort William population

Fort William's population has fallen gradually since 2012. This is due to the limited supply of new build homes in the local area, which has mostly included social housing and small scale flatted developments.

### Fort William household affluence

Compared to the wider Highland Local Authority area, Fort William has a higher proportion of lower affluence households, including those living in inexpensive homes in village communities. That said, there is a significant number of well-off owners in rural locations but a lack of affluent households living in modern homes given the lack of supply of private new build developments in the local area.

### Fort William residential market

There is a limited residential market in the postcode that includes Fort William due to the limited supply of private new homes that would have boosted transaction numbers. Nevertheless, the local market has remained steady supported by second hand sales. Whilst transactions have dropped over the last 12 months in line with the rest of Scotland, the average price has grown in the last three years as the market has shifted towards higher price bands.

### Gaps in the market

The increase in average prices in Fort William over the last three years is potentially encouraging for any future private new build development. Over the last 10 years, the area has witnessed mostly social new build housing and small-scale flatted sites and consequently there is lack of comparable evidence for pricing purposes. At present there are no plans for any medium to large private housing developments in the local area. Future private developments, if any, should consider attainably-priced small to medium sized two, three and four bedroom properties that can attract first time buyers, couples and growing families.

### Conclusions

The wider Scotland residential market is likely to remain price sensitive in the short to medium term, against a backdrop of economic challenges. Demand for attainably-priced housing will remain strong and this favours locations such as Fort William which has seen a lack of private new build supply.

## Recognising the Need for New Housing Fort William 2040 Vision

**The FW2040 Vision seeks to create a 'Great Place to Live' and there is a stated ambition to increase the number of homes in a variety of tenures throughout Fort William and the wider Lochaber area.**

While the town centre alone cannot provide the projected level of new homes it can be an active contributor in meeting these ambitious targets.

Through stakeholder engagement it has been identified that there is a need for new residential accommodation to serve the expanded hospital at Blar Mhor, protect existing workforce levels and to permit growth at key local employers like the Alvanne British Aluminium Smelter.

Lochaber Housing Association have expressed a desire to expand their presence in Fort William and will consider a range of opportunities from small to larger scale.

UHI have also stated their need for additional purpose built student accommodation to support their campus adjacent to the Old Fort. This is explored in greater detail in the 'Working Town' section of this report.

A mix of tenures will be vital to appeal to a wide market and ensure housing supply remains inclusive.



## Town Centre Living Introducing Later Living

**Like many towns Fort William seeks to be age friendly and to meet the needs and aspirations of its older citizens which will include having access to leisure and amenity and different levels of supported living.**

This was one of the recommendations of the recent FW2040 Consultation, which sought to consider the provision of additional residential accommodation for the ageing population (including care home provision).

Access to green space, safe walking routes, proximity to shops, culture and public transport all indicate that living in or close to the town centre would support the requirements of some of the older citizens.

Beyond that, for many of the more aged population, Fort William town centre has been the shared landscape of memory and youth and the ingrained cognitive understanding of place is likely to offer a more dementia friendly, positive environment to locate urban care homes and supported living. If

“ An energised town centre offers so much more for later living and all within walking distance – activities, services, travel connections and a multi-generational community. ”

not directly on the main streets, such a development (similar to Belong Chester below) would benefit from the services, familiarity and activity of the town centre environment.

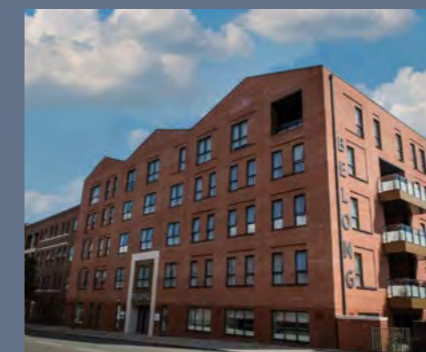
### Responding to Community Feedback

*'Introduce new adaptable and flexible housing for the elderly population to allow independent living'*

# case study

## belong chester

**Belong Chester, completed in July 2022, provides high-specification accommodation and world-leading specialist dementia and nursing support for over 100 people.**



24-hour support is provided across six extended family sized households and the village also includes 23 independent living apartments, which are available to buy or rent.

The ground floor 'hub' provides active frontages to the street and features a range of facilities, including bistro, exercise studio and function rooms.



An integrated children's nursery works with the village's team to create a place where older and younger generations can learn from each other in a welcoming, inclusive community.

As a prominent city-centre location, Belong offers enhanced opportunities for social interaction and integration with the wider community.



## Town Centre Living The Current Picture

The town centre is home to a large number of residents and has a healthy number of upper floors on the High Street already providing residential accommodation.

This was recently strengthened thanks to the Lochaber and Tweeddale House conversions at the Parade and the Whisky Centre Housing on High Street, both delivered recently as key FW2040 projects.

The core of the town centre is supported by the residential communities of Upper Achintore and the Plantation located on the sloping land to the south as can be seen in the diagram below.



### Responding to Community Feedback

*'There is currently a real lack of affordable private housing in Fort William, we need to build more'*

## Meeting the Residential Need Where the town centre can contribute

### Responding to Community Feedback

*'We need to bring all the empty and/or underused upper floors back to life... the environment and amenity of the High Street area would be enhanced'*



We have explored where the town centre and the areas of focus identified from the outset by the client could potentially contribute to the requirement for new homes throughout Fort William and the wider Lochaber Area.

Through a combination of potential further upper floor conversions and the development of sites, a

significant number of new homes could be provided as indicated in the diagram above.

- Existing homes ■
- Potential upper floor conversions ■
- Potential new build development sites ■



**A Key gateway site**

This location provides an opportunity to introduce a significant amount of new residential in the form of a mixed use block / blocks that could contain a variety of tenures (private for sale, mid market rent, social rent, later living etc.) over an active ground floor and with car parking provided in the depth of the block.

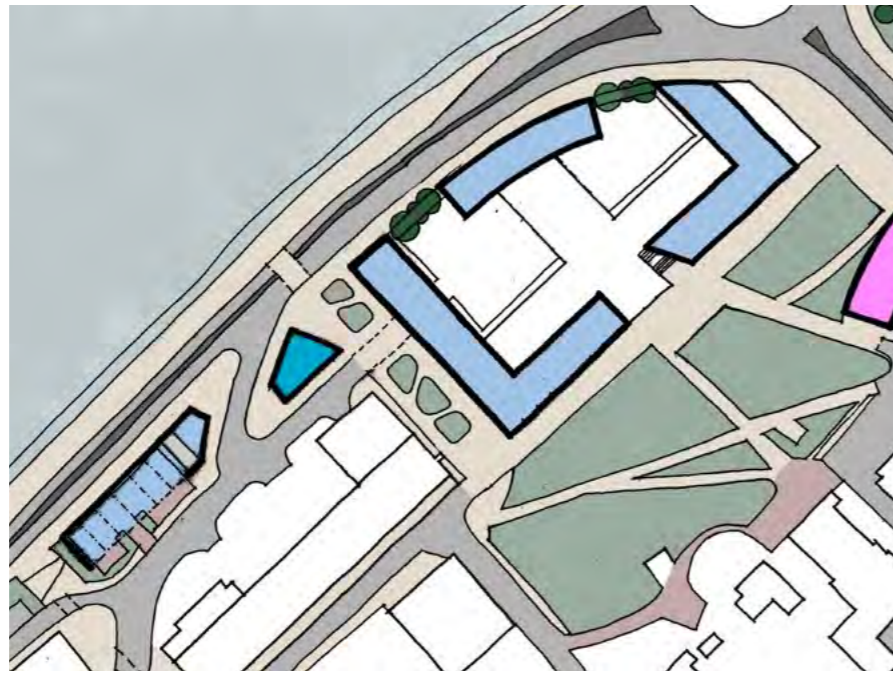
The sketch proposal shown here is of a scale that gives a sense of enclosure to The Parade, provides a new lochside 'face' for the town centre and safeguards activity at street level, vital for town centre vibrancy.

Two options have been explored:

**Option 1.**  
**Removal of Middle Street**  
This creates one large development plot to maximise frontage and amenity

**Option 2.**  
**Retention of Middle Street**  
Still facilitates significant development, but in a more fragmented form

# option 1



- Active ground floor
- F&B / Leisure
- Residential



Potential to provide  
circa  
**120**  
new homes



Active ground floor accommodation at key 'gateway' corner with residential above

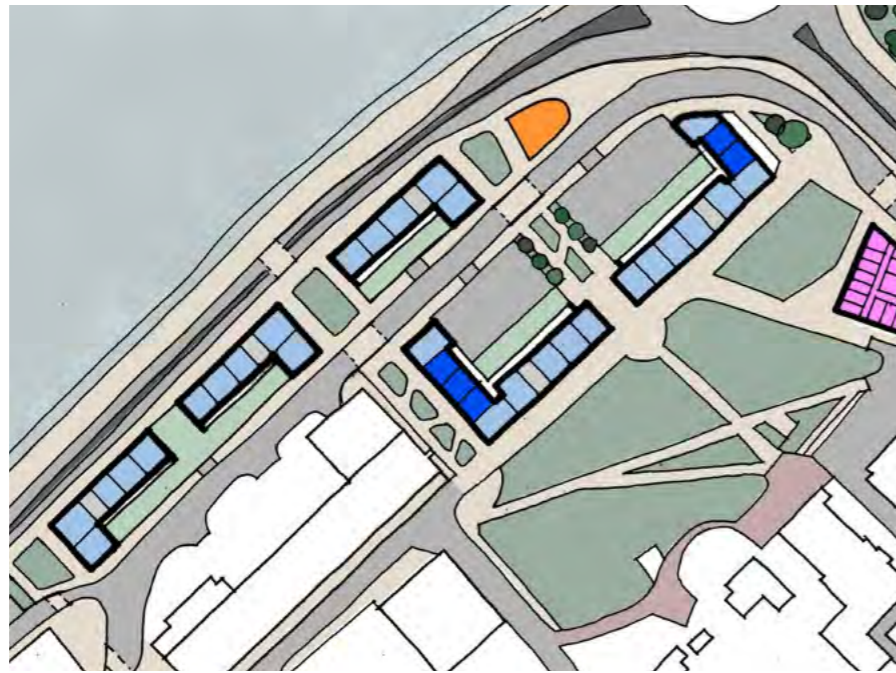
Residents amenity garden over active ground floor and parking area in centre of block

New residential units facing Loch linnhe

New linear residential block with parking beneath



## option 2



### Mixed-use Blocks: Bringing Necessary Density, Vibrancy & Passive Surveillance

In order to ensure the creation of a vibrant and safe town centre environment of an appropriate scale, a variety of ground floor uses could be included within the development proposals to key street edges, from retail/F&B to civic/leisure and commercial to provide activity at street level.

Residential accommodation above provides passive surveillance and opportunities to live at the heart of the town centre, close to all of the facilities it provides and in proximity to the excellent public transport links already available.

- Active ground floor ■
- F&B / Leisure ■
- Residential ■



Potential to provide  
circa  
**110**  
new homes



- Active ground floor accommodation at key 'gateway' corner with residential above
- Residents amenity garden over active ground floor
- New 'pavilion' building, potential tourism / cultural use
- New linear residential blocks with parking beneath

## Town Centre Living

### Belford Hospital / Former St. Mary's School Site



**A significant residential opportunity**  
The combined hospital and former school sites are located on the edge of the town centre and in close proximity to both bus and train stations.

By maximising building footprints on the levelled 'platform' that houses the current hospital building and working sympathetically with the remainder of the site and its challenging topography it is possible to create a large residential development that could consist of a variety of types and tenures as shown here.

Vehicular access to the site has been moved away from Belford Road to a position on Fassifern Road, some distance back from the existing junction to maximise visibility.



- Flats ■
- Family Townhouse / Terrace ■
- Student Residential ■

Potential to provide circa

**85**

new homes (excluding Student block)

Residential block with active elevations to all four sides

Potential purpose built student residential block to Belford Road

New pedestrian route through the site connecting to Victoria Road

Community garden / growing space at end of site



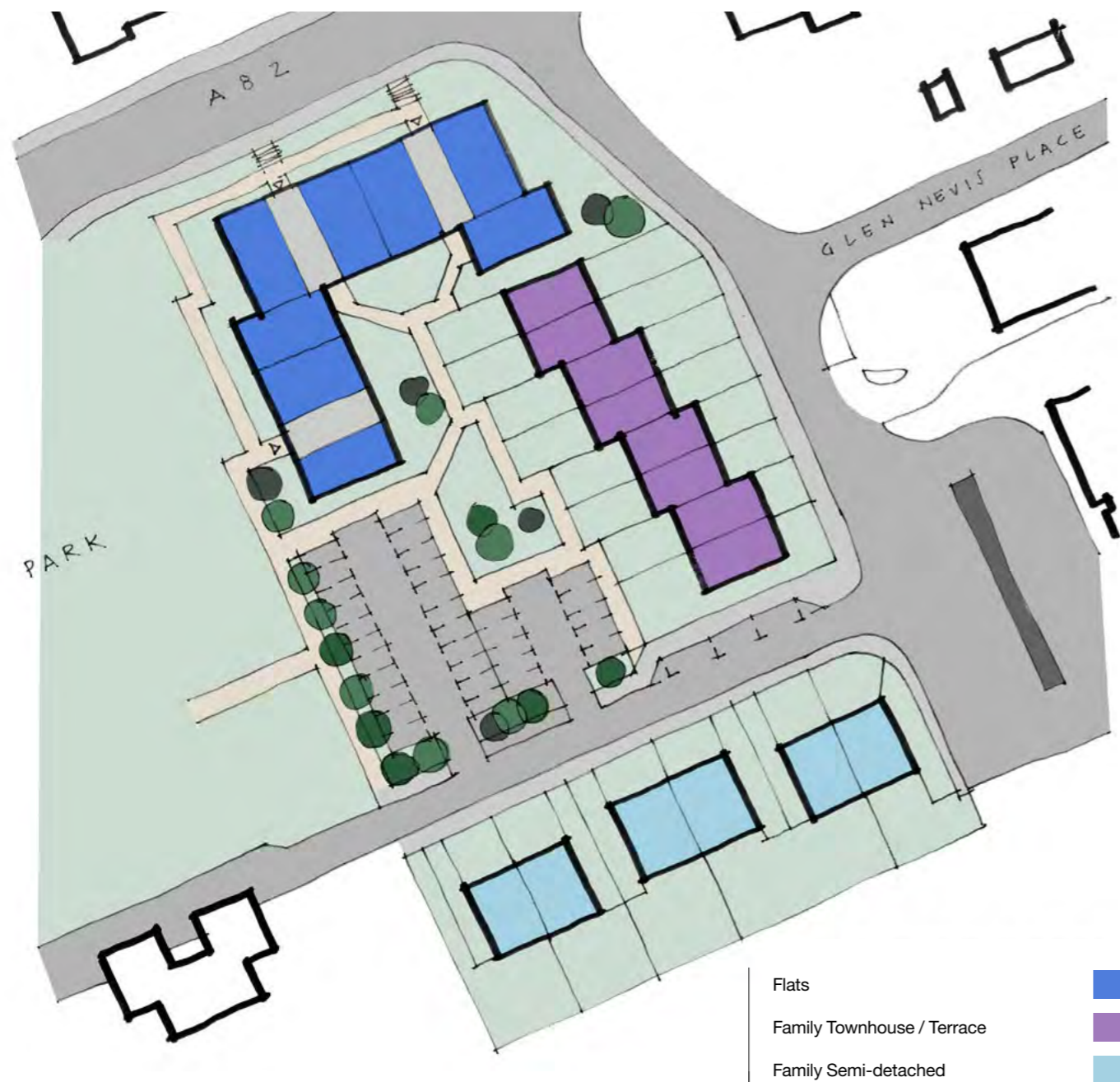
Family townhouses reduce scale to tie in with existing adjacent residential units on Fassifern Road

New vehicular access into site

Shared parking courts hidden in depth of site



Town Centre Living  
Lochaber Leisure Centre Site



Larger family semi detached units to rear of site  
Family townhouses with private front and rear gardens  
Parking court and shared amenity garden  
Flatted block to main road



Potential to provide  
circa  
**40**  
new homes

With the potential relocation of the Lochaber Leisure Centre, this site, the most distant of all of the areas of focus from the town centre would then be available for redevelopment.

The masterplan has explored the introduction of a residential development on this site with a mixture of flats to the main road and

townhouses / larger family units to the rear, all focused on a shared parking courtyard and amenity greenspace.

Flats  
Family Townhouse / Terrace  
Family Semi-detached





# 8

## locate services centrally

Key institutions such as education providers, health and civic establishments can be fantastic assets for a town centre. They offer essential accessible services right at the heart of the community, enhancing town centre vibrancy and greatly increasing footfall.

For public funded developments, reinforce the responsibilities and all-round benefits in locating these assets and services centrally.

**The Highland Council opened its new offices and Customer Service Centre in 2018 within the repurposed and extended former High School building facing Loch Linnhe and so already has a significant presence within the town centre.**

Following an options appraisal in 2020, it has been recommended that the Nevis Centre, a key community, leisure and arts facility for the town be replaced, perhaps with the 'sport' element removed from its program to create a more community and arts focused facility. This study explores the potential of locating such a facility within the heart of the town centre.

