

Appendix

A new vision for Wick





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HISTORIC CONTEXT

Wick's history stretches back, at least, to the era of Norwegian rule in Caithness, which ended, conclusively, in 1266's Treaty of Perth. The name Wick appears to be from a Norse word, *vík*, meaning bay, also the word Viking. Into this bay flows the River Wick which the Vikings used as a harbour for their longboats and trading vessels. The Castle of Old Wick is situated approximately 2 kilometres south-east of the town on the North Sea coast.

Wick in Scotland was granted the title of Royal Burgh in 1589. However, it was in the 1800s that Wick enjoyed its greatest prosperity as a thriving herring port, in time becoming the busiest in Europe.

A hidden gem in Wick is Lower Pulteneytown overlooking the harbour. Pulteneytown is now an area of Wick on the south side of the River Wick. Until 1902 Pulteneytown was administered separately from the Royal Burgh of Wick. Pulteneytown takes its name from Sir William Pulteney, 5th Baronet, a governor of the British Fisheries Society. In the early years of the 19th century Sir William commissioned Britain's leading civil engineer, Thomas Telford, to design and supervise the creation of a major new herring fishing town and harbour at the estuary of the River Wick.



Boats in the Harbour drying their sails, inset: Women gutting the herring

Copyright Wick Society from the Johnston Collection

Background



Old map of Wick approx. 1870

copyright Wick Society from the Johnston Collection

Pulteneytown was so named after the death of Sir William in 1805 and became a major player in the 19th century herring boom. It was built in order to supply work to the Gaels evicted during the Highland Clearances. During this boom period the harbour was expanded still further by local shipbuilder James Bremner. History of this era is preserved in the collections of Wick Heritage Museum.

The Old Pulteney whisky distillery is in the Pulteneytown area. The first Caithness Glass factory was also in this area, but Caithness Glass has now left both the town and Caithness.



Sir William Pulteney



Thomas Telford

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Background

TEAM BRIEFING AND MINIBUS TOURS

The project team assembled on Thursday morning 21 February at the Wick Assembly Rooms to set up the venue and set off on a bus tour to explore the town and its surrounding area. Equipped with briefing packs and accompanied by representatives of Highland Council, the team began to gain an insightful knowledge about the town. After the bus tour the team returned to the Assembly Rooms to continue team briefing on such topics as housing, town planning, education, sports and culture.



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POST-IT WORKSHOPS “WICK TODAY” & “WICK TOMORROW”

ISSUES

Wick community

- Population decline
- Apathy
- Lack of cohesion in activity groups
- Feeling of exclusion from planning and decision making process
- Some distrust of The Highland Council

Image and identity

- Lack of positive identity - perceived as remote and in decline
- Need to restore civic pride

Environment

- De-centralisation / investment in town edge development
- Derelict and neglected buildings
- Vacant shops
- Poor quality design of newer buildings
- Lack of colour and diversity
- Lack of quality green space and play areas
- Litter

Young people

- Lack of facilities and opportunities for young people
- Lack of further education opportunities and information

Transport / getting around

- Need for more direct pedestrian paths
- Lack of continuous coastal path
- Access to town centre for those unable to walk far
- Bus times and frequency to Thurso and wider Caithness
- Slow and expensive train journeys
- High cost of flights
- No flights to Kirkwall and Glasgow

Education, training and employment

- Declining numbers in local schools
- High levels of unemployment

Local economy

- Lack of commercial vitality and diversity
- Existing facilities underused
- Lack of opportunities to utilise harbour
- Loss of trade in the pedestrianised town centre
- Closing businesses and shops
- Competition from out of town retail

Tourism

- Wick not promoted as a destination
- A place en route to Orkney
- Lack of prominent tourism centre
- Lack of interpretation and celebration of local history and archaeology

“Our harbour went completely down the bin when the fish industry had to close down. Now we need to develop future uses!”

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POST-IT WORKSHOPS “WICK TODAY” & “WICK TOMORROW”

ACTIONS

Wick community

- Keep local people in Wick
- Involve young people
- Help the population grow
- Social empowerment through inclusion and integration
- Start a local bank to keep money local
- Work together and collaborate with wider Caithness areas

Environment

- Tidy and brighten up the town
- Use or knock down the redundant buildings
- Reuse vacant heritage and listed buildings
- Improve coastal and river paths
- Connect to John O' Groats linkages / footpaths
- Build new buildings that fit in with existing environment

Transport / getting around

- Improve transport connections to bring in more workers
- Develop a tourist train between Thurso and Wick

Local economy

- Invest in local job creation - less centralisation to Inverness and the south
- Learn from Thomas Telford – invest in initiatives that support local community
- Ensure commercial diversity
- Create vibrant town centre
- Develop the harbour for diverse number of uses
- Capitalise on marine renewables
- Incentives to small businesses to locate here

Tourism

- Create a positive reputation / a place to be
- Create a vibrant harbour / waterfront with lots of visitors
- Improved marketing of local areas and points of interest
- Promote outdoor and leisure activities
- Sea food restaurants
- Utilise the diversity of the history and Nordic heritage
- Develop better facilities for young visitors – wet weather centre, rowing etc.
- Cheaper flights and more destinations from Wick airport
- Act together with Caithness / Sutherland as a whole

“ The tourist business need to be professionalised! There was a great tourist office but that’s been closed...”

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Young People

Groups of pupils from Hillhead Primary School and South Primary School in Wick attended on Thursday to help shape the Vision for their town. A separate workshop was held with both groups and the discussions were framed by the following questions:

- What is here now that we use?
- What do we want?
- What do we need, and,
- What will the barriers be to getting what we need?

