

Inverness City Vision

thinking about the Inverness of the future

WHAT DOES INVERNESS MEAN TO YOU?

Inverness is a special place which means many things to many people. The future of Inverness is about people and their relationship with the natural and built environment. One very good way of shaping this future is by agreeing a vision – what we want that future to be like.

Put simply, a vision describes the kind of place that it is desirable to create. It sets out an image of the kind of city that Inverness can be, and describes the necessary ingredients in terms of quality of streets, buildings, spaces and much more.

Over the next six months, Highland Council will be facilitating a visioning exercise for the City of Inverness. This is part of the process of preparing the new generation of planning documents for the area.

This is a different way of planning. We are not going to prepare a vision for the city and then ask communities what they think of it. Instead, we want to work with everyone with a stake in the future of Inverness and develop a shared vision. We will be doing this at a series of special Future City Games from Wednesday 20th January to Friday 22nd January 2010 for people from local communities, businesses and the public sector.

This leaflet explains more about why we are doing this. It gives a taste of the ideas that we'd like to bring to the Games and it describes how anyone who is interested can sign up for one of the Games in January – places are free, but limited.

RAPID GROWTH - AND FUTURE CHANGE

Inverness has been one of the fastest growing cities in Europe in the last few years. A look at how the plan of the city has developed over the last 100 years shows a dramatic change in the shape and extent of the city. However, just as Inverness has attracted attention for its rapid growth, it has also attracted comments about the quality of its built environment and the sprawl of the new suburbs. Some say that while the edges are getting bigger the city centre is suffering. Others argue that Inverness is big and changing but isn't a real city.

As a place, Inverness has many assets – including a wide range of goods and services, neighbourhoods with distinctive character, and a strong relationship with the landscape and water. However, these assets need to be nurtured if they are to thrive. A number of things could threaten the city's assets - including managing the consequences of

significant population growth, the impact of economic change on the future role of the city centre, the effect of increasing car use on movement and quality of life, and management of the city's natural setting.

There are different ways of responding to these challenges – and each could result in a different future vision for the city.

INVERNESS - THE CITY IN THE HIGHLANDS

Inverness has many identities. It is emblematic of the Highlands and serves as a focus for Gaelic culture. Being 'Cathair bhaile na Ghailig' has consequences for the city and the provision of a new primary school to support and maintain the Gaelic language is one aspect of this. The city is where people come together, interact, and access amenities. It is also a venue for traditional and contemporary music as well as a centre for learning and the arts.

The 19th century city grew in tandem with the development of the railway from London. Tourists were able to travel the length of Britain, observe its shifting scenery and arrive in Inverness, a unique, well crafted circular grid town in a natural bowl by the River Ness. From the point of arrival, tourists could pass through intimate streetscapes, cross the river over bridges and enter the Highlands in one of the most dramatic sequences of views and spaces in any city in Europe.

In the 21st century, Inverness now has a worldwide audience - it is known as 'the city in the Highlands' and this brand attracts visitors in large numbers.

Apart from tourism, there are a number of reasons why we should think not only about the City of Inverness but also about its relationship with the Highlands - including:

- 1. A Resource for the Highlands.** Inverness acts like the town centre of a vast area stretching south to Speyside and Lochaber, west to Skye, and north beyond Dingwall and Lairg. It is by far the biggest place in the region with the greatest concentration of shops and amenities. It is important that it works as a place where people want to be, both for those who live in the city and for those who travel to use it.
- 2. Sustainability.** Sustainability encompasses many things, environmental, social and economic – in the Highlands, it includes supporting rural and urban communities. Inverness is an essential part of that support network.
- 3. Culture and Choice.** Inverness is a remarkable place. It has a fantastic setting, and some amazing assets. It is also a very "liveable" place where people choose to be – a comfortable city that provides a range of lifestyle choices and caters for diverse cultures. It has all the necessary ingredients to provide households with choice, affordability and a sustainable future.
- 4. Connection and Exchange.** Inverness is both remote and well connected. It is a long way from other cities, but has excellent rail and air links to Glasgow, Edinburgh, London and other regional, national and international centres. Providing more opportunities to do business could strengthen the distinctiveness of Inverness – and have a major impact on the wider Highlands economy.