The existing library building, located close to the Parade and at a key arrival point within the town centre adjacent to the underpass that leads to the train station and beyond offers little in the way of street activation and a lack of urban scale. It has also been recommended that this function be absorbed into any new

community and culture led facility. Over and above arts and cultural attractions, town centres are the most accessible location for health facilities, driving footfall that is beneficial to other surrounding uses and reducing reliance on private car journeys.

The decisions on the location of these essential services must be based on ensuring the resilience of the town centre and not cost, in line with current government guidance such as the 'Town Centre First Principle', 'A New Future for Scotland's Town Centres' and NPF4. We explore opportunities to encourage and accommodate more essential services in to the town centre.

## Essential Services in Fort William

### The Current Picture

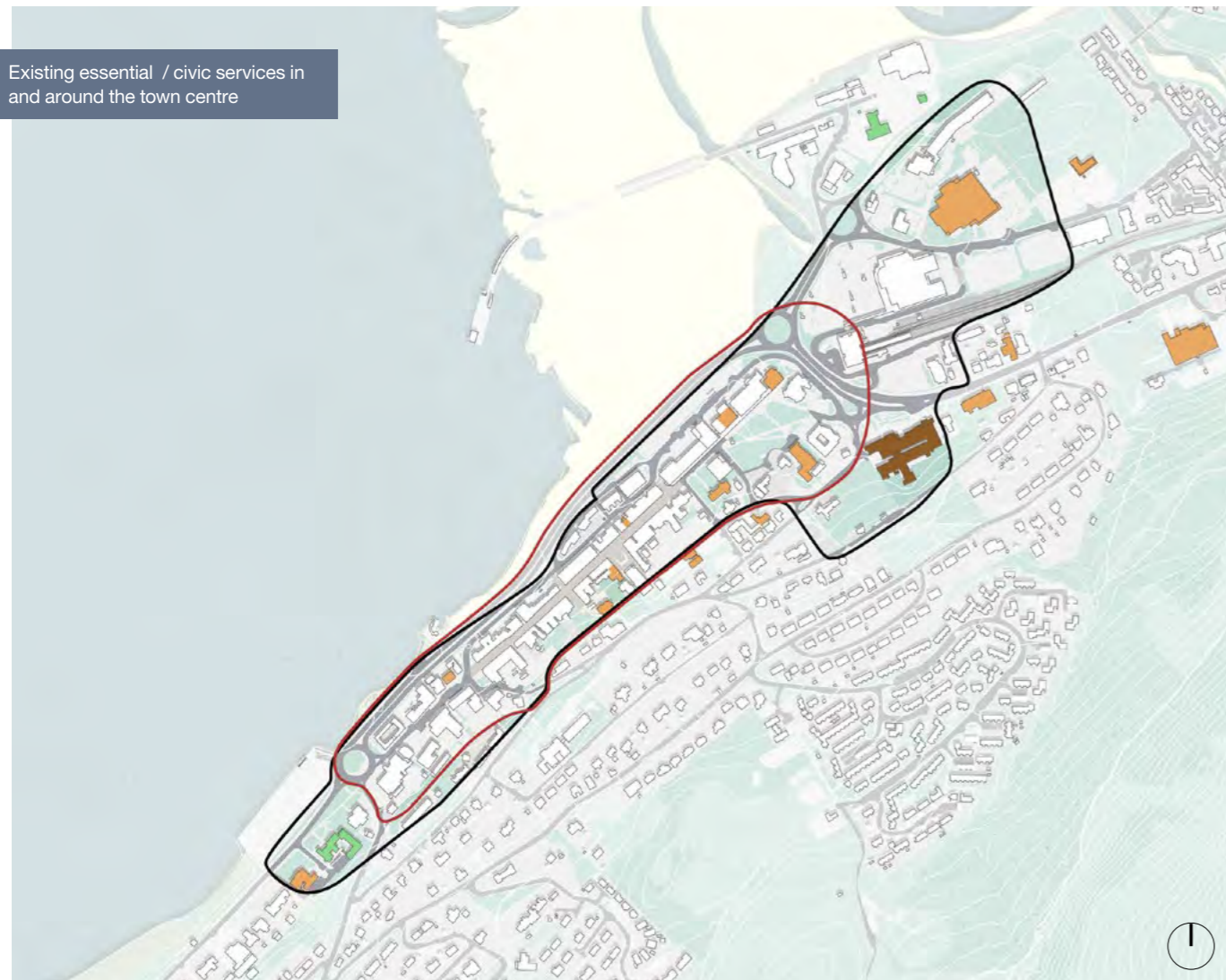
The map below shows the location of a number of essential services and civic / community uses in and around Fort William town centre.

The current hospital is within the wider town centre boundary but is scheduled to relocate to Blar Mor, nearly 3 miles outside the town centre. The current leisure centre and the Nevis Centre are also located some distance from the heart of the town centre.

Positioning these services within the town centre ensures they are accessible and drive footfall to support businesses.

- Civic / Community
- Healthcare
- Government

Existing essential / civic services in and around the town centre



Highland Council Charles Kennedy Building, Achintore Rd



Lochaber Leisure Centre



Fort William Library



Nevis Centre

## A New Nevis Centre An Essential Civic & Cultural Facility



**The Nevis Centre building, opened in 1990, is one of the largest venues in the Highlands and offers a range of services and facilities for the community, covering arts, sport and leisure.**

It is the only venue of its type and size within Lochaber and provides much needed space to a number of community run groups and sports clubs. It also plays host to larger national events such as the Scot Trad Awards and the Royal National Mod. By hosting these, Fort William and Lochaber benefit from added revenue both in the hospitality and retail sectors.

The current facility consists of the following:

- Foyer with reception area and in-house café
- Theatre / concert hall with seating capacity c.1000 used as an entertainment venue and as a games hall with associated changing areas and showers
- Children's indoor soft play area
- Ten pin bowling alley
- Bar with seating area
- Small function hall
- Youth space
- Meeting room
- Office space

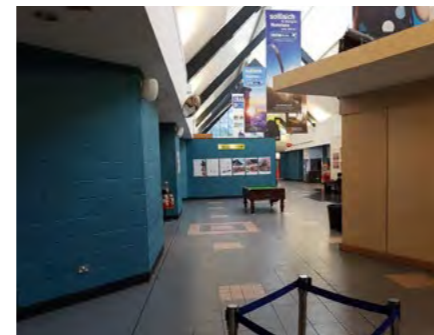


Though busy, the building (currently leased from THC) is reaching the end of its life. A study was undertaken in 2020 (summarised on the next page) to develop options for a replacement facility.

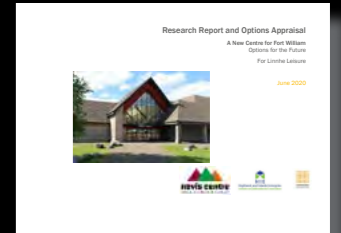
The report recommends that any new facility focus on cultural and community activity. It also recommends the retention of both the Ten-pin bowling and Soft Play however, the masterplan proposes to remove these functions and use them as key components of a new leisure led attractor elsewhere in the town centre (described in the Vibrant Town section of this report)



This study has explored potential locations for a new facility to better serve both Fort William and the wider region.



## Linnhe Leisure Research Report & Options Appraisal: A New Centre for Fort William



### Purpose of Study

To engage with key stakeholders and users and to undertake an options appraisal resulting in a preferred option to develop a new facility (or facilities) that will significantly improve the quality of the user experience for local people and visitors.

### Aspirations

There is an aspiration for any new build to be:  
Energy efficient, fit for purpose, used more, attractive to members and performers, retain bowling alley and soft play

### Community Survey Findings

A survey of local people identified patterns of demand and evaluated support for the centre. In summary;

- 29% visit the centre weekly, and 24% monthly.
- The ten-pin bowling, soft play, café and sports hall are the highest demanded facilities
- The largest number of group member visitors were in relation to the gymnastics
- As individuals the most popular activities are large concerts and events (56%), Christmas Festival (56%), craft fairs (46%) and seated cultural events (40%). In terms of importance to individuals the aggregate score was 7.5/10.
- In terms of how important people felt it was for the community, the score rises to nearly 9/10.

- There is high demand for a bespoke cultural event space to attract touring concerts and shows as well as space for rehearsal for groups across Lochaber. 88% of responses felt the assets were average to poor in relation to art provision and 76% felt the assets were average to poor in relation to cultural events provision.

### Challenges

- The mix of culture and sport facilities clash and don't work well in the same space.
- Continuity of service while a new development is being constructed.
- High demand and a lack of space.

### Potential Site

In the user group survey 46%, by far the highest proportion, supported a town centre site and the majority of stakeholders agreed. The current location or the An Aird Car park site were considered.

### Recommendations

1. The direction of travel for the Nevis Centre is a new build replacement.
2. The best site on balance is the An Aird car park across from the existing centre, allowing a new development on a simple clean site while current activity carries on.
3. The centre should ideally pass responsibility for providing all sports space to a new, renovated or extended Lochaber Sports Centre.

4. Nevis Centre should focus on cultural and community activity.
5. Soft play and bowling should be retained and refreshed in the Nevis Centre as popular activities and key income generators.
6. The Nevis Centre should be constructed with a smaller theatre for regular productions.
7. The Nevis Centre should consider absorbing the library to increase footfall to all activity.
8. The large sports hall can accommodate infrequent large event such as the Mod.
9. Ideally the new sports centre should be constructed on the old Nevis Centre site once it is established on the An Aird site.
10. An accommodation schedule should be developed for both centres.
11. A technical feasibility study should be undertaken to consider the sites in more detail and to see how this schedule of space could be accommodated.
12. Consideration should be given to the legal, management and governance structure of a body which will lead on the development of this potentially complex and costly development.

playback

## A New Nevis Centre An Essential Civic & Cultural Facility

### Responding to Community Feedback

*'We need a dedicated cultural venue with a theatre space that would also draw in people from surrounding areas'*



## A New Nevis Centre Potential Locations

As stated in the 'Manifesto for Change' upon which this masterplan is structured, the placement of significant civic and cultural attractors should not be based only on where sites are available but more importantly, where they will have the

greatest positive impact in terms of footfall, accessibility and vibrancy for the town centre.

To that end, the An Aird car park site was discounted. The West End car park was also considered inappropriate as it still performs a vital function at this end of town and a new civic building would lead to the loss of too much parking.

**Ultimately the site at the Parade is believed to be the optimum location for the new facility.**

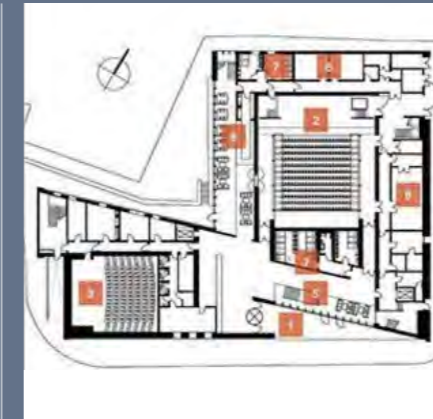
**It provides an opportunity to create a 'gateway' to the town centre, positively address both the Parade and Loch Linnhe and be well connected to public transport for those travelling from further afield.**

# case study

## mareel, lerwick, shetland

Area population :  
22,400

Program:  
Cafe/ Bar (Capacity 60 people)  
Auditorium (600 standing / 300 seating)  
Rehearsal Room (capacity 30 people)  
Cinema Screen (37 people)  
Dressing rooms  
Board room (16 people)



## beacon arts centre, greenock

Area population :  
44,248

Program:  
Cafe/ Bar  
Auditorium (500 people)  
Secondary Stage (128 seating)  
Gallery Suite (128 people)  
Rehearsal rooms  
Multifunctional space  
Meeting rooms



## The New Nevis Centre A Town Centre Attractor

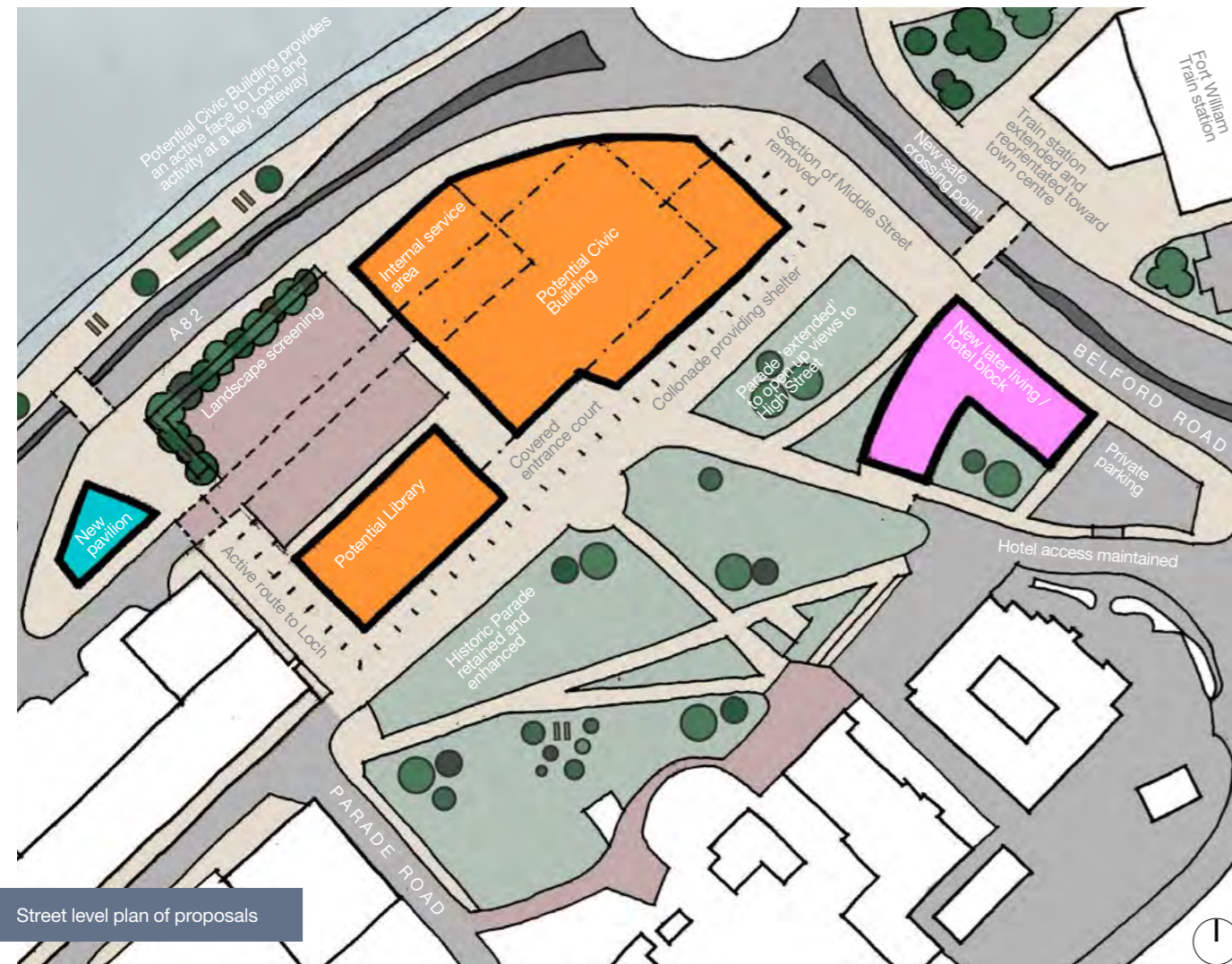
**The proposals locate the new Nevis Centre at this key 'gateway' location adjacent to the Parade.**

The new building could incorporate a continuous colonnade along its length to provide much needed shelter at street level, and a series of upper level terraces to allow elevated views over the Old Fort and Loch Linnhe.

A new library and learning hub could also be incorporated as part of any new facility, as recommended by the options report as detailed on page 119.

The new building would permit the creation of active routes from the High Street to the Loch and Fort and still safeguard an element of public surface parking as shown.

The plan and sketches shown below are indicative only and serve to highlight a potential approach to the site, not a developed scheme.



Street level plan of proposals

“ Positioning these attractors to energise key routes by stimulating footfall is critical. You probably only have one shot to get the location right. Visibility, radial influence and approach routes should determine their positioning, not just conveniently available sites. ”



Sketch views of proposals



Continuous colonnade providing shelter from the elements

Significant 'gateway' to Fort William town centre

Potential for inhabited terraces

Car parking provided, shielded by landscaping

## Lochaber Leisure Centre A Popular Community Resource



**Lochaber Leisure Centre is an extremely popular facility for both Fort William and the wider Locahaber area. As with the Nevis Centre, the building is showing its age and so the provision of a potential replacement facility has been explored as part of this study.**

The existing facility consists of the following:

- 25m swimming pool
- Hydrotherapy pool
- Fitness suite
- Squash Courts
- Associated changing and support areas

With the aspiration to remove the sport element of provision from any

new Nevis Centre and combine it with the existing leisure centre offer, a building with a larger footprint than the current facility would be required.