Below is an all-encompassing summary of the discussions from both Charrettes for Wick and Thurso.

WANTS

- A range of facilities were indicated that would improve the quality of life for young people in both towns (Go Kart Track; a dog walking park, retail outlets appropriate to their age group etc)
- They were concerned about the steep drop in business activities and the closing of shops
- Surfing was something that could be developed to give greater quality of life and employment opportunities
- A better use of vacant sites within the town

NEEDS

- They felt that Dounreay closing would have huge impact on both towns and on them and the choices open to them
- To create a healthier population
- A need for more employment
- A steady stream of money coming in to the house
- More land released for building
- A bigger railway network

BARRIERS

- No money
- No work
- Fewer opportunities

“ We have too few opportunities for young people. We need to do more to keep them here. ”



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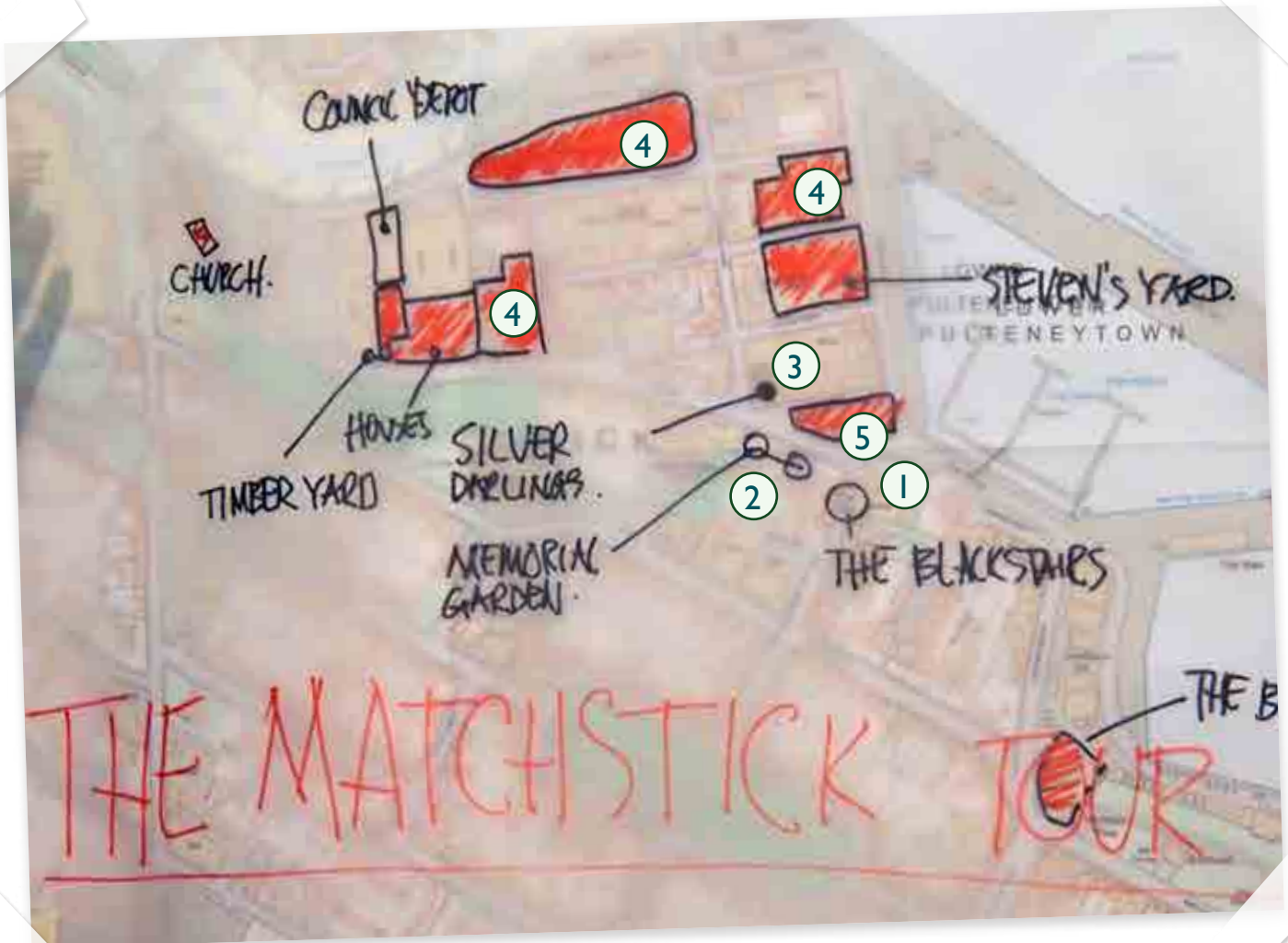


Hands-on Planning

After the post-it workshop and refreshment break, people were invited to break into Hands-on Planning (HOP) workshops to work around plans with the team members to explore community needs and physical design ideas. This section sets out the outcomes from the HOP groups from both days.