PUBLIC POLICY

The Scottish Government wants to create a more successful Scotland where we can all flourish – by increasing sustainable economic growth. The Government acknowledges that a high quality environment is an important part of achieving this.

Highland Council's ambitions for its population are expressed in the Single Outcome Agreement, and link back to the Government's aim of creating a wealthier, fairer, healthier, smarter, greener and safer Scotland. The Single Outcome Agreement aims to promote sustainable Highland communities, safeguard the environment and create a competitive, sustainable and adaptable Highland economy. It also aspires to a healthier and fairer Highlands with better opportunities for all.

These aims have implications for the type and form of place that Inverness should become. For example, how successful is Inverness in catering for a broad range of expectations? How well are the Single Outcome Agreement's ambitions being met? How well does the city cater for everyone's needs? Is any section of the community disadvantaged? Retention of the local population, in particular the 16-35 age range, is important for Inverness and the surrounding Highland communities. However, it is this age group that tends to be attracted elsewhere – so it is important to provide what is needed in order to attract and retain them.

CHANGING GLOBAL AND NATIONAL CONTEXTS

Inverness, like all cities, works at two levels –at a national and even global level of competition and relationships with other cities, and at a local level where communities, neighbourhoods, streets, services and amenities are important.

Current economic and environmental challenges will have a big impact on the way that future provision of transport, health, jobs and other services and facilities are planned in our towns and cities. For example:

- In recent decades, too much urban growth in Scotland has been mediocre. Inverness has many of the ingredients of a successful urban place but the quality of what has been built is not always high. How can we raise the bar in the future?
- New forms of public investment may have a bearing on long term health and educational investment in Inverness. How should we accommodate facilities for health and education in the Inverness of the future?
- From 2010 new building standards will reduce carbon emissions by 30 per cent, and this year's climate change legislation aims to reduce emissions by at least 80 per cent by 2050. How will this need for greater environmental sustainability affect the layout of the city and the design of individual buildings?

POSSIBLE FUTURES?

There is no restriction on the kind of ideas that might come up at the Future City Games in January but some of these might include:

Healthier? Health and obesity are becoming more and more of an issue. Could we design the Inverness of the future to be a healthier place? Should we encourage more

active lifestyles? Should we design to make it easier to get about by foot and by bike – and harder by car? Should we invest in health services differently?

Wealthier? We all need to earn money to live – and most of us would like a little more if we could have it. What are the best ways of achieving that? Attract more big companies? Support local enterprises? Invest in transport links? Improve the quality of life?

Greener? We are all being urged to reduce our carbon footprint. What are the implications for the future of Inverness? A denser settlement where people need to travel less? Having jobs closer to homes? More allotments so we can grow our own food?

Smarter? The government wants us to be better educated and have more skills for work. And we might want the city to be smarter to attract tourists and businesses, and give us a better quality of life. Are these priorities? What are the implications for the Inverness of the future?

What else? What should the balance be between these – and other – competing priorities? What does the city look and feel like?

HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

We will be holding a series of exciting one-day Games to develop visions for the Inverness of the future. They will be held from Wednesday 20th January to Friday 22nd January 2010. Everyone who has an interest in the future of Inverness is welcome: residents and businesses – adults and young people – private, voluntary and public sectors.

Places will be limited – so register your interest in participating before 31st December by contacting Conan Farningham at the City Vision Team, Highland Council:

Tel: 01463 702291 | Email: devplans@highland.gov.uk

This City Vision exercise is intended to assist in the creation of a prosperous flourishing City of Inverness. The exercise is facilitated by Highland Council in preparation for a new generation of development plans.

For further information, please contact the City Vision Team or check the Inverness City Vision blog at: www.invernesscityvision2009.blogspot.com If you're interested in finding out more about the concept of Future City Games, please visit: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/governance-future-city-game.htm>

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