As can be seen in the diagram below, 3 sites were identified as potential locations:

### 1. An Aird Car Park

Discounted due to its compact size unable to accommodate the enhanced program.

### 2. Hospital / Former School site

Discounted due to its challenging topography and vehicle access issues at such a busy junction

### 3. Current Nevis Centre site

This site was chosen as the preferred option for the masterplan

as it permits the creation of an expanded facility complete with a significant amount of parking and a direct relationship with the adjacent Shinty pitch and Tennis Court.

Furthermore, should the proposals to relocate the bus station with an active travel hub and improvements to the train station and MacFarlane Way be implemented as outlined earlier in this report on the An Aird Car park site, this would make this the location best served by public transport and active travel.

The sketch proposals shown demonstrate a new facility that incorporates a swimming pool, a 6 court flexible sports hall, a large fitness suite that could contain gym, studios and therapy spaces, together with all required ancillary and support spaces, all accessed from a glazed internal 'street' accessible from both the town centre 'front' of the building and the parking to the rear.



Potential Relocation options for the Lochaber Leisure Centre



Existing location  
Potential sites for new facility



Sketch views of proposals



Reception / Shop / Cafe	Dry Changing	
25m Pool with Viewing Platform	Wet Changing	
6 Court Sport Hall	Staff Area / Offices	
Gym / Studios	Plant / Ancillary	



An aerial photograph of Fort William town centre, showing a mix of residential houses, industrial buildings, and a large body of water in the background. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter. Large, bold, white text is superimposed over the lower half of the image.

# working town





## new workplace

Reintroducing residential on its own to town centres could lead to areas devoid of life and activity during working hours. The way we work is changing. Introduce workspaces that create vibrancy during the day while offering flexible working and healthy live / work balance.

With a new imperative to work from home accelerated by Covid-19, there is a greater need for local shared workspace in well-connected towns to bridge between home and town centre.

Through our initial analysis we have found that there is a lack of available creative / co-work office space and workshop / maker spaces within Fort William town centre.

The masterplan proposes the incorporation of new opportunities for workplace within the town centre, from co-work spaces that take advantage of a post COVID desire to be more flexible and local in our approach to working, to new craft & maker spaces.

These new spaces could take over vacant retail properties at street level, providing a place for craft with a showroom component that would enliven the town centre and further diversify the offer on the High Street. Creative office space could be an ideal use to revitalise vacant upper levels over retail in many of the historic buildings within the town centre



Savills has undertaken research on the current supply of office accommodation to rent and buy in Fort William. According to CoStar data, there is no office accommodation and only retail / leisure uses available on the market either to rent or buy.

This demonstrates a lack of current supply of functional office space, which could suggest there is demand for some form of office/flexible work space provision in Fort William. Given the provision of retail space on the market there could also be opportunities to repurpose this vacant space to such uses.

According to Savills research (2023), flexible office space operators are benefitting from strong occupancy and desk rate growth across the UK due to the exceptional rise in demand post-Covid-19. Tenants now also have a desire for greater flexibility, with 72% of landlords now expecting tenants to require more flexible lease terms according to the Savills 2022 Landlord Flexible Office Survey.

Given the local market dynamics, it is likely flexible office workspace with a provision of smaller suites and hot desks would be appropriate. This would allow the space to attract smaller companies looking for flexibility or cater to individuals who are working remotely and looking for space to work.

Although the flexible office space market is increasing in popularity, with flexible operators expanding portfolios and seeking space across the UK, it is unlikely that larger operators would expand into smaller, more remote locations such as Fort William. Therefore, we would anticipate that any investment in developing new working space would likely need to be from the public sector initially.

## Introducing Workplace

### Where the town centre can contribute

The diagram below identifies a number of opportunities to introduce workplace to the heart of the town centre through a mixture of upper floor conversion, occupation of vacant or under-let street level retail units and the potential repurposing of a number of individual buildings.

A number of these potential locations are highlighted on the adjacent page.



Opportunities for introduction of office / co-work / maker spaces throughout the town centre

### Responding to Community Feedback

*'Introduce measures to encourage business start-ups in the town centre'*

Former Tesco Building:  
Creative Co-work



Mairi Macintyre Building: Office /  
Co-work space over Venue



Former TSB Branch



Vacant retail unit, High Street



BT Telephone Exchange Building: Is there potential as technology advances and space requirements reduce that the majority of this building could provide office / co-work and / or maker spaces at the heart of the High Street?

# 10

## educate

Encourage established education providers and community groups to take space in the town centre.

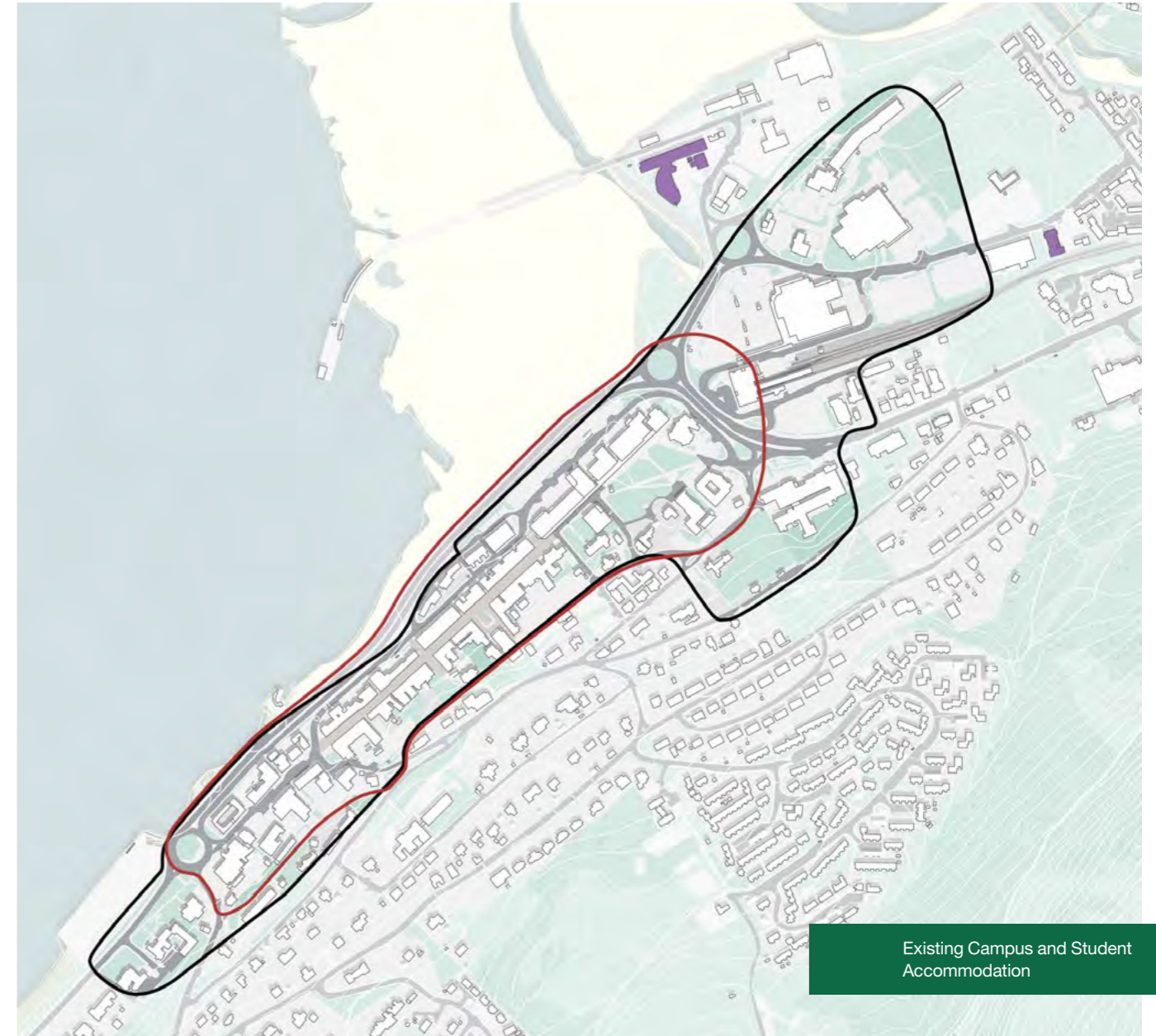
Beyond conventional institutions, life-long learning encourages people from all walks of life to learn new skills and meet new people. This will create a sense of empowerment, increase wellbeing and combat digital poverty.

UHI West Highland should be encouraged to make their presence felt more readily within the town centre through the introduction of more public facing activities and this study explores opportunities for this.

The vibrancy of the town would further benefit if future expansion of educational activities could integrate with the centre by taking advantage of 'loose space' in existing buildings on the High Street particularly for incubator or life-long learning opportunities.

There already exists student specific residential accommodation on Camanachd Crescent in the town and this study has, following consultation with UHI, identified potential further opportunities to introduce this typology within the study area in appropriate location and scale. This, along with supporting new employment opportunities and optimising the positive benefits of links between

established employers, UHI West Highland and new entrepreneurs will enable the development of further skillsets. This will create the opportunity to offer support and advice to prospective new businesses or social enterprises interested in locating in Fort William.



Existing Campus and Student Accommodation

## Further Education The Current Picture



## Further Education

### Where the town centre can contribute

**UHI North, West & Hebrides have a significant presence close to the town centre where a wide variety of courses are offered.**

The Fort William campus is home to the School of Adventure Studies, dedicated to outdoor and adventure related study. The BA (Hons) Adventure Tourism Management is the only course of its kind in Scotland.

The adjacent diagram identifies locations throughout the town centre for the introduction of additional student residential accommodation.

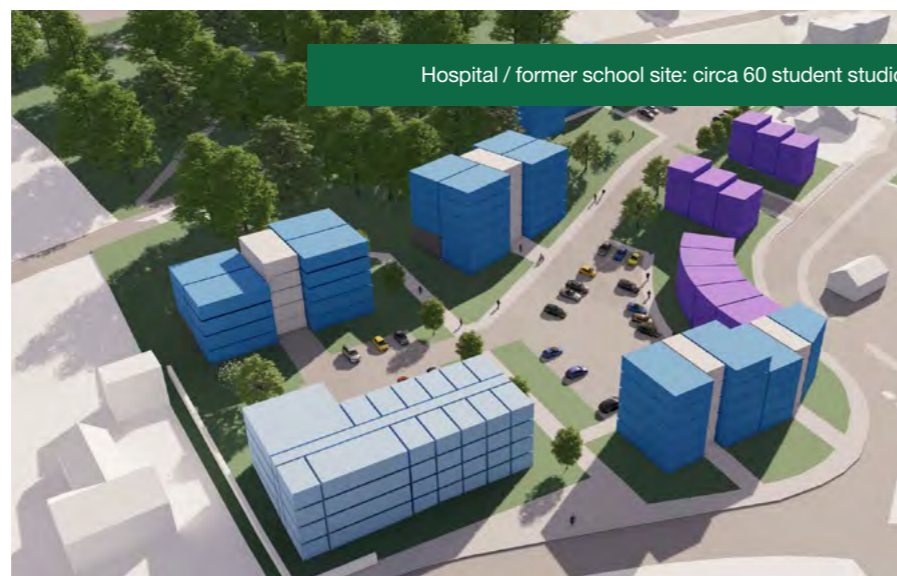
Beyond this, the vacant and under-let spaces and buildings identified in 'New Workplace' on page 128 could also be used for education purposes, should UHI require additional space beyond the confines of their existing campus.



Potential Opportunities for further student accommodation



Parade site: potential student accommodation



Hospital / former school site: circa 60 student studios



Existing 40 Bedroom Purpose Built Student Accommodation, An Aird

## Scottish Government Research on Purpose-Built Student Accommodation and Student Housing in Scotland

**This report, commissioned in January 2022 informs the work of the Purpose Built Student Accommodation Review Group, who were tasked with the development of a Student Accommodation Strategy for Scotland.**

The considerations pertinent to this Vision are outlined below:

**Increasing Demand**  
Demand for student accommodation is high and growing. There will continue to be large numbers of international students and also in future years, more home students will come from lower income widening access backgrounds, thereby increasing affordability pressures across student accommodation provision.

**Market Gap**  
There appear to be gaps in the market provision with developers and investors moving up-market (and fewer university halls). This supports the introduction of a more modest, mid-range offer.

**Stakeholder Perception**  
For some stakeholders, PBSA has shifted from being a modern solution to poor quality 'studentification' to becoming a part of the problem of perceived new forms of neighbourhood dominance.

**Moving with the Times**  
There is an opportunity to re-use existing vacant properties in good locations. However, the refit of the property must be good quality.

**Quality and Design**  
The report strongly encourages new developments to include user-testing and post-occupancy surveys to inform their design work, including their suitability for disabled students.

**Future Proofing**  
The sector needs to recognise the greater financial insecurity of a larger part of its market and provide a wider range of accommodation.

**Widening the Offer**  
There is a demand for a more budget offering. It recommends considering more fully how different interventions and repositioning, for instance, of refurbished student halls or other refitted properties might achieve similar ends.



# visit fort william town



# attract

**Social and cultural attractors are a major catalyst for positive change and offer important opportunities to drive more visits into your town centre. From community and civic destinations, to cultural centres, cinemas and European-style food halls, these uses can bring new life to old, cherished buildings. Look to work with existing institutions and community groups to bring new galleries, museums and performance spaces to the heart of the town centre.**

Positioning these attractors strategically and making them work together to energise key routes by stimulating footfall is critical. You probably only have one shot to get the location right. Visibility, radial influence and approach routes should determine their positioning, not just conveniently available sites.



In terms of existing attractors within Fort William town centre, the Highland Cinema on Cameron Square has had a positive and transformative effect, not only due to its introduction of a popular leisure and food and drink offer but also due to its central location at the heart of the High Street. Adjacent to this, the West Highland Museum has ambitions to expand its offer through extension into an adjoining building that will increase its display capabilities and in turn, it is hoped, its visitor numbers.

Fort William benefits from a number of cultural and tourist attractions in the surrounding area (Lochaber Castle, Ben Nevis Distillery, Lochaber Geopark etc.) and as the 'Outdoor Capital of the UK' attracts a huge proportion of its visitors from the walking, climbing, skiing and mountain biking community.

The Fort that gives the town its name has great potential in its position on the edge of Loch Linnhe but at the moment is difficult to reach on foot due to the combination of the A82 and Morrison's car park. This study seeks to maximise the potential of the Old Fort and the Loch as a significant 'attractor' for Fort William through forging stronger pedestrian connections from the town centre and creating an attractive environment with activity and potential to dwell for locals and tourists alike.

Beyond those already stated, we identify potential additional uses that stimulate the day and evening economy with appeal to a wider demographic of residents and visitors whilst capitalising on the loyal local customer base.

## European Style Food Halls

### A Proven Attractor

European style food halls have become increasingly popular throughout the UK and beyond thanks to their variety of food offer, sense of community (due to their shared seating areas), and ability to host events.

If placed in the right location they can be important attractors, stimulating footfall, creating vibrancy both day and night, and incubating and supporting business. They can be powerful agents of regeneration, reviving the fortunes of cherished heritage assets, as seen in Palma, Malmo, Oslo and closer to home in Altrincham to name but a few.

In the case of Altrincham, the town centre was suffering a seemingly terminal decline due to changing shopping habits and its relative proximity to Manchester City Centre and the Trafford Centre.

The traditional market was reinvented as a European style

Altrincham Market Hall



food hall in 2014, won market of the year in the Observer Food Monthly Awards in 2015 and has led to a significant upturn in the fortunes of this once failing town centre.

It has been a real footfall success story, the collected data demonstrates that the Market has had a positive effect on visitor numbers within Altrincham town centre, particularly in the immediate vicinity of the food hall with a 7% increase in the area around the market since 2017. More crucially,

this also led to a 73% reduction in surrounding vacant retail property within the wider town centre.

A number of potential locations within the town centre could support a food hall; those below have been chosen because they could help to increase footfall and catalyse wider change around them.



Potential Food Hall Locations

# case study

## victorian market, inverness

This recently completed project, creates a contemporary European style food hall within the much-loved historic setting of the Victorian Market (the main market hall and the fish hall) safeguarding its future at the heart of the City Centre.

It houses a number of food operators, with a particular focus on promoting local produce, and complimentary businesses where the theatre of food preparation is celebrated and front and centre.

The central space, the hub of the development houses shared seating and is a flexible covered civic space that can adapt at different times of the day to hold specific one-off and seasonal events.

The layout and the operation of this development supports and nurtures operators and incubates businesses.

The new food hall has had a regenerative effect on the adjacent arcade markets and the immediate city centre and has become a vibrant focal point for the wider community.



Former Tesco Building: Potential Food Hall  
More details can be found on pages 168-171

## Markets

### A Proven Attractor

**Traditional external markets, once a staple of our town centres have, in recent times, enjoyed a renaissance as people seek to 'shop local' and care more about the provenance of the food and goods they buy.**

They are powerful footfall attractors, as evidenced in the case study below and can be a way for small businesses to be incubated and then expand into physical bricks and mortar space, reversing increasing vacancy rates.