MATCHSTICK TOUR

- 1 Blackstairs: subject of a Lowry Painting
- 2 The Memorial Garden is in the location of the first daylight bombing raid on the UK in 1940
- 3 References throughout Pulteneytown to 'Silver Darlings' is in celebration of the thriving herring industry
- 4 Pulteneytown has several potential development sites within its historic fabric – Stevens Yard, the timber yard, derelict houses on Union Street, the swimming pool site and 21 Telford St.
- 5 Heritage Centre on Bank Row is one of the best in the UK



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Hands-on Planning

TOWN TEAM

- 1 The central block is an important focus
- 2 Bridge St. & High St. have fine buildings and townscape quality
- 3 Back Bridge St. is a traditional lane & pedestrian route
- 4 Victoria Place has good river views & south orientation
- 5 Gap sites should be a priority to fill at high level with parking behind
- 6 Some one way car traffic through the High St. would bring more activity
- 7 Riverside walk could connect through to Victoria Place



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Hands-on Planning

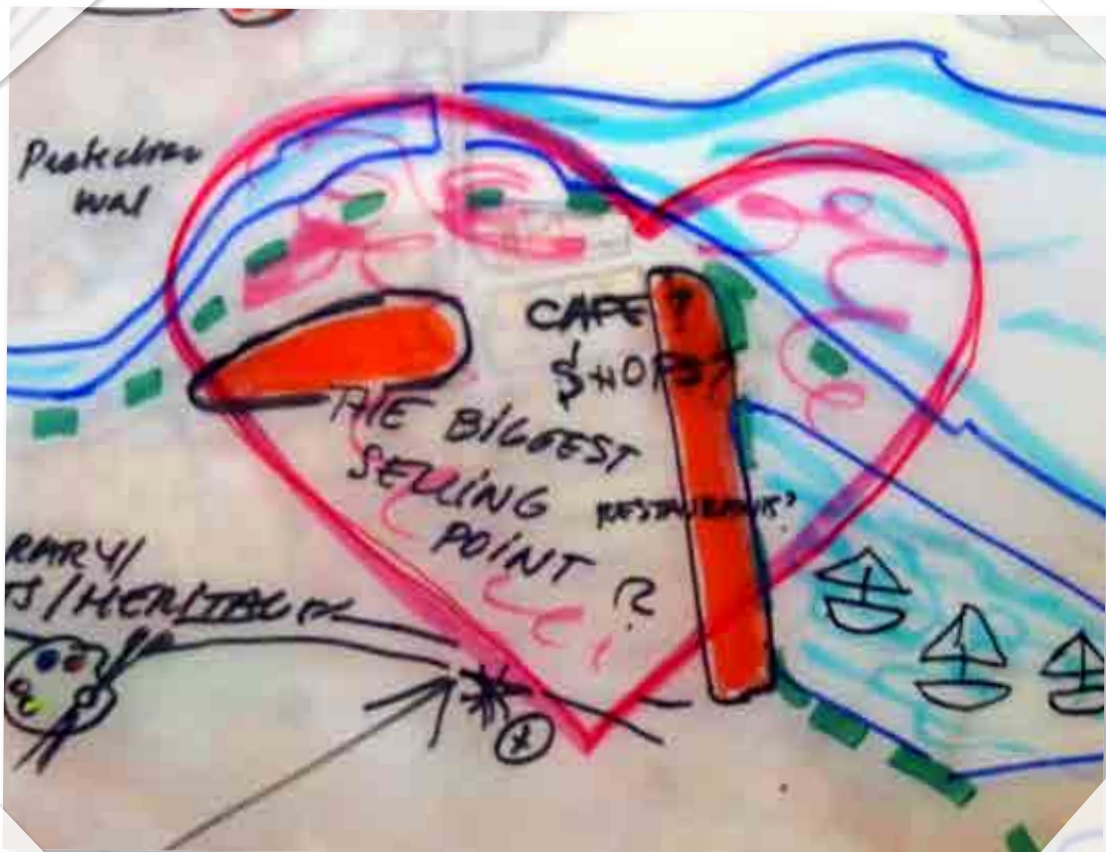
TAKE THE PAST WITH YOU

- Suggested extended conservation area
- Existing conservation area
- Proposed Thomas Telford trail



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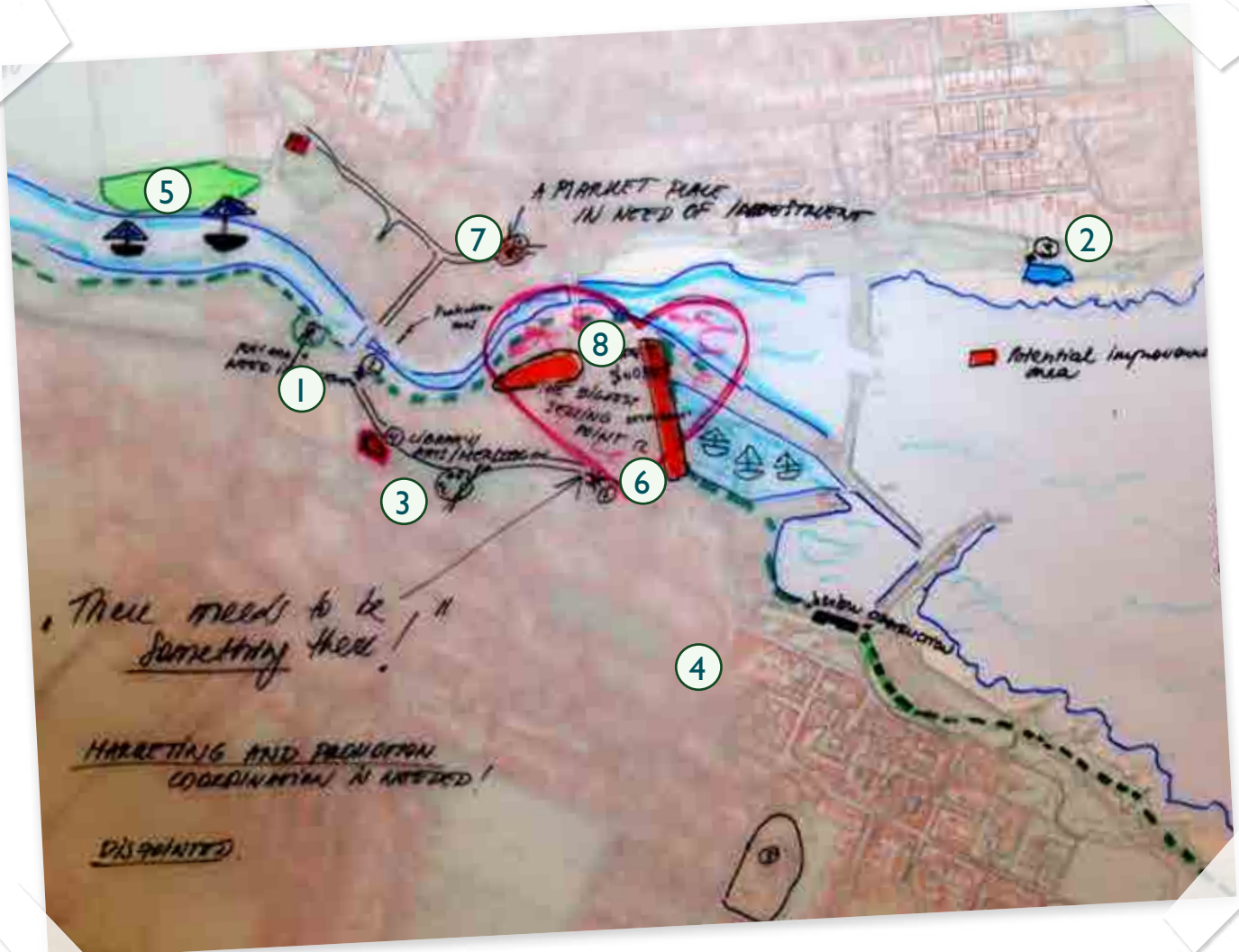
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Hands-on Planning