There are currently monthly markets held adjacent to The Parade and in the Nevis Centre that takes the form of a Craft Fair / Car Boot Sale.

Beyond these, the popular Glen Spean Market, a monthly farmer and craft market is held 6 miles outside the town centre in a location not readily accessible by public transport.

Fort William High Street and its connected gathering spaces provide an attractive backdrop for activity.

The town centre would benefit greatly from the expansion of existing or the introduction of additional markets bringing much needed activity and providing support to existing businesses.

Specialist seasonal markets could also be introduced around specific

#### Responding to Community Feedback

*'Multiple responses expressed support for a town market (crafts, unpackaged fresh produce, and particularly a farmers market'*

times of year, such as Christmas that could form part of a larger 'festival', attractive to both the local population and tourists alike.



## the frome independent frome, somerset

**An Innovative Market Revitalising the Town Centre**

This market, held on the first Sunday of every month has transformed the fortunes of Frome in the West Country. It began in 2009 with 15 stalls and now boasts 250 stands and its economic impact has been felt throughout the town.

The market sells everything, from homeware to flowers and fresh produce, including a specially curated Farmers Market and has a thriving street food offer with a wide variety of cuisines available.

The market supports new and fledgling businesses through their 'suitcase sale' area, offering smaller non-committal pitches concentrated together.

When the market began, the majority of small independent shops in the town centre were vacant, now they all have tenants. The success of the market has encouraged the local authority to invest in the public realm in the centre of Frome and for the first time in generations, young people are moving to the town instead of away.



## awestruck academy clydebank

Housed in a former Snooker Hall above an Indoor Market, Awestruck Academy, founded in 2017, offers courses and experiences in Digital learning, photography, video film-making, gaming, virtual reality, music tuition, performance and art.

Its varied community spaces include a cafe, creche, gaming room, performance space / venue with stage and recording equipment, gym and a gallery space that exhibits the work of local artists.

It provides essential community arts and music services and is

looking to expand into providing mental health and wellbeing facilities.

Founding member Allan Rutherford states; 'We focus on providing a relaxed and creative atmosphere that invites people to share ideas and see these take shape.'

Whether it's young folk forming a band, parents or those in business wanting to stay clued up about online security or retired people rediscovering a hobby, we can take your talent and knowledge to the next level.'



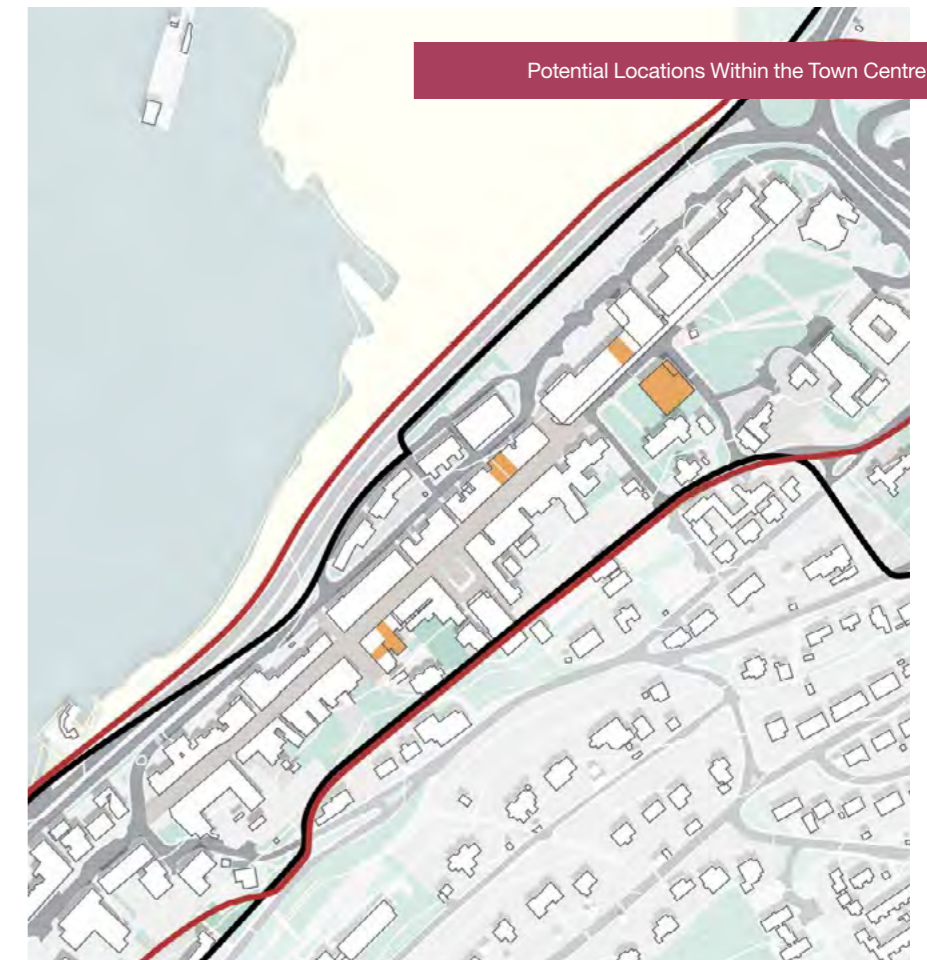
### A Youth & Community Hub

**Welcoming Young People and their Families to the Town Centre**

**It is important to consider the introduction of attractors within our town centre that do not exclusively rely on spending money in order to appeal to as wide a demographic as possible. Our town centres need to be focused on interactions, not transactions.**

To that end, and in response to the community and stakeholder feedback received looking for free or low cost experiences within the town centre for all, but with a particular focus on youth and young families, the masterplan proposes the inclusion of a youth and community hub within the vision for the town centre.

Potential Locations Within the Town Centre





## Leisure & Tourism Catalysts for Transformation

**Leisure uses are a vital component of any town centre. They offer considerable benefits to the local population in terms of activity, employment and wealth generation.**

Currently, there are a number of popular leisure activities within the town centre, including the Highland Cinema on Cameron Square and the ten-pin bowling and soft-play within the Nevis Centre. There is an opportunity to introduce more leisure uses within the town centre but these must be located in the right place to maximise the footfall benefits they can bring.

Introducing water based leisure activities on Loch Linnhe could be a welcome addition to the existing town centre offer and a catalyst for the transformation of the town's relationship with the loch.



New Cruise Ship Terminal, Greenock

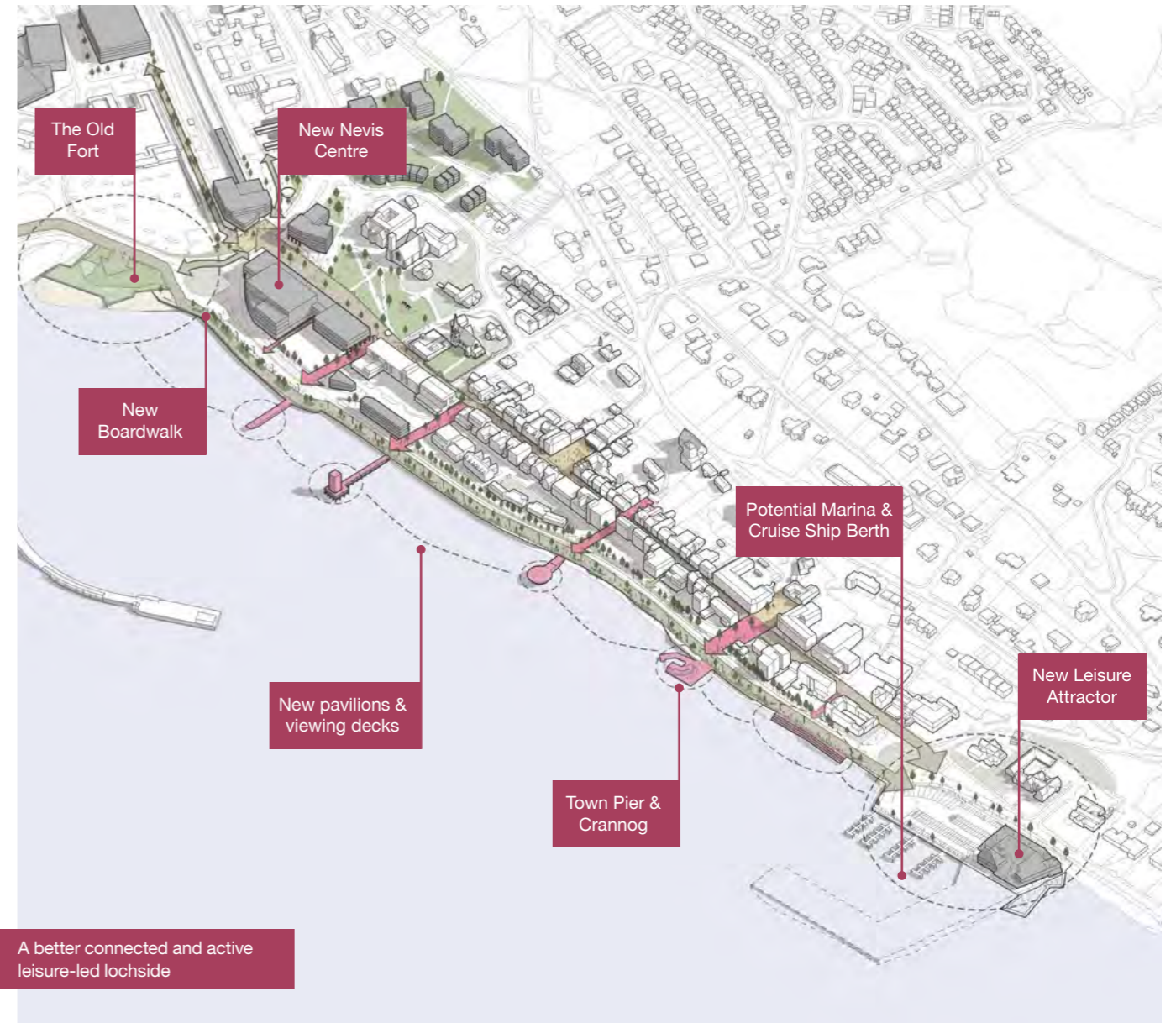


Tourism is crucially important to the economy of Fort William and the introduction of new leisure attractors to provide a greater level of quality and choice of activity will be essential to the future health of this market.

As outlined earlier in this report, the Fort William Marina & Shoreline Community Interest Company have brought forward proposals to create a dedicated cruise passenger welcome centre. The significance of this market to the town is outlined in their study report where they state;

*'In 2023 there will be some 6,200 cruise ship passengers arriving in Fort William, with a further 3,300 visiting crew. It is estimated that each passenger who comes ashore and attends a coach tour or visit will spend up to £200 per person.'*

*Over the next five years it is expected that the number of passengers will double, potentially injecting some £5M per annum into the economy by 2030.'*



### Creating 'Bookends' of Activity

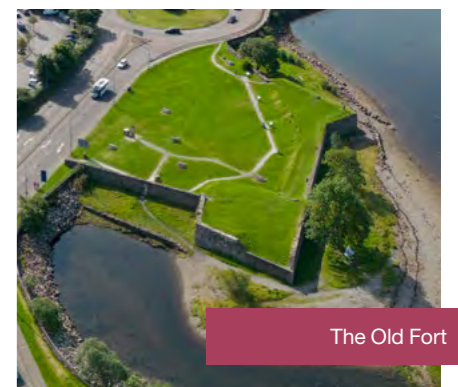
A transformed and accessible lochside, incorporating a widened pedestrian and cycle zone complete with planting, seating and elements of shelter provides the ideal location for additional leisure uses and would act as the connective tissue between The Old Fort and the replacement for the Nevis Centre to the east and a proposed attractor on the site of the West End car park (detailed on the next pages)

### Connecting to the High Street

In order to enrich the experience along the edge of the loch between these 'bookends' of activity, a number of new structures forming a 'trail of breadcrumbs' are proposed, incorporating the existing Crannog Restaurant on the Town Pier.

Consisting of a variety of interventions from simple piers to viewing towers or follies, these elements are strategically located visible from and perpendicular to the key civic spaces of the town centre (The parade, Monzie Square, Gordon Square etc.) to reinforce connection between the loch and the High Street, the spine of the town centre.

It is important to note that these proposals do not hinder the ambitions of the larger lochside development schemes outlined within the Context section of this report (pages 20-21) should they be brought forward in future.



The Old Fort



Crannog Restaurant & Town Pier

## Leisure & Tourism

### The West Car Park: A New Leisure Attractor & Gateway to the Town Centre

#### Responding to Community Feedback

*'We need to safeguard a significant amount of parking at West End Car Park, this is important for that end of the town'*



The West End Car Park is a significant component of the car parking that serves Fort William, however as an entry point to the town centre and a space with a direct connection to Loch Linnhe, it provides the opportunity to introduce a new 'gateway' building and active relationship with the loch whilst safeguarding a significant proportion of the existing parking.

- Other complementary leisure uses (climbing / mini golf etc)
- Cafe / bar
- External viewing area and childrens play deck overlooking the loch



The new gateway building announces the town centre from the western approach and is envisaged as a leisure-led facility that could contain the following uses:

- Cruise passenger welcome centre
- Watersports hub
- Safe swimming zone
- Children's soft play and ten-pin bowling, to replicate these popular elements contained within the current Nevis Centre



Widened pavement leading to new building with landscape buffer to parking

Majority of surface parking retained (opportunity for canopy with solar panel array)

New leisure building with inhabited garden roof with shelter, seating and childrens play

Watersports hub with restaurant above and panoramic views over Loch Linnhe



#### Responding to Community Feedback

*'Consider a water sports centre to attract young people'*

*'We need better access to Loch Linnhe for wild swimming, this has positive physical and mental health benefits'*

*'The west end of the town looks depressing with nothing to attract visitors'*



Reception / Exhibition space

Watersports hub

Soft play

Ten-pin bowling

- Cruise passenger welcome centre
- Bar / restaurant
- External picnic and play garden deck

## A Calendar of Events Ensuring All Year Round Vibrancy

Fort William and the wider Lochaber area successfully hosts a series of events throughout the calendar year including:

- The Mountain Bike World Cup
- The Glenfinnan Gathering International Highland Games
- Fort William Mountain Festival (Every February)
- Ben Nevis Race (First weekend in September)
- Scottish Six Day Trials (first week in May)
- National MOD (every 5 years)

A number of other towns and cities host popular and celebrated festivals and events, two such examples are showcased in the adjacent case studies, and Fort William should consider the introduction of additional events, specifically within the town centre.

Any new events should be designed to take advantage of facilities already present within the town centre, and appeal to both the local population and attract tourist and visitors.



Building on the considerable success of the Highland Cinema could Fort William host its own film festival? Similarly could a book festival be a possibility, or perhaps a food and drink festival, celebrating the fantastic local produce?

Seasonal events, like the Hallowe'en Festival in Paisley or a series of christmas themed events, including a themed market could also be introduced.



### Responding to Community Feedback

*'We need more community events and festivals'*



# case study

## wigtown book festival wigtown

Wigtown transformed its fortunes through embracing literature and has been recognised as Scotland's 'National Book Town' since 1998.

It is now home to an internationally recognised book festival and contains 14 book shops, which equates to one for every 500 residents.

The town, outwith the festival has become a magnet for book lovers and has developed an extremely successful tourism industry and was awarded 'Scotland's Most Creative Small Town' in 2012.



## hallowe'en festival paisley



Every year Paisley town centre is transformed to play host to the town's Halloween Festival - one of the biggest and best in the UK.

The award-winning festival - which attracts a crowd of tens of thousands - sees three nights of spectacular street performers and specially-created spooky installations, set against the backdrop of the town's 850-year-old Abbey.

So successful, there are plans to market the event as 'Scotland's Halloween: the definitive destination' by Event Scotland.



**A successful town centre needs to be vibrant and safe providing culture, music, bars and restaurants and underpinning the town's economy (and tourism) particularly at weekends and evenings. The centre also plays an important role in enhancing quality of life by fulfilling a town's promise of entertainment, distraction and shared celebration.**

# 12

## night life

**Feedback received as part of the FW2040 community engagement called for 'a revitalised town centre....a more vibrant night time economy including nightclubs.' This masterplan explores the expansion of the evening economy in the town centre, with a particular focus on ensuring this is introduced in locations that work with the existing offer and promote activity where desired, for example along the High Street.**

In order to stimulate the town centre's economic recovery a proactive planning, conservation, regulatory and licensing system is essential.

Getting the basics of stewardship right is vital to creating a positive visitor experience, so cleanliness and maintenance need to be high priority issues.

Feedback received from the 2022 FW2040 public event, in response to the question 'what would encourage you to come in to the town centre more?' stated 'More live events or live music and entertainment offerings in the evenings, particularly for families'.

New residential developments, including the repurposing of existing upper floors have to be considered carefully when located near evening activities but will provide passive surveillance to routes and spaces providing a safer, more welcoming environment for all.



## Fort William's Evening & Weekend Economy The Current Picture



The map above shows the locations of current evening and weekend bars, restaurants and leisure venues together with hotels and B&B's throughout the town centre.