HEART TRANSPLANT

- 1 Shortest street Ebenezer Place
- 2 Outdoor swimming pool
- 3 Carnegie Library - potential place for Arts Centre, Johnston Collection and Tourism Information Centre
- 4 Old Pulteney Distillery
- 5 Village Green
- 6 Heritage museum
- 7 The Market Place - needs investment
- 8 Harbour – potential thriving heart of Wick with shops, cafes & restaurants



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Hands-on Planning

TOWN & RIVER

There are many pleasant green spaces that could be linked up

- 1 The River Wick is visually 'close' to people
- 2 The walkway upstream of the Bridge is green and beautiful on both banks but Poundstretcher is an eyesore
- 3 There are many gap sites along the north bank that could be made better when viewed from Pulteneytown
- 4 What is the future for the Swimming Pool



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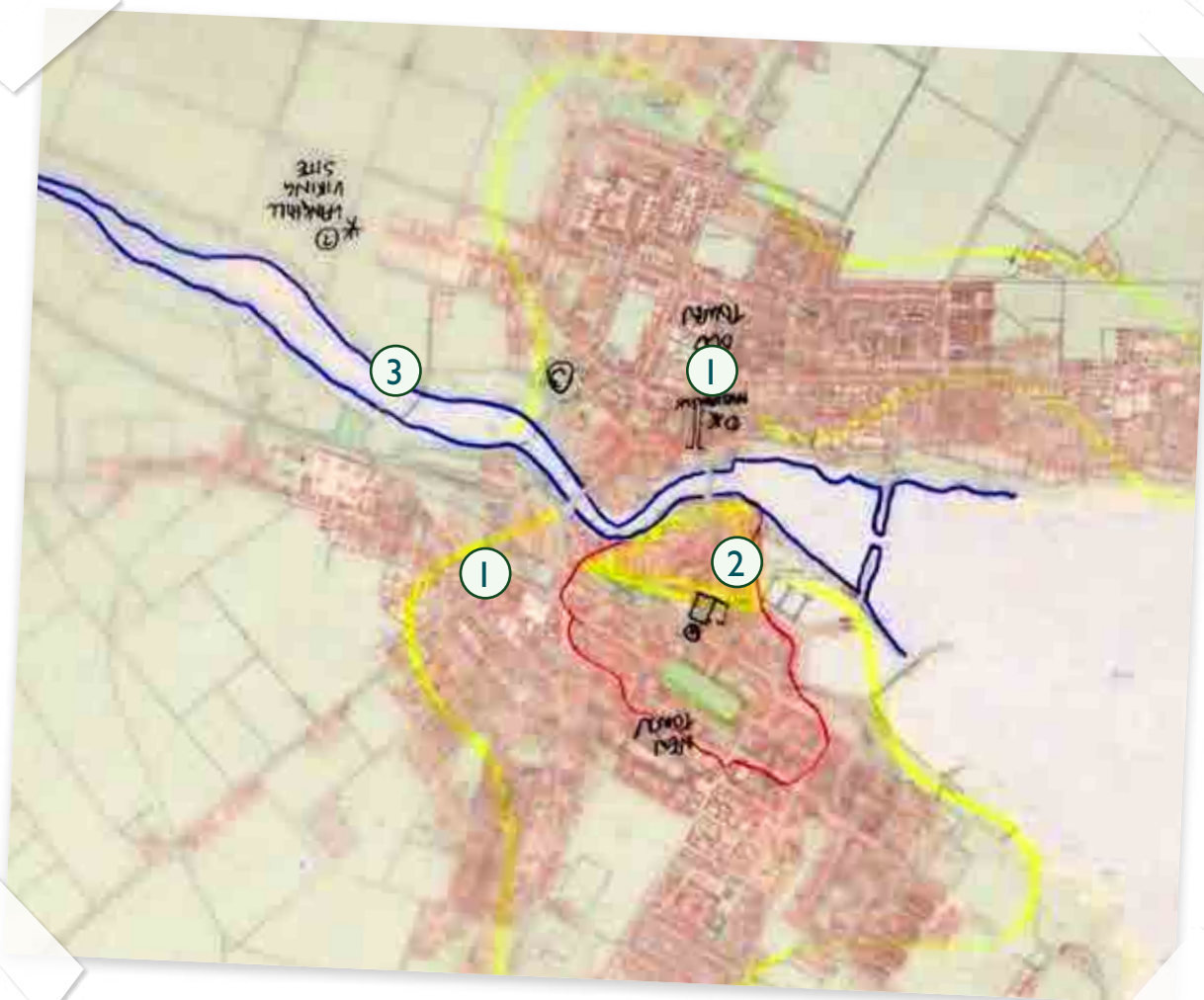
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Hands-on Planning