The High Street is well served for bars and restaurants from Cameron Square down to Gordon Square but lacking in evening activity around the Parade.

The primary event/gig venue that also houses two existing popular leisure uses, soft play and ten-pin bowling, the Nevis Centre, is located peripheral to the heart of the town centre denying the heart of the town centre the foot fall this facility generates that would support the High Street centred bars and restaurants.

F&B / Leisure  
Hotel / B&B



### Responding to Community Feedback

'We need a wider range of entertainment offerings in the evening, particularly for families after 5pm'

## New Evening & Weekend Opportunities

A number of new opportunities to enhance Fort William's evening and weekend offer have been proposed within the masterplan and these are highlighted below.



Evening & weekend activation of lochside



Potential new foodhall, former Tesco building

Potential Street level venue and rooftop space, Mairi MacIntyre building



Potential new waterfront leisure attractor: Restaurant, ten-pin, soft play, watersports



Potential new Nevis Centre: Theatre and events spaces now in the heart of the town centre

# 13

## illuminate

Public art and dynamic lighting can transform the existing environment for a relatively small outlay.

Lighting, in particular, can create a variety of effects to suit the season or event, celebrate rich historic facades and elevate the everyday.

This study promotes opportunities to build on the existing public art throughout the town centre, with particular focus around the High Street and any proposed public routes and spaces, such as along the shore of Loch Linnhe.

It also explores the introduction of colour and light to celebrate the historic town centre fabric, transform the arrival experience and improve safety on key routes into the town centre.

A lighting strategy will be a key component in creating a quality of environment, enhancing feelings of safety and supporting the continued extension of activity into night time economies.



'Sair Feet', Gordon Square



## Public Art:

A near immediate opportunity to enhance the public realm

There are a number of opportunities throughout the town centre in the form of blank exposed gables that would benefit from the introduction of a mural or installation to provide a much needed injection of colour.

This can be achieved for relatively little financial outlay, could engage the local community, local artists and could be developed into a wider festival, where new murals are added each year or existing ones replaced to allow for change.

The application of murals, in conjunction with improved paving materials and lighting may be a great solution to enliven the narrow inactive vennels and pends that lead north and south from the High Street, improving the pedestrian experience.



Gable opportunity, High Street / Gordon Square

# case study

## nuart aberdeen

Nuart Aberdeen is an internationally renowned street art festival that has been staged in the city since 2017. Local and internationally acclaimed artists are invited to create a selection of new works, both large and small, around a chosen theme

Based on the worlds leading street art festival in Stavanger, Norway, it has attracted thousands of visitors and local people to the city centre,

boosting the economy and positively transforming the built environment through the addition of colour, form and texture.



## Lighting:

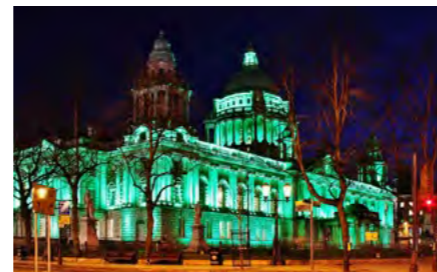
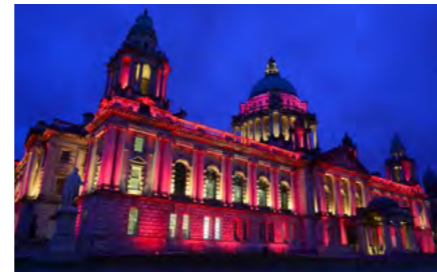
Transformation of the town centre through dynamic lighting & supporting the evening economy



Paisley High Street: Vision proposals

**Fort William, and the High Street in particular, has a remarkable architectural legacy of buildings and spaces that could be celebrated by night with dynamic lighting, providing moments of magic.**

Development of an innovative and creative lighting strategy complete with a programme of permanent and temporary installations would meaningfully embed visual and performing arts into the centre of the town, creating activity, vibrancy and vitality. It could be delivered through private sector owners and tenants and co-ordinated by any future management vehicle (e.g. BID). The success of events like the 'Radiance' lighting festival (outlined in the adjacent case studies) has shown that such initiatives can be truly transformational and a real boost to both visitor numbers and day/night time economies.

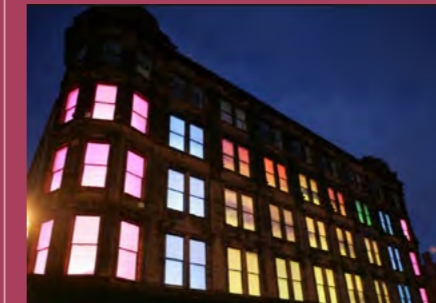


Belfast City Hall: Seasonal and event based lighting

# case study

## radiance festival glasgow

Radiance, held in 2005, was Glasgow and Scotland's first 'Festival of Light'. 68,000 visitors attended over three evenings, taking in a range of works by some of the world's leading lighting designers and visual artists, creating an unforgettable transformation of the city centre.



Radiance encouraged people to rediscover Glasgow's remarkable range of buildings and secret locations made resplendent through original lighting schemes, projections, installations, public artworks and curated events.



## bristol light festival bristol

In 2020, Bristol hosted their first light festival, with the aim of supporting the recovery of Bristol's city centre. As a result of its initial success, the festival has continued to take place over following years, growing in footfall and programme.

The festival, visited by 170,000 people in 2022, is supported by a number of bodies, from the Bristol City Centre, Redcliffe & Temple, Broadmead, and Cabot Circus Business Improvement Districts, and Bristol City Council.



# 14

## meanwhile

Transformation takes time and not all proposals will be delivered in the short-term.

Where a building or site is vacant encourage 'meanwhile' uses that benefit the wider community, either through the creation of public space or temporary occupation for curated retail, commercial or cultural use.

**There is ample opportunity to enliven existing underused spaces and places within the town centre to create immediate vibrancy and impact in the short term. This could happen at different times of the year allowing 'pop-up' creative leisure or cultural ventures to make an impact and stimulate interest and activity.**

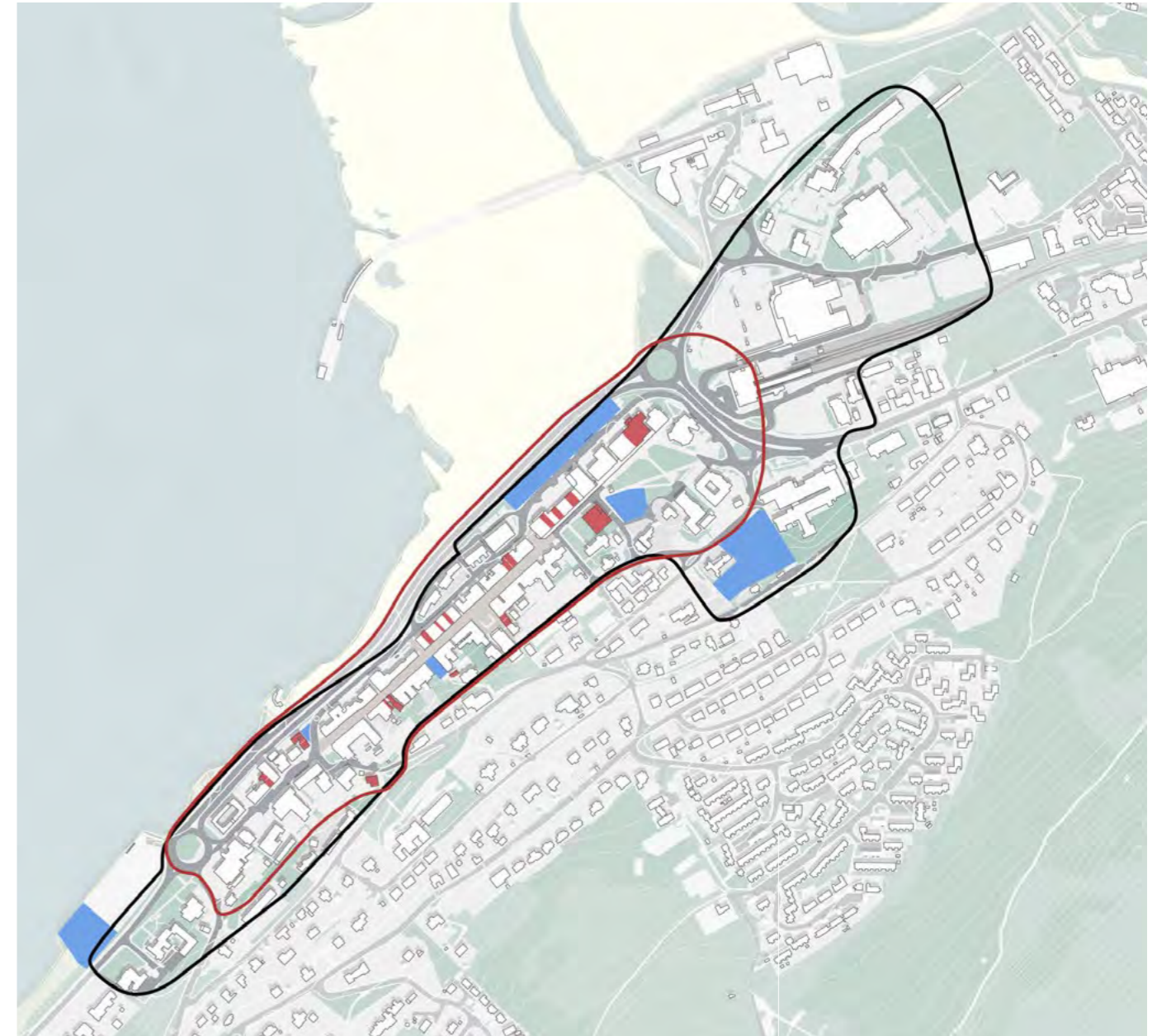
Interventions of a 'meanwhile' nature on even part of a site can permit a phased approach to the delivery of larger developments, preventing their lying dormant and inactive in their entirety for the duration of their often complicated and protracted design, procurement and construction.

This masterplan proposes the introduction of temporary greenspace to accommodate family friendly outdoor amenities for active uses that support and enhance the visitor experience and connect the whole community to the town centre. In terms of vacant retail forming part of a repurposing or redevelopment opportunity, landlords should be encouraged to consider their ESG agenda and provide meanwhile accommodation for community based and charity solutions that, although negating rates, is a great deal better than an empty unit on the street.



### Meanwhile Uses:

Opportunities within the town centre, now and in future



The diagram above identifies locations for meanwhile uses of two important and distinct types, namely:

1. Vacant buildings or ground floor units
2. Current vacant sites / open spaces / potential future sites (prior to redevelopment)

A number of these buildings and spaces could be very quickly transformed for the benefit of the wider community and be a first important step towards achieving the ambitions of the FW2040 Vision to positively transform the heart of Fort William.

The case studies that follow on the next pages showcase a number of successful meanwhile interventions from Scotland and further afield that could be introduced to Fort William town centre.

Vacant buildings / ground floors  
Open sites / potential future development sites





## Meanwhile Uses:

External sites and spaces

The case studies below and opposite demonstrate a number of potential approaches that could be taken to introduce a variety of external 'meanwhile' uses to the heart of Fort William.

# case study

## \*spark, york

Opened in May 2018, Spark\* is a project centred around positive social change. A temporary structure built out of colourful shipping containers reminiscent of Boxpark, it has transformed Piccadilly, an under used street in the centre of York and turned it into a vibrant, colourful destination.

Central to their mission is that local people should benefit from regeneration.

It is home to a complementary mix of entrepreneurs from different sectors, with the curation of retail, food and drink, workspace and arts and culture.

Throughout the year it plays host to a wide range of rotating community events and has become a key space in the life of the city.



# case study

## gap filler christchurch, new zealand

Following the earthquake in 2011, while the government looked at the long term reconstruction over 100 citizen led projects sprung up all over the city, from community gardens, markets housed in shipping containers, cycle repair, temporary co-working spaces and performance venues.

These brought much needed activity back to the heart of the city, assisted in speeding the recovery and informed government investments. More than 70 of these were conceived and organised by Gap Filler, an arts based community action group.

They created, amongst other things, a cycle powered cinema, a performance venue constructed from wooden pallets and a giant interactive outdoor arcade game.

They continue to innovate and come up with fresh meanwhile uses to this day.



## Meanwhile Uses:

Vacant buildings / ground floor units



## outer spaces nationwide



Outer Spaces, a national charity, have a vision for new, local, culture-led neighbourhood and community renewal.

Working collaboratively with artists, organisations and commercial property owners they temporarily occupy and activate empty commercial spaces, offering studios and workplace in vacant retail, office and industrial units.

Operating throughout Scotland in a number of towns and cities, including Glasgow, their projects transform closed and boarded-up shops, streetscapes and empty commercial centres into highly visible, colourful, inviting spaces where people can experience the arts first hand.

“Our programming reconnects and regenerates communities and supports social and cultural networks to thrive....we believe that the arts have the power to transform communities and enrich lives, and that everyone should have the right to experience and participate in the arts.”

# case study

## charity super.mkt london



Charity Super.Mkt is a pilot store that brings different high street charity shops together within vacant retail spaces.

After securing the ex-Top Shop unit at Brent Cross Shopping Centre, North London as an initial site in January 2023, charity Super.Mkt will take the pop-up throughout the UK.

The charities are allocated retail space of between 1,000 or 2,000 sq. ft with costs covered via a 20% turnover rent on sales with no leases to sign, or bills to pay.

Charity Super.Mkt provide the premises marketing, music and supplementary volunteers, with the aim of increasing income for good causes whilst occupying otherwise unused premises.

# case study

## the art department paisley centre, paisley

Opening in 2022, the Art Department is a multi-arts exhibition and event space, within the former Allders Department Store, part of the Paisley Centre.

The temporary venue and art gallery, located within a vacant department store, provides two floors of 3,300 sqm of exhibition space, one of the largest arts

spaces in Renfrewshire.

The space is run by Outspoken Arts Scotland, previously Gala Scotland, formed in 1995 to deliver the Glasgay! LGBT arts festival, to provide accessible, open and inclusive arts programming.





# responsible town



**It is important that this masterplan for Fort William town centre enshrines the shared values of the town, particularly equality and inclusivity. Alongside this the town centre has a role to play in responding to the climate change challenge by delivering on the various strategies, increasing density and making the best use of what we have already.**

# 15

## **repurpose and repair**

**Take the opportunity provided by repurposing and rebalancing to upgrade or replace buildings that offer nothing to the urban environment.**

Many of our town centres benefit from a legacy of quality historic buildings and these new interventions should be of a contemporary architecture that matches them in quality and ambition.

**The built heritage that enriches Fort William's town centre brings a strong distinctiveness and authenticity. Heritage assets are to be protected and cherished and the best way to ensure this is to bring them back into life through repurposing – particularly of upper floors (as noted in “Repopulate” and “Create Workplace” sections).**

This masterplan identifies opportunities where the introduction of new uses can be combined with the enhancement or replacement of buildings / facades that are detrimental to the quality of the urban environment.

The desired increase in residential provision and mix of uses will involve the need for new development. It's important therefore that any new interventions are of a high quality and make a positive contribution and at the same time enable the town to meet its net zero targets.

This study indicates considered volumes, height and density of development and suggests through precedent, a level of quality that is commensurate with the surroundings.

**Fort William's Built Heritage**  
A Legacy to be Celebrated



St. Andrew's Church

**Fort William town centre contains a large number of well loved heritage assets, many of which are listed.**

These key buildings deserve a setting that celebrates their significance and allows them to flourish. Furthermore, several may require repurposing in order to protect their long term future.

Both the setting and potential uses of these heritage assets and others have been considered as part of the masterplan.



West Highland Museum



Grade A listed



Grade B listed



Grade C listed



## A Presumption for Retrofit A Carbon Conscious Approach

**With the ongoing de-carbonisation of the grid, the carbon battle will increasingly focus on embodied carbon rather than just operational.**

The carbon is locked ('spent') in existing structures and repurposing or extending these can take advantage of this investment. This is enshrined in national policy (NPF4). A ready reckoner provided by Atelier Ten environmental consultants is that a typical mixed-use, multiple level new build spends around 500 to 600 kg CO<sub>2</sub> for every sqm of development whereas a retrofit and repurpose is, at most, a third of this cost. A new build that focuses on recycled/recyclable or renewable material and modern construction methods might achieve a spend of 350 -450 kg CO<sub>2</sub> for every sqm.

There is often the argument that the financial viability of retrofit compared to new build doesn't stack up and this is based on many factors e.g. achievable density, complexity and compromise and market attraction. This is sometimes considered alongside the difficulty in adapting existing fabric to perform thermally and the implications this has on whole life carbon emissions.

On occasion, the combination of all these factors will suggest that replacement is the more considered solution and this study does show where new build might better achieve the (environmentally) more impactful ambition of increased density and inhabitation or more positive impact on streetscape. The preference is for retrofit, adaption and expansion.