CULTURE CLUB

- Living assets in music, festivals etc
 - Need for cultural capacity
 - Need to address the gap between enthusiastic young people and older generations – need to target parents!
- 1 The town has a lot of distinctive features: Telford's Plan for Pultneytown, the world's shortest street, the most celebrated herring town, parliament square
 - 2 Apply for next round Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) Scheme for town centre
 - 3 Utilise existing heritage walks and trails



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Hands-on Planning

GLASS HALF FULL

- Housing development has been highly curtailed in recent years, with only 3 private homes built in the last 2 years
- There is an oversupply of affordable housing, which is leading to the imminent demolition of a block of flats in the town at North Murchison Street
- The loss of jobs from the closure of Dounreay is unlikely to be offset by new jobs in other sectors
- The redevelopment of existing buildings is not always cost effective, and consideration should be given to selective demolition and new build in Lower Pulteneytown
- The railhead site has contamination issues and is unsuitable for housing.
- Wick's two principal assets are the Airport and the Harbour, which could be instrumental in its future development and growth
- Lower Pulteneytown development should consist of marina related uses, tourist and leisure development, and office space for engineering companies in the marine sector. The old herring yards could be brought back into use.
- The new piers would bring jobs to the town which are much needed
- The existing Wick High School building could be developed for private rented flats, for which there is a market
- The swimming pool floor could be filled in and the building converted as has happened elsewhere e.g. The Edinburgh Tapestry Studio



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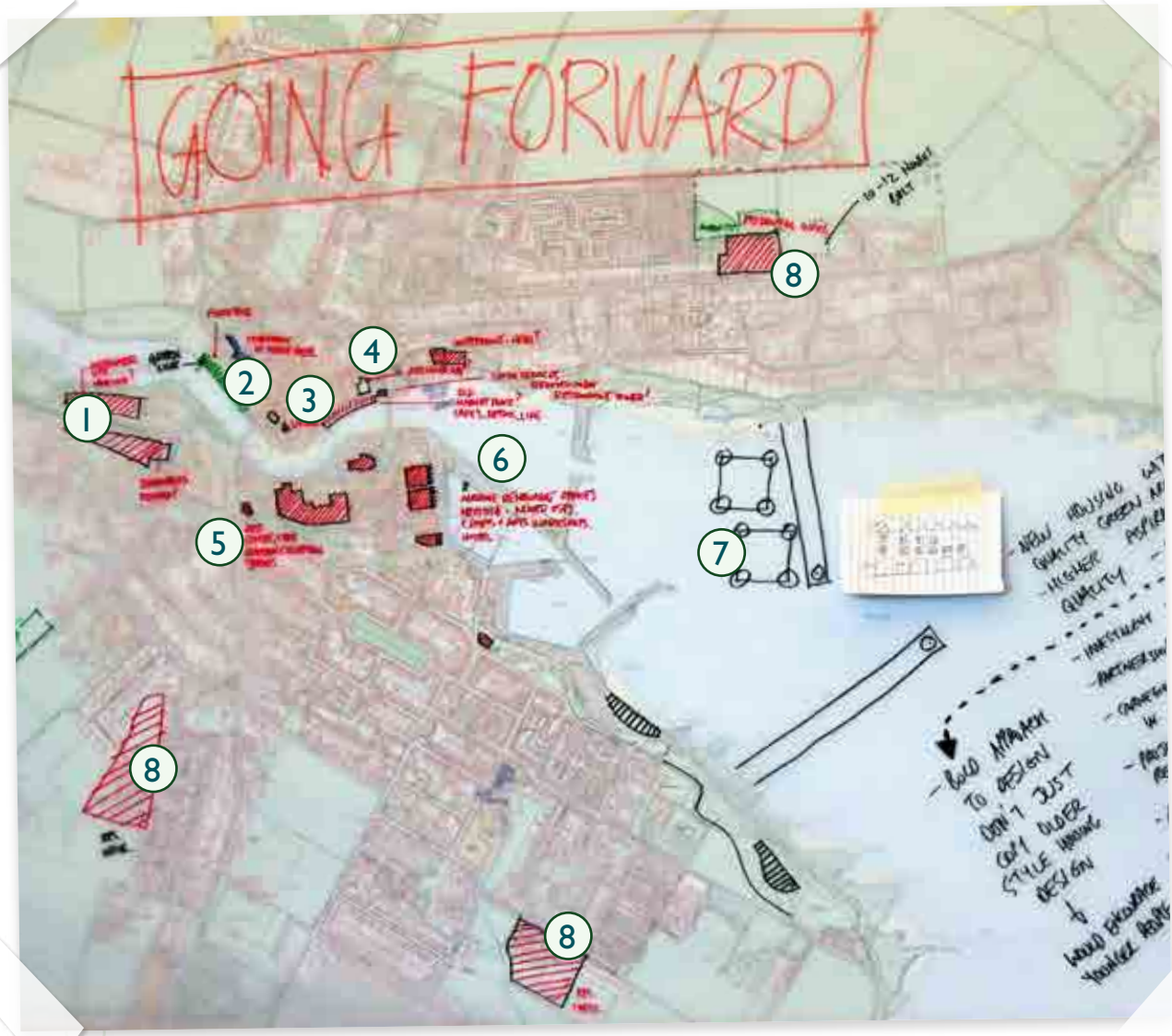
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Hands-on Planning

GOING FORWARD

- 1 The 2 railhead sites could become key sites for the marine renewables industry to bring in equipment by rail.
- 2 Protect Poundstretcher area and car park from flooding if redeveloped. A green landscaped bund could do this and extend the adjacent green space towards the bridge.
- 3 Location for a new Youth Hostel
- 4 The Town Centre Riverfront could be redeveloped to improve the aspect to the river, with gap sites infilled and possibly a new active quayside in the location of the old riverside market
- 5 The Carnegie Library could become the Carnegie Arts Centre housing the Johnston photo collection, studio space and possibly a cafe
- 6 Regenerate Lower Pultneytown with mixed uses including office space for the marine renewables industry, arts and crafts workshops and galleries, and some housing at upper levels overlooking the harbour
- 7 Enlarge harbour to attract and service marine renewables industry and create jobs
- 8 Focus housing developments on regeneration sites such as the vacant schools



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Hands-on Planning

GREEN FUTURE

Good level of open space provided for within Wick. There's a general feeling that the public open spaces within Wick are under used and not cared for enough.

- 1 Location of the proposed new community campus has poor connectivity with neighbourhood directly to the east that it will be serving
- 2 Argyle Square is under used and has a lack of activity and, with the exception of the church, an unanimated edge
- 3 Bignold Park is a well-used park but is too expansive and would be more attractive as a

- 4 destination for local families if there were a more formal landscaped garden for people to enjoy
- 4 Improve connections through the town by enhancing the many lanes either side of the High Street
- 5 The northern Broadhaven residential area lacks public open space compared to the rest of the town
- 6 A loop path connecting the coastal path around the north of Broadhaven back into town would provide access to heritage sites to the north



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Hands-on Planning

COMMUNITY NEEDS

Existing provision:

- Full sporting programme
- Full youth programme
- Rock Challenge
- Highland Youth Voice/ Parliament
- Great variety of things
- Improve connections through the town by enhancing the many lanes either side of the High Street
- The northern Broadhaven residential area lacks public open space compared to the rest of the town
- A loop path connecting the coastal path around the north of Broadhaven back into town would provide access to heritage sites to the north

Obvious gaps:

- Alternative Sports
- Information Points & Media
- Promotion Services
- Community Wide Discussion Forums on various issues, e.g. - Renewable Energy- Caithness wide activities- Independence Referendum
- Counselling services for young people and others- Substance Abuse
- More trained staff