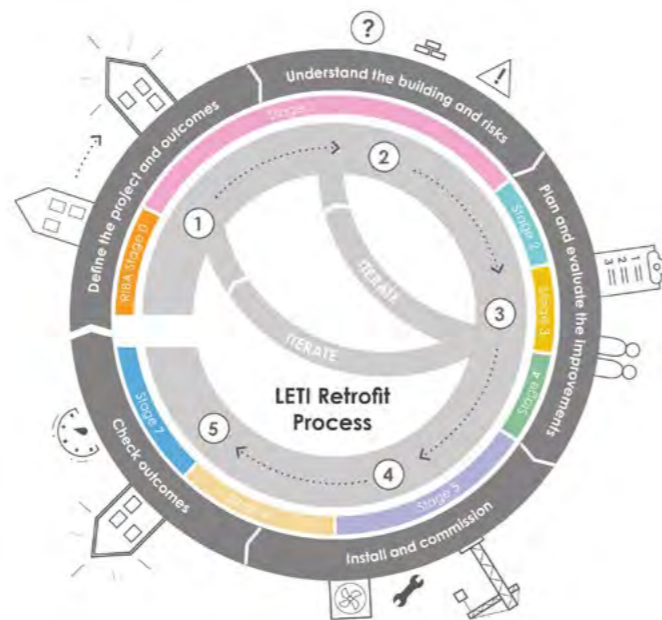
The opportunities for retrofit in Fort William town centre are generally in upper floors of heritage buildings and this is covered in the Living Town and Working Town sections. Beyond that are the prominently located former Tesco building and the Mairi Macintyre building that are either vacant or, because of their scale and condition, have a significant negative impact on their surroundings. These were identified through our frontages analysis study on the adjacent page.

### Spend Carbon Where it Counts

There are occasions within the town centre where new build is required where it is on gap sites or buildings that cannot easily adapt. It is also the case that a more impactful contribution to the town core by e.g. providing more public place can be achieved through a new build approach rather than retrofit.

The proposition is that if you're going to spend carbon, spend it in the reinforcement of the town centre where it meets the wider environmental and social ambition.

Needless to say that all new build (and new build extensions to retrofit) will be expected to achieve high levels of energy efficiency and embody low carbon measures such as renewable energy production and water conservation. It is also important to build in adaptability and circular economy principles in loose-fit design and design for dismantle and built in recyclability.



Right: LETI retrofit process



Mairi Macintyre building

## Frontages Study Identifying Opportunities for Intervention

**The quality of architecture and place that exists should be the yardstick for the quality of the built environment we introduce while helping us to decide what we need to repurpose or remove.**

**As demonstrated on the previous pages, Fort William's centre is a historically rich environment with many period and listed buildings, particularly focused on and around the High Street.**

While there are examples of modern sensitive interventions within the town centre, there are a number of areas where the built form is deficient in terms of massing, quality or street activation.



This frontages study exercise has assisted in the identification of a number of potential development sites where the transformation or removal of negative frontages would be beneficial to the town centre streetscape, evidenced in the adjacent map.

positive frontage □  
negative frontage □

Former Tesco building



a masterplan for fort william town centre



## Former Tesco Building

### A Significant Repurposing Opportunity

The existing Tesco building is in a key location at the heart of the town centre with presence on both the High Street and the Parade. Two potential options for this asset have been explored as part of this study.



#### Option 1: Food Hall / Co-work / Community growing space

A New Foodhall is introduced at street level with the current blank facade to Parade Road opened up to provide activity and views.

The level above is imagined as a new co-work space, again with opened up elevations providing light and views. The building is topped by a new community garden / growing space that could also provide produce for the Foodhall below.

#### Option 2: Community Venue / Event Space / Bar & Restaurant

Ground and first floor levels are combined to create a new flexible community events space fronted at street level by a drop-in cafe / bar and topped at roof level with a new F&B offering with external seating overlooking the Parade, capable of hosting external events.

**Roof Level**  
Community garden / growing space

**First Floor**  
Creative Co-work space

**Ground Floor**  
Foodhall with external street level seating



Option 1 Proposals

## kollider sheffield

This listed former Co-op department store and well known city landmark has been transformed following the departure of the retailer into a multi-use community hub.



At street level, Kollider is home to Kommune, a 16,000 sqft european style foodhall offering a diverse choice of great tasting food by local operators, an artisanal bakery and specialty coffee, independent retail and an iconic bar.

Above the food hall the building contains the following diverse uses;

The National Videogame Museum - Ko:host, a series of impressive events and meeting spaces, including the listed former boardroom

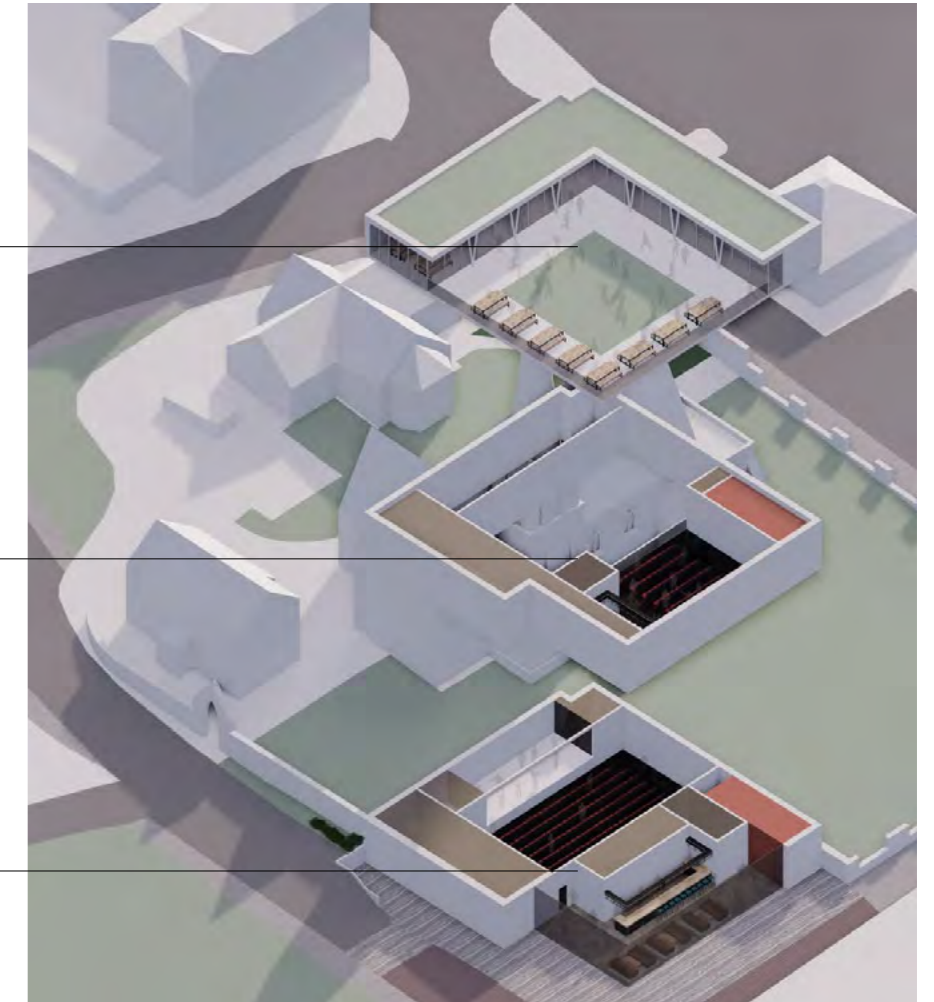
Kollider Eagle Lab, home to a myriad of start-up and high growth tech, digital and creative businesses, developed in partnership with Barclays.



**Roof Level**  
Bar / Restaurant and external event venue

**First Floor**  
Upper level of community events space

**Ground Floor**  
Community events space with street facing drop-in cafe / bar



Option 2 Proposals

## slow food urban farm, birmingham

Slow Food Birmingham, a grassroots organisation that promotes local food production, have introduced proposals to create an urban farm on top of a multi-storey car park in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter.

The new farm would provide glasshouses and planters for growing together with community space, an education hub that would form partnerships with local schools and colleges to promote interest in food cultivation and cooking and a cafe.

The aim is to provide fresh locally grown food for Birmingham residents while promoting sustainable agriculture and reducing carbon emissions.

*"The proposals are the first step of our vision to turn grey space to green productive space with the needs and wants of the local community at its heart. We want to be bringing the community in and giving them an opportunity to get their hands dirty, talking about what food they can buy and how they might cook it."*

Kate Smith, Founder & Projects Lead



Food production is a major contributor to climate change but research published by TEDI, the Engineering and Design Institute London, finds that urban farming can help reduce our carbon footprint by not only reducing the need to transport food but also through the use of more sustainable methods.



## Mairi MacIntyre Building

### A Significant Repurposing Opportunity

The Mairi MacIntyre building a highly visible element of the town centre that has a significant frontage to both High Street and Middle Street. The tallest building in the town centre with a robust structural framework, it presents a number of opportunities for repurposing.

As part of any repurposing, the external appearance of the building

could be significantly improved and its environmental performance positively transformed to ensure it enshrines the ambitions of the FW2040 Vision. Two potential options have been explored as part of this study.

**Option 1: Retained Retail or F&B unit / Residential Units**  
The existing split level retail unit at the base of the building is improved

Potential to provide circa

**12**  
new homes

and retained with an area given over to form a dedicated entrance for the newly introduced residential accommodation above.

**Roof Level**  
Residents amenity deck

**Fourth Floor**  
Residential units

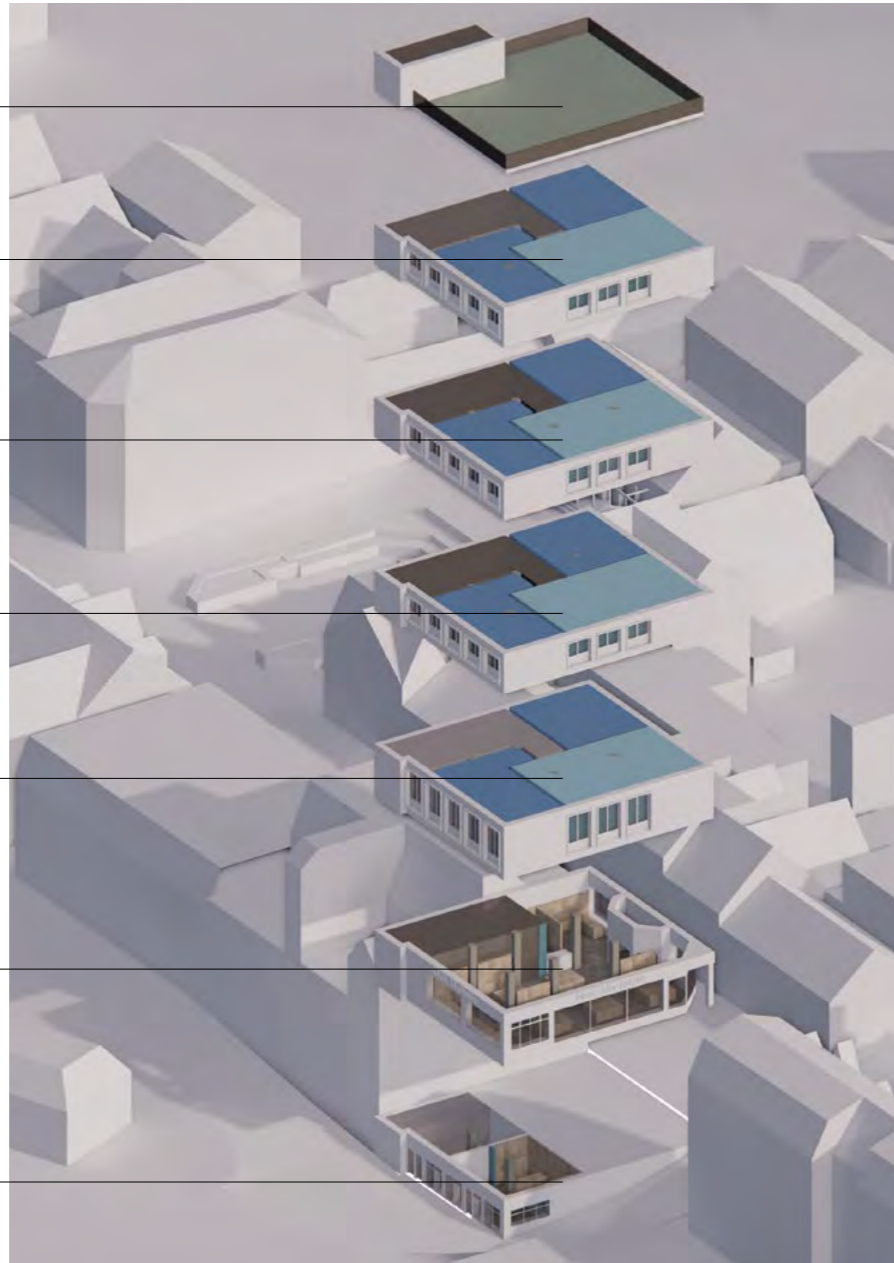
**Third Floor**  
Residential units

**Second Floor**  
Residential units

**First Floor**  
Residential units

**Ground Floor**  
Retained retail / F&B unit

**Lower Ground Floor**  
Retained retail / F&B unit  
Access to residential core



**Option 2: Gallery / Venue / Creative Co-work / Rooftop Venue and Viewing deck**

The existing split level retail unit at the base of the building is reimagined as a new gallery / events space with a significant amount of creative co-work space on the floors above, meeting an identified gap in the market within the wider Lochaber area, topped by a new venue and viewing deck taking advantage of the building's height and location.

**Roof Level**  
Rooftop venue and viewing deck

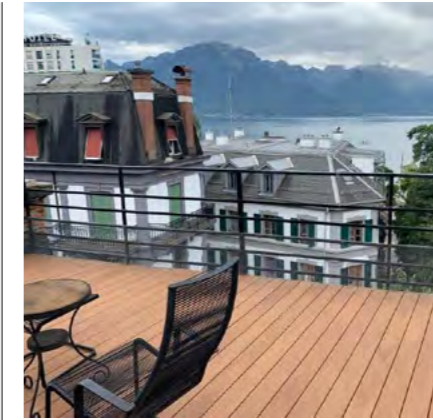
**Fourth Floor**  
Creative Co-work space

**Third Floor**  
Creative Co-work space

**Second Floor**  
Creative Co-work space

**First Floor**  
Creative Co-work space

**Ground Floor(s)**  
Split level gallery & event space active to all three streets



Option 2 Proposals



# 16

## green place

In response to the climate emergency, enshrine an ambition to achieve shared international goals within your Vision. This can be done by working towards a carbon zero objective and a more circular economy, generating localized renewable energy and recycling waste.

Promote biodiversity and flood resilience in an inventive way that provides quality greened urban space for the community in the heart of our towns.



The FW 2040 Vision is organised around 5 key themes, one of which is 'A Place that addresses the Climate Emergency'. Being a town with a strong sustainable agenda could be a unique part of Fort William's identity, attracting a population and businesses that are increasingly aware and concerned about living and operating responsibly.

With the exception of the Parade, there is very little green space within the town centre so creation of new high quality, low maintenance walkways and urban green space will create biodiversity, improve well-being and encourage healthy living practices.

## Green space in Fort William

### The Current Picture



The Parade



Cemetery



Active Greenspace



## The Parade

### Fort William's Key Greenspace

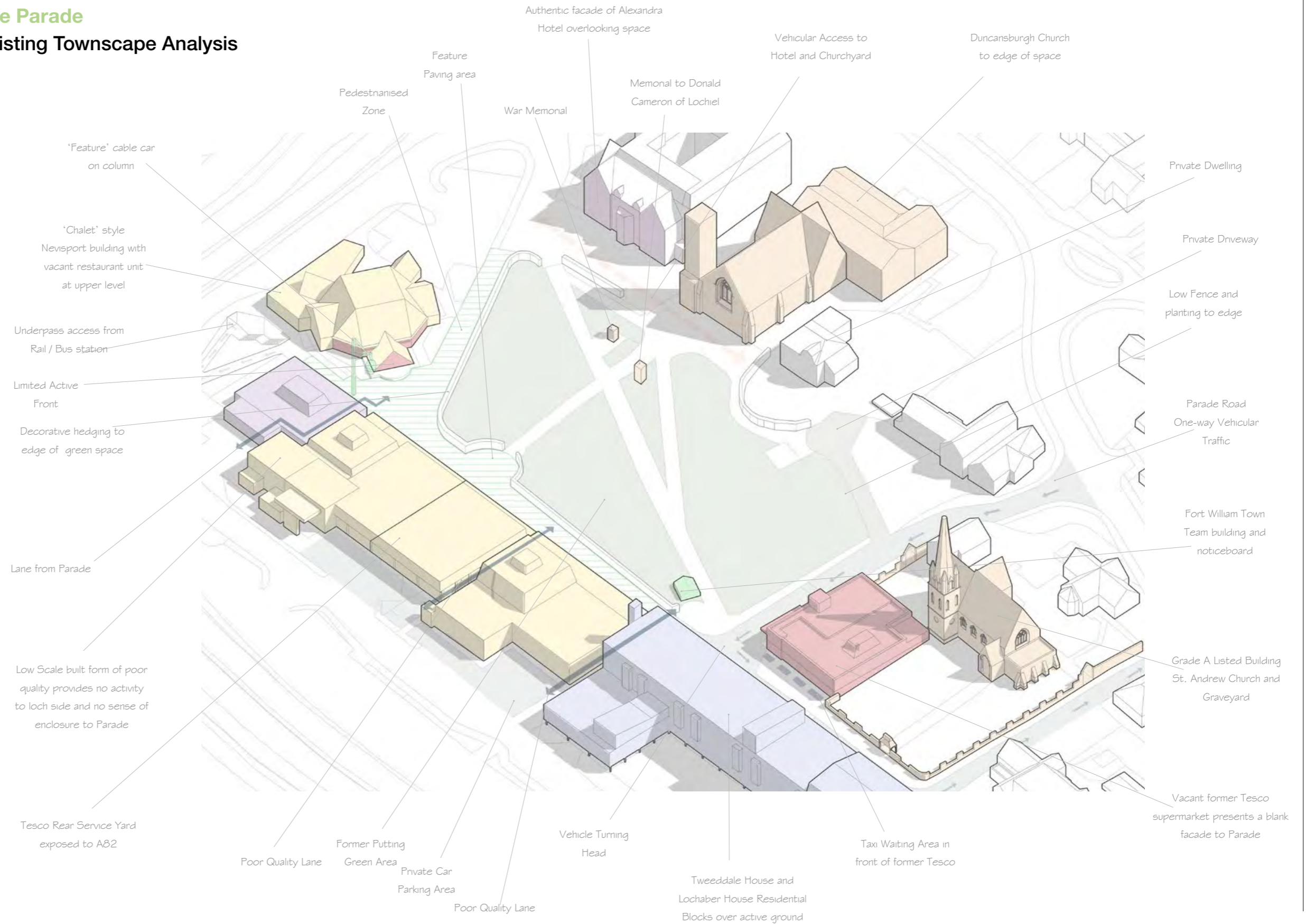
The adjacent townscape analysis has informed the masterplan proposals to improve the setting of this important civic space through the introduction of new buildings of a more appropriate massing to its northern and eastern edges.