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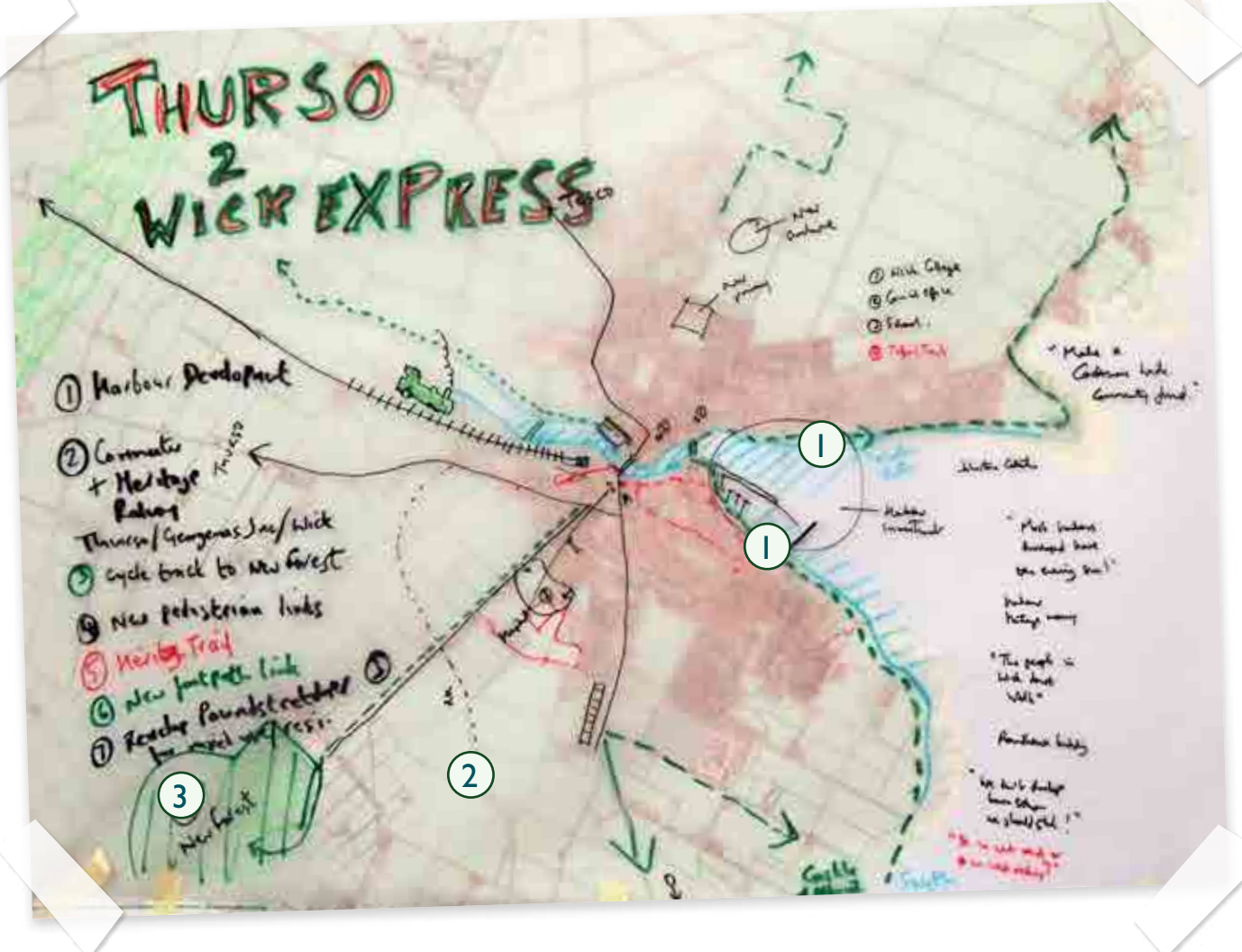
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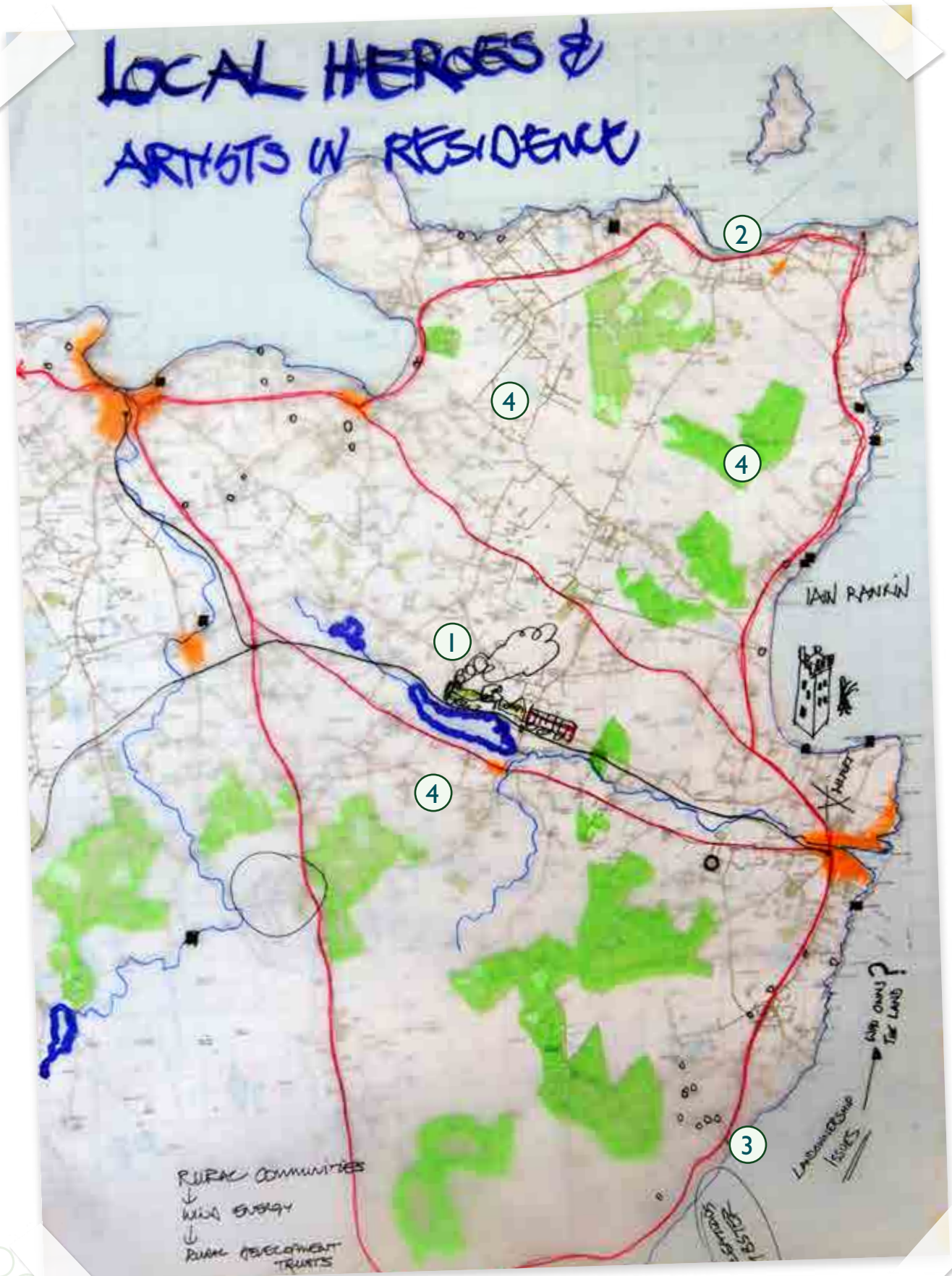
WICK & THURSO EXPRESS

- 1 Coastal Path – “wildness”, archaeology, views and castles
- 2 The Flow Country – wilderness, environmental sensitivity, exploration, dark skies, northern lights
- 3 Cycle route to new forest