It also highlighted the 'monocultural' nature of the greenspace and has led to the proposed addition of childrens play, a sensory garden and leisure use as outlined on the next pages.



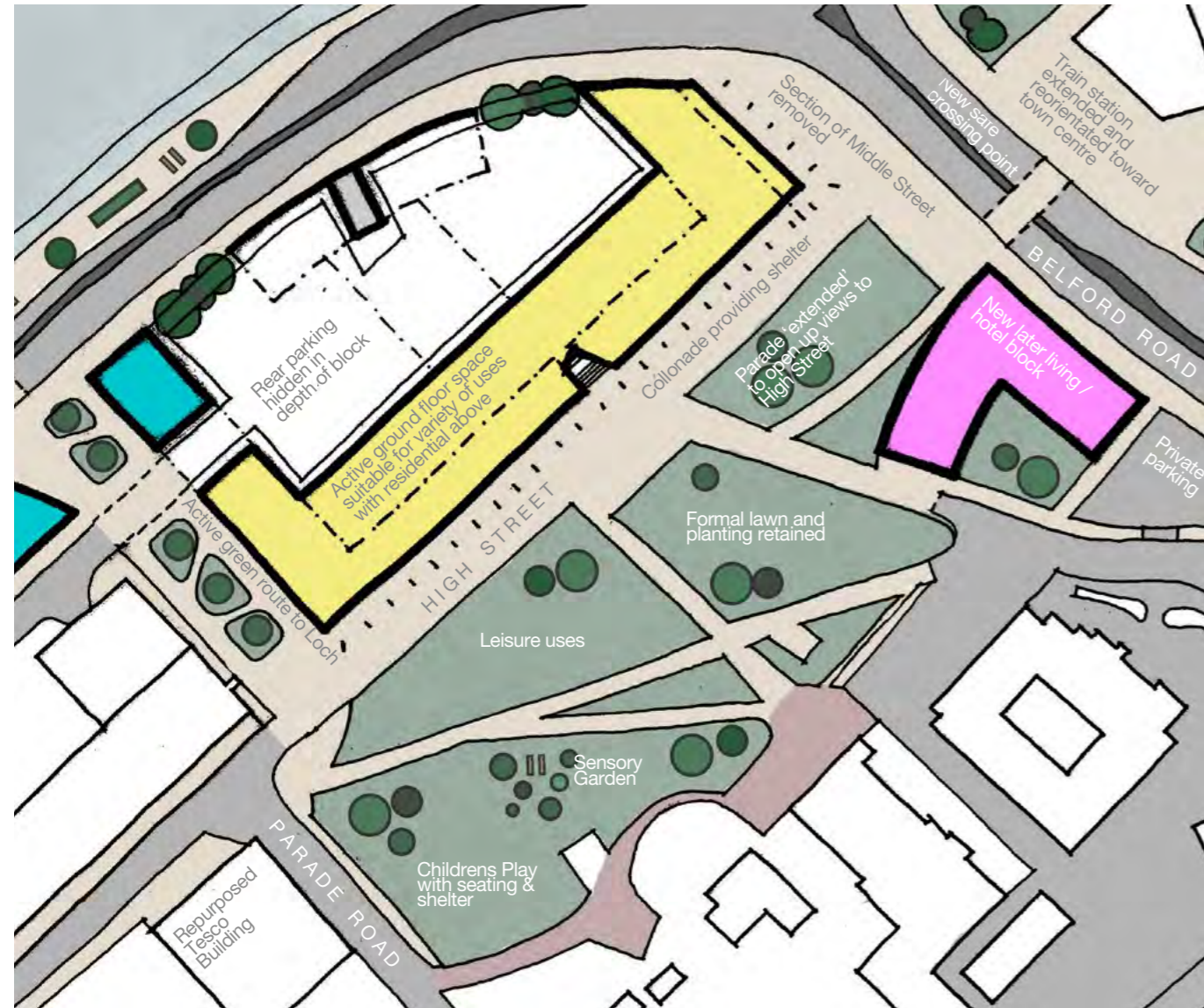
## The Parade

### Existing Townscape Analysis



## The Parade

### Serving the Entire Community



The proposals seek to frame this key greenspace with new development along its north and western edges, providing a greater sense of enclosure by a combination of either hotel / later living and a new cultural building or significant levels of residential accommodation providing an excellent level of passive surveillance.

The masterplan also proposes to increase the area of the Parade by extending it north toward the train station, making it the first space both seen and experienced upon approach into the town centre from this direction.

The significance of the space in terms of its history and its use as a gathering space for memorialising is respected and retained but the proposals seek to introduce (or reintroduce) other uses that serve all members of the wider community.

A dedicated area of childrens play with seating and shelter is proposed, along with the reintroduction of a leisure use, perhaps in the form of a putting green. Permanent furniture to permit chess play could also be a welcome addition.

Finally, primarily for the elderly community, a stimulating area of sensory planting with seating is proposed, together with external exercise equipment.

### Responding to Community Feedback

*'Enhance The Parade with more seating and play space for young children'*



## Greening the Town Centre Essential for Climate Resilience

The masterplan introduces greenery and planting of a variety of types throughout the town centre area, highlighted on the plan below.



### Key Moves

1. Extended and improved Parade greenspace
2. Street trees and Rain garden planting introduced to High Street
3. Trees and planting to enhanced promenade to edge of loch
4. Monzie Square transformed with green terrace planting and childrens play space
5. Extensive planted buffer created adjacent to A82
6. Green roofs introduced to repurposed buildings
7. Green roofs to proposed new buildings
8. Additional planting areas to Station Square

### Responding to Community Feedback

'Introduce more trees, planting and landscaping, particularly to the High Street'



Additional greening within the town centre



Benefits of Urban Green Space - Atelier Ten

### Urban Parks and Green Space

Areas that are naturally or artificially covered with vegetation (e.g. grass, bushes or trees). Can range from playing fields and highly maintained environments to relatively natural landscapes

Common alternative terms: Urban parks, urban green cover, amenity grassland and sports pitches



**10%**  
Increase in willingness to pay for products associated with green cover



**9.5%**  
Increase in property value in direct or close proximity to a park



**84.2%**  
Rainwater runoff retention

#### Average OPEX maintenance cost (£ per m<sup>2</sup>yr)

£0.71 urban parks and green space



### Green Roof - Vegetation growing on any structure's horizontal surface

Common alternative terms: Living Roof, eco-roof, roof garden, brown roofs, green-blue roofs, biodiverse roofs



**6.7%**  
Total energy savings for the space directly below the green roof



**11db**  
Noise reduction by an extensive green roof



**6.9%**  
Uplift to property value by an accessible green roof



#### Average CAPEX installation cost (£ per m<sup>2</sup>)

£126 extensive green roof    £176 intensive green roof

#### Average OPEX maintenance cost (£ per m<sup>2</sup>yr)

£6 extensive green roof    £11 intensive green roof



Benefits of Green Roofs - Atelier Ten

## Urban tree Planting Softening Space, Providing Shade and Encouraging Biodiversity

The introduction of street trees is a critical component in how the urban environment can assist in dealing with the Climate Emergency.

Beyond the obvious environmental benefits, they can soften otherwise hard landscape dominated streets and spaces, provide shade, encourage biodiversity and be an integral part of sustainable urban drainage systems, dealing with grey water runoff and treatment.

A number of the benefits they bring (carbon sequestration, air temperature reduction etc.) have been identified and quantified by Atelier Ten and are outlined in the adjacent infographics

Street Trees - Trees located next to or within a public road

SuDS-enabled Street Trees - Street trees combined with a sustainable drainage system



**30-50%**  
Increased restaurant patronage



**3°C**  
Air temperature reduction



**5.5kg**  
Carbon sequestered per tree annually



#### Average CAPEX installation cost (£ per m<sup>2</sup>)

£248 per tree    £7,477 SuDS-enabled street trees

#### Average OPEX maintenance cost (£ per m<sup>2</sup>yr)

£0.12 per tree

Benefits of Street Trees - Atelier Ten

## Green - Blue Infrastructure

### Promoting Active Travel and Mitigating Flood Risk



#### Mitigating Flood Risk

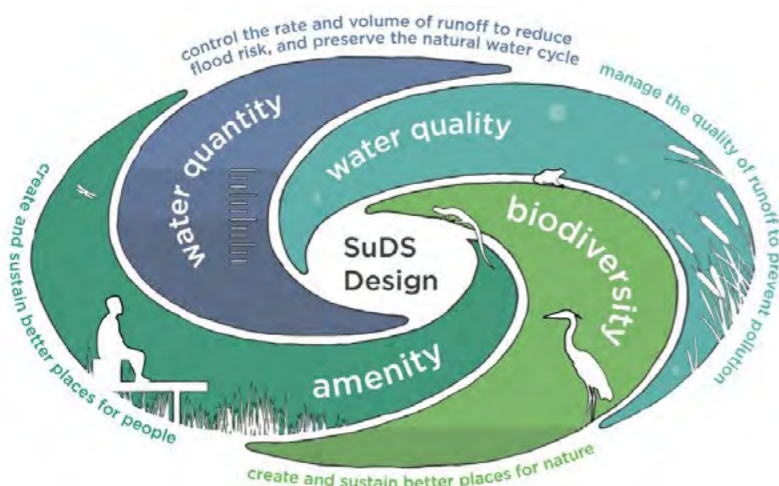
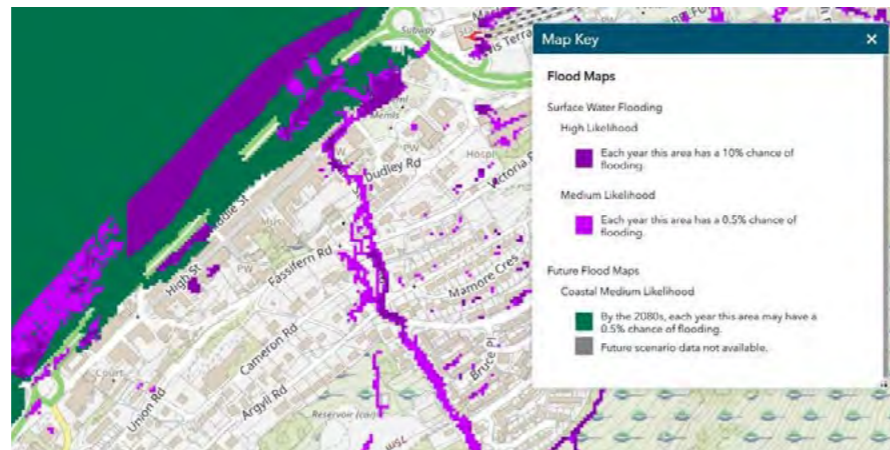
Fort William is adjacent to Loch Linnhe and in an area affected by future predicted sea level increases as shown on the SEPA future flood maps.

A flood alleviation scheme will require to be developed in line with the Masterplan proposals to protect the area between the existing A82 and the Linnhe Road/Middle Street. This could be incorporated into the proposed improvements to the urban realm along the edge of the loch, made easier to implement through the widening of this zone thanks to the removal of one of the current traffic lanes.

The High Street while being out with the influence of the coastal flood extents is impacted by pluvial flooding which occurs during relatively frequent storm events. The SEPA flood maps show pluvial flooding occurring for the 1:10 year

event or a 10% chance of flooding each year.

The area around The Parade Park, due to surface water pathways being blocked with existing buildings, is prone to localise flooding and during extreme events takes runoff from the higher surrounding streets via Parade road. The removal of this blockage to increase the capacity within Maciver Lane will be a key flood reduction measure.



#### Green-Blue Infrastructure

The prediction for climate change in the Fort William area is at 46% to 2100. This will see warmer wetter winters and hotter drier summers with periods of intense rainfall. This intense rainfall will manifest itself with increased runoff from the surrounding streets which is then directed towards High Street.

The current proposals are to incorporate Green infrastructure elements along the High Street, following feedback from the recent engagement workshops. This green infrastructure provides opportunities

# case study

## avenues project, glasgow

The £115 million 'Avenues' project is dramatically improving the quality of the city centre environment, putting people at its heart.

Its aim is to improve connectivity, introduce sustainable green infrastructure through attractive streetscapes and enhancing biodiversity, protect space for cyclists and pedestrians, improve the way public transport is accommodated and transform the perceptions of the city for all those who live, work and visit.

Green infrastructure is being used to structure and order the street, changing the behaviour of motorists and prioritising pedestrians, while providing habitat for biodiversity. It incorporates SuDS for climate

resilience, using a combination of materials and creates space for cyclists and for ground floor businesses to colonise and occupy.

Construction work began with the Sauchiehall Street "pilot" Avenue in 2018. The next phase is currently underway and delivery of the completed network of city centre wide routes is expected by 2028.



to manage pluvial runoff to avoid issues such as ponding on the High Street. Coupled with the outline development proposals the green infrastructure can be organised in such away as to manage rainfall at source and to store / direct flows away from The Parade.

Each element will incorporate above and below ground storage for surface water which will then be discharged back into the local sewer network at a reduced flow rate. Reducing the flow rate from High Street and the surrounding spaces (Station square / Monzie Square / Fraser Square / The Parade) into the Scottish Water sewer

network will reduce the pressure on the network and potential for sewer flooding.

Green Infrastructure can take many forms from raingardens and bio retention tree pits to Green roofs as well as larger SuDS features.

The multi functional benefits of green infrastructure from adapting to climate change, eco system enhancements and improving human health and well being are well understood and documented. They will also contribute to the aesthetic improvements to the town centre streets.



# include

**Make your urban centre accessible for all, regardless of age or ability, accommodating those with issues of dementia or mobility and providing pause points throughout. Offering welfare facilities accessible for all can have a significant impact on the footfall and dwell time of our high streets.**

Create success for your urban centre by helping people discover and enjoy it easily. Develop a memorable, cohesive and legible wayfinding strategy that helps people navigate their way around their town centre.

**Key to the successful evolution of Fort William town centre will be ensuring that it is accessible and navigable by all.**

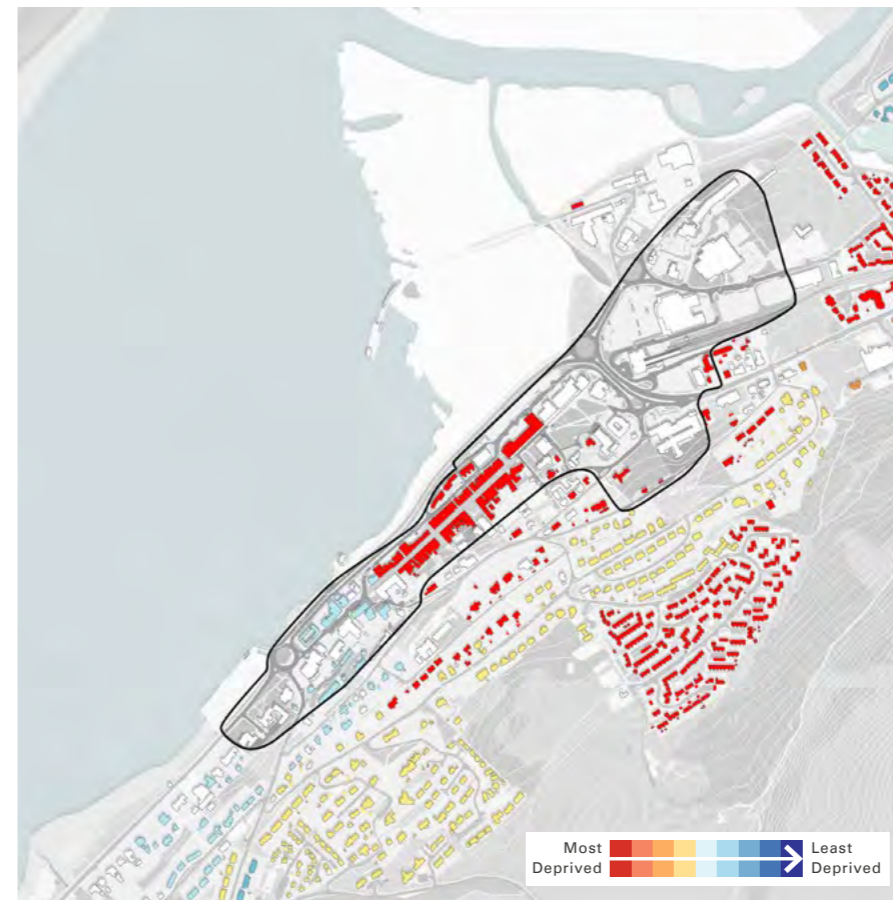
The FW2040 consultation feedback of November 2022 called for the introduction of more seating, particularly on the Parade, and for more covered areas to shelter from inclement weather.

This study has assessed current provision of welfare facilities, bench seating and shelter, vital in our often challenging climate. These are shown throughout the study area alongside existing wayfinding and proposed improvements to maximise the potential of the town centre to appeal to all members of society, regardless of age, mobility or income. Improvements to these key elements will encourage pedestrian movement which in turn promotes active, healthy living.

'Changing Places' facilities provide a lifeline for those families and

individuals with challenging health and mobility issues. The decision to visit a place is often determined by their availability. The only facility of this type in Fort William is located within the campus of UHI West Highland. Opportunities to introduce one in a more centrally located and accessible position within the core of the town centre is proposed as part of this masterplan.

Young people and teenagers should be included and invited to the town centre with active, engaging services and facilities that offer positive social interaction.



SIMD Analysis Map 2020. This Demonstrates statistics on relative deprivation in small areas in Scotland (arranged by Postcode) published by the Scottish Government.

## Why an accessible and inclusive town centre is important

- Shared history and stories
- Ceremony and celebration
- It's where we memorialise
- Familiarity - the landscape of our youth
- Inclusive to all (low income, old, young)
- Interactions not transactions
- Nurtures a sense of belonging



## Age Friendly Town

### Creating Intergenerational Public Spaces

Spaces that are safe and welcoming to people of all ages and abilities have the potential to bring many social and wellbeing benefits.

Designs should provide access for people who use a wheelchair, mobility aid, cane or walking stick and cater to families, friends, carers and assistance dogs. This requires places for groups to sit together, spaces for prams and pushchairs and secure designated space for dog waste with access to bins and fresh water.

Public spaces should be overlooked by active frontages and play spaces with conveniently placed observation points for parents or carers.

It is essential to provide public welfare amenities for all within or close to the space for it to be fully usable.

#### Learning and Play for all ages

Parks and open spaces should benefit from direct sunlight to promote health and wellbeing, while also offering natural or built shade structures.



## Seating and Shelter User Friendly Spaces

Seating and shelter are fundamental aspects of usable streets and spaces.

The key to street shelter and seating is not to create hazards and obstructions that block clear routes. Any structures should contrast visually to their surroundings and feature warnings such as changes in ground texture.

According to London Legacy Development Corporation's Inclusive Design Standards, seating should be provided no less than every 50m, complimented by natural shelter such as trees or urban interventions.

Larger shelter structures can perform several functions, accommodating pop up events of markets, Colonnades along primary routes can act both as a sheltered route for pedestrians and a space to be inhabited by ground floor cafés and restaurants, provided due attention is paid to maintaining a clear and unobstructed path.

### Recommendations

Introduce additional seating and shelter within and surrounding the Parade as shown in the Green Place section of this report

Provide new seating and shelter to transformed Squares to provide pause points along the route of the High Street

Encourage any new developments within the town centre to incorporate canopies / collonades to provide shelter

Encourage local High Street businesses to incorporate canopies for shelter

Responding to Community Feedback

'Consider additional areas of shelter and more comfortable outdoor seating'



Baltic Station Market, Tallinn

### Seating and Shelter The Current Picture

Place of Shelter  
External Seating  
Bus Shelter



## make space for girls



Make Space for Girls campaigns for facilities and public spaces for teenage girls on the premise that parks, play equipment and public spaces for older children and teenagers are currently designed for the default male.

Currently provision for young people consists almost entirely of facilities such as skate parks, fenced pitches and BMX tracks. These are seen as meeting the needs of all young people when in fact they are places dominated by boys. Girls feel that parks are unsafe, and offer nothing for them, yet these issues are seldom acknowledged,

There are obviously many other

issues at stake here as well. Race and national heritage, religion, culture, relative deprivation and disability all affect girls' access to public spaces.

Make Space for Girls have undertaken and collated extensive research, all which points to the following 8 principles for a successful place for teenage girls:

1. Climbing up high
2. Dividing up large spaces
3. Social exercise
4. Social seating
5. Structures to hang from
6. A stage for fun
7. Hammocks
8. Weather proof

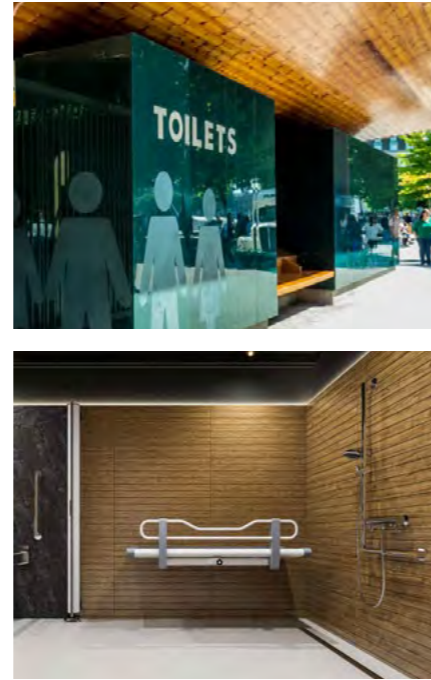


## Welfare Facilities

### The ability to spend time in the town



Public toilet block, Westbourne Grove, London



The provision of welfare facilities was brought up by a number of groups during stakeholder engagement and was viewed as particularly important for families with young children and by senior citizens.

Welfare facilities are also vital to people of all ages with mobility and medical issues and the availability of spaces to facilitate adult changing etc. are increasingly being provided in public buildings and in retail centres as they are viewed as attractors and a means to increase dwell time. This same principle would be applicable to the town centre.

Gender neutral 'superloo' models are becoming increasingly popular and their introduction should be considered. These enhanced cubicles have the ability to cater for ambulant disabled people as well as being inclusive and safe for transgender people. Facilities



for people with more complex disabilities (Changing Places) are game changing, especially when there are currently no options within the heart of Fort William town centre.

Fort William would all benefit from these facilities meaning that people (and their families) can spend more time in the town.

## Welfare Facilities

### The Current Picture

There is currently a lack of welfare facilities available within the town centre. The main public toilets at Viewforth Car Park have been highlighted by a number of stakeholders as being of poor quality and their location at the head of a rather steep climb makes them difficult to access by those with mobility issues.

Welfare facilities could form part of a larger offer, incorporating tourist information, police phones and drinking water and potentially staffed by town centre ambassadors.

The Borough of Richmond's Community Toilet Scheme is a great exemplar of a joined up approach, enabling local businesses like pubs, restaurants and shops, to work together with the Local Authority to make more clean, safe and accessible toilets available to the public.

### Recommendations

- Retain and improve both existing facilities
- 
- New toilets, baby change and feeding room and changing places facility within any new transport hub
- 
- New public welfare facilities as part of any new Nevis Centre development / new leisure-led facility on the West End car park
- 
- Introduce Community Toilet Scheme in conjunction with local businesses similar to the successful Richmond scheme

### Responding to Community Feedback

'We need more and better quality toilet facilities in the town centre'



- Toilets within transport hubs
- THC controlled facilities
- Changing Places facility



Typical time spent in welfare facilities by different user groups



# delivering the masterplan

# Fort William

A rebalanced, resilient, vibrant & welcoming town centre



## Moving Forward

### What is the Masterplan?



#### Focused

This document sets out a series of physical and spatial changes in the town centre to achieve the social and cultural ambitions of the community.

It is deliberately focused in an area that ‘feels’ like the town centre as you experience it on the ground, extending from the train and bus station area to the north, bringing the edge closer to the High Street, down to the West End Roundabout at the southern end of the High Street. This is the heart of the town, where we can support an improving local economy and opportunity.

#### It sets the direction of travel

This masterplan records and responds to the requirements of the community.

The coordinated masterplan is a clear statement of ambition that can achieve alignment of intent and stand as a guideline to assess the appropriateness of future development.

#### Bold

The changing patterns of retail have given us a once in a lifetime

and by repopulating our town centres with workplace and town centre living.

This won’t be achieved without significant redevelopment to repurpose or demolish and rebuild.

#### It enshrines Scottish Government policy

Probably the four key policies concerning the built environment are ‘Town Centre First’, ‘The Place Principle’, ‘A New Future for Scotland’s Town Centres’ and the recently published ‘National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)’.

Along with the environmental agenda, the proposals enshrine the principles of these policies and recognise the imperative to ensure key players stay focussed on the town centre in what they can contribute (vibrancy and connectivity) and how they will benefit.

#### A tool to attract investment and secure funding

The published masterplan is a statement of intent and positivity about the town and reinforcing it is “open for business”.

Even through the stakeholder consultation the process has nurtured ambassadors for the re-energised town centre of the vision and we can use the content to attract further investors through a series of developer days and alumni awareness programmes.

There are significance pressures on public finances and budgets but there is a growing focus on town centres. We should use the Vision to develop and showcase “oven ready” projects that can effect transformational change and ensure Fort William is best placed to benefit from the release of any future funding.

#### A way to engage the community

Success will require the buy in of the wider community and the published vision should be used to engage, excite and nurture buy in from community groups.



## Moving Forward

### Implementation

#### In the right place

Some of the proposed moves may be frustrated by ownership and may need to happen in another guise.

It is the identifying of the moves and “building blocks” to achieve a re-energised town centre that is the true value of the project. Beyond this, the study highlights the importance of positioning uses (attractors) where they can have the highest impact e.g. we are not just trying to put a market into our town centre, we are trying to put it in the right place in the town centre.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to get these decision right.

#### Staying the Distance

This is a long term vision so it is important to identify the quick wins and programme out the longer-term projects.

A stalled spaces strategy and temporary locations can be identified Can we set up artist’s studios or collaborative working in unused space? Some moves will blossom, others may fail. We need to see the town as a beta project or test bed for re-invention.

#### Behavioural change

The current procurement mechanisms and decision-making approach to investment need to evolve if they are to be able to recognise the real value of development that safeguards our town centres rather than favouring the easier answer of edge of town and out of town development that has seen public sector funded education, healthcare and services

marginalised when they could contribute to a vibrant town centre.

This traditional “best value” approach has been changed in both the Public Sector Finance Manual and the NHS Transaction Handbook in favour of Town Centre First, Place making and Carbon Reduction.

All decision makers need to presume fo town centre investment and to understand the value to our town and our community.

The masterplan will have reprofiled the town centre to be the vibrant focus for the whole community with wellbeing, inclusion and opportunity at its heart.

We will have a consolidated and successful retail offer and new uses that meet the needs of the community and extend into an evening economy.

We will have increased the residential population and provided workplace and creative space. We will be proud of Fort William town centre.



## Moving Forward

### Delivery Plan

**This delivery plan outlines some of the key actions particular to the delivery of the new Masterplan for Fort William town centre.**

Importantly, it links to and reinforces, but tries not to reiterate, the many actions contained in the Council's other relevant strategies and action plans, notably:

- The FW2040 Vision
- Fort William Locality Plan
- Town Centre Action Plan
- Strategic Transport Study
- Active travel Masterplan

A number of actions associated with implementing the key themed dimensions of the Masterplan are outlined throughout the thematic sections in this document. The

action plan below does not repeat these, instead supplements where appropriate to highlight suggested action around policy changes, collaborative governance, operational and place management improvements.

This delivery plan should be refined in consultation with stakeholders.

Delivery will need partners to work with the client team, within defined timescales for action.

#### Focus / Objective

**1. Progress FW2040 Vision projects with a town centre focus**

**2. Implement 'quick win' public realm improvement initiatives and occupy vacant spaces**

#### Action

Continue to develop and deliver the projects already identified within the FW2040 Vision pertaining to the town centre area to maintain momentum and demonstrate transformation where it will be most impactful for the wider community.

Set up a dedicated town centre working group and look to work with partners in the community, creative arts and third sectors to:

- Implement low cost public art improvements to refresh the urban realm with a particular focus on blank exposed gables, the narrow lanes and vennels connecting High Street to Middle Street and Neglected spaces (Monzie Square etc.)
- Occupy and bring life to vacant street level units (and connected upper floors) with temporary community, creative (studio / maker space) or curated pop-up retail / F&B uses. Explore ways to simplify the various permit processes and introduce 'meanwhile use flexibility' (e.g. in building regulations, planning policy, roads), including review of fees where feasible. Introduce a matchmaking process linking owners with needs for creative/ community/ pop-up space and explore grant support for vacant building fit out and frontage activation.

#### Focus / Objective

**3. Proactively deliver masterplan proposals and promote good stewardship through collaboration and effective governance**

**4. Develop detailed road, parking, active travel and public transport hub improvement proposals**

#### Action

**c.** Increase a sense of pride in the general appearance of the town centre by ensuring the regular cleaning and painting of the underpass and surrounding environs and enforce the removal of junk / scrap materials and rubbish from prominent locations throughout the town centre, particularly on Middle Street.

Good stewardship in the upkeep of land and buildings, to ensure they positively contribute to the quality of the town centre as a place, is the responsibility of all owners and stakeholders. A zero tolerance approach should be adopted to the neglect and deterioration of Fort William's valuable and unique architectural heritage.

- Explore the creation of a 'development and management vehicle / partnership' for the town centre locale (e.g. BID or other such partnership) that enables public, private and third sector collaboration on decision making and implementation and pulls resources to jointly unlock the place potential of Fort William.

Continue dialogue with HiTrans, The Highland Council, Transport Scotland, and other key stakeholders to coordinate the evolution of the town centre transport improvements.

- Develop the proposals further with respect to changes to the railway and bus stations including the introduction of an Active Travel Hub.

- Liaise with public transport operators to coordinate service provision in relation to planned and emerging development.

- Detailed assessment of the road network using new trip generation estimates for the Masterplan vision to understand the opportunities and constraints associated with the potential changes to the road network.

- Develop a parking management framework which supports sustainable travel patterns but acknowledges the need for parking and access for various vehicle types.

- Explore a servicing strategy to minimise the need for large delivery vehicles/ servicing vehicles to enter the town centre.

- Prepare a Transport Assessment to support the Masterplan in its entirety, with more detailed assessments where required as detailed applications are made for development plots/areas.

## Delivery Plan

### Focus / Objective

**5.**  
**Develop outline business cases for the larger scale projects proposed within the Masterplan**

### Action

Evaluate and create prioritised list of larger scale projects contained within the masterplan.

- Develop project design responses sufficient to achieve planning status. Create detailed business cases for each project in order to be ready to take full advantage of any available future funding streams or encourage private investment.

**6.**  
**Support the repurposing of buildings, including upper floors and heritage assets**

Create a guide that outlines how planning policy, buildings standards and environmental health requirements can be tailored to enable repurposing of buildings (for daylight, noise, odour, energy, open space, refuse, access, escape etc).

- Further explore measures to close viability gaps and incentivise repurposing, including: refining the approach to developer contributions, lobbying for changes in VAT, rates relief on listed buildings and for establishment of enabling funds (similar to BPRA). Progress recommendations of the SCA/ SCCTF cities collaboration in this regard.

- Ensure all development proposals progress NPF4 requirement to investigate rigorously options for repurposing prior to any proposals for demolition.

**7.**  
**Create high quality public and green spaces**

Embed the opportunities in the Masterplan for the creation and enhancement of green, public and amenity space.

- Create an integrated Green-Blue Infrastructure Strategy, which will establish a bold new plan for open and green space provision in the town centre.

**8.**  
**Improve accessibility and movement**

Support ongoing implementation of the Active Travel Strategy and extend the ethos of a greened and rebalanced street network, restored connections/ enhanced permeability and safer, healthy and attractive routes through and around the town centre.

### Focus / Objective

**9.**  
**Continue to Engage the Community**

### Action

Continue to engage the wider community on how the principles of the Masterplan can be taken forward to ensure their voices are heard and they feel ownership of their re-energised town centre.

- Develop exhibition material (visualisations, video, physical model, dedicated website).