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Hands-on Planning

LOCAL HEROES & ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

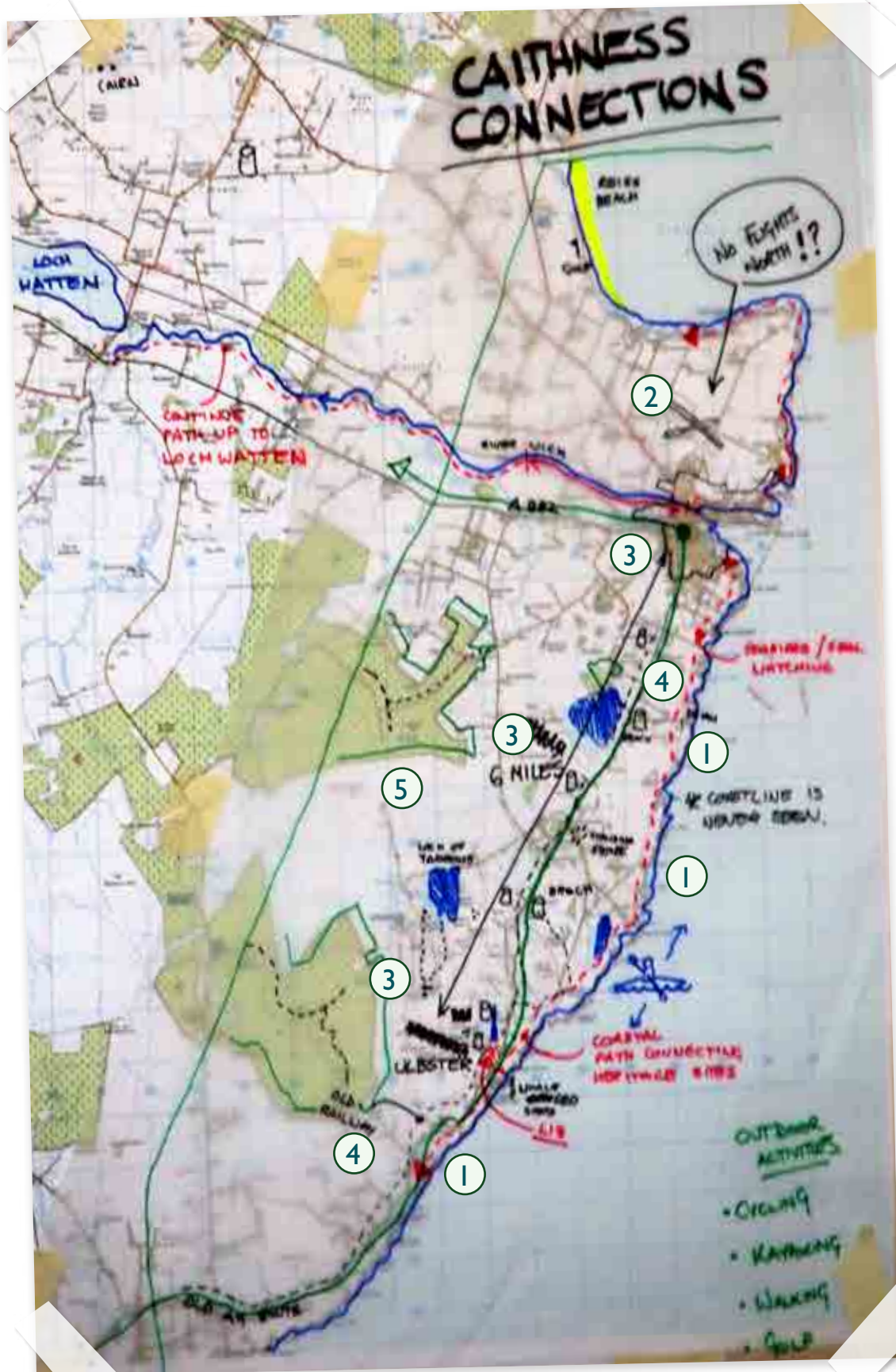
Landownership issues – reluctance to permit access along the coast through fields and the like.

- 1 Steam Train on the Wick – Thurso Line: a tourist attraction & a local means of transport
- 2 Broch reconstruction would be a fantastic project
- 3 North Lands Creative Glass – Lybster
- 4 Rural Communities – Wind Energy Developments – Rural Development Trusts



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Hands-on Planning

CAITHNESS CONNECTIONS

- 1 The coastline is never seen! There should be a coastal footpath that provides access to one of the most stunning coastlines in Scotland...why isn't there one!?
- 2 There are no flights to Orkney or Shetland from Wick Airport!
- 3 A rich Caithness heritage exists within a six mile stretch south of Wick that nobody is aware of...
- 4 The old railway line is an unused resource and tourism opportunity
- 5 The Yarrow is a haven of heritage sites that few know about

“ We have one of the most wonderful coastlines but there isn't a coastal walk! ”



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“ We have a good number of visiting boats from around 60 per year to 300 last year. Many stayed for a good few days. ”

Gordon Doull, Vice Chairman of the Wick Harbour Authority

Local Economy

The Local Economy Workshop was the final workshop on Thursday and it was facilitated by Nick Taylor, who has run Scarborough's award winning Renaissance programme. Below is a summary of the discussion.

- 1 Much comment was made about the decline in vibrancy in the High Street and the closure of some of the main shops and many felt the recent out of town shopping developments and on-line shopping were undermining the High Street
- 2 However, it is possible to do well with the right business and management e.g. Wetherspoons
- 3 There was a feeling that investment, particularly in renewables, should be welcomed in the town and that the town is well placed to benefit with the community able to adapt to new skills required.
- 4 New employers have been satisfied with the staff employed from within the local community.
- 5 Advantage should be taken of number of boats visiting the harbour
- 6 Need to promote tourism more strongly with focus on Wick and the wider area

“ It is crucial that we unite our local forces and find local champions that can help put Caithness on the map again! ”

“ Too many people simply pass through on their way to Orkney. ”

“ We have been delighted with the quality of sub-contractors here in Wick. ”



Nick Taylor, Scarborough Renaissance