

A new vision for Thurso

Key Themes

The outcomes from the public workshops were considered and are summarised below.

Support for growth

Thurso is a beautiful, historic town with a stunning coastal setting and views to Orkney. However, the town is in transition - with the decommissioning of Dounreay the town must attract new investment, including the renewables sector, to secure future training and job opportunities. Providing land for the western expansion of the town will facilitate the growth of Scrabster Harbour and future investment in the town and send out the message that Thurso is open for business.

“We need to be ready for what’s coming if we are to survive Dounreay’s closure.”

Local Economy

There is enthusiastic support for encouraging tourism and for new investment in training and employment in the town such as the North Highland College (UHI) and renewables. Participants want to see strong links between the education and employment sector to attract people to the area and ensure the town’s young people are ready to take up new opportunities.

“We’ve got the right time, we’re in the right place and we have the right people.”

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Local distinctiveness and tourism

A traditional Norse port in the 12th Century, the town is steeped in history and culture. However, it was felt that this rich legacy, and Caithness generally, is under-sold to tourists and that the town should promote these historic and cultural assets through community led events, attractions and tours. Ideas to reopen St Peter’s Church and Thurso Castle and its grounds as key visitor attractions should be explored along with the use of local crafts, skills, materials and produce.

“Caithness is the undiscovered bit of Scotland!”

Transport and movement

Participants highlighted the cost and infrequency of buses and trains as well as the lack of parking at the railway station. There is also concern about HGV’s passing through the town and the location of disabled parking spaces. To improve the vitality of the town centre, it was felt important to work to improve frequency of train and bus provision and improve the arrival experience and parking signage for visitors.

“It takes two hours by car to Inverness and over four by train!”

Young People

Young people expressed their desire for better play, sports and outdoor activities, particularly surfing. A key concern was the lack of informal ‘hang out’ space for 16-25 year olds to get together. Students from the High School highlighted the facilities young people would need in the future to encourage them to stay in the town, including employment, good shops and better housing.

“Establish more links that build relationships with young people and the renewables industry.”

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Key Themes (continued)

Arts and culture

Participants highlighted the number of artistic groups operating in the town and the potential community and tourism related offer that these groups could collectively bring. A cultural centre where artists could meet was seen as important to support a cultural renaissance of the town.

“Art and culture is not just an add on to tourism - it's a really powerful sector!”

Landscape and Environment

The River Thurso is one of the town's greatest assets but some of the uses along its length, particularly to the east of the Ellan Bridge, detract from its amenity value. Over time relocation of employment uses and replacement by residential and mixed use regeneration can enhance the river corridor. This would create more natural landscapes and habitats whilst providing amenity for local people and visitors with focused areas for leisure, recreation and culture.

“The river is special upstream and unloved downstream from the bridge.”

Quality of design

Participants expressed concern over the design quality of newer buildings and the neglect, sometimes to the point of demolition, of older buildings. There are opportunities for creative and place sensitive Nordic architectural approaches to new buildings and the enhanced use of local materials, particularly Caithness stone, in future building works.

“We are Norse Scotland.”

Active community

Participants highlighted the number of active groups currently operating throughout the town but that the lack of a community hub or meeting space has affected the ability of these groups to co-exist and work together for the greater good of the town.

“We lost our central meeting point when the town hall was turned into Caithness Horizons.”

Continuing participation

The principle of participation was grasped enthusiastically during the Charrette. Participants expressed an enthusiasm to continue their involvement in the town's regeneration and the emerging CaS Plan. Through the Charrette the idea of forming a new forum or team was developed, to build local capacity and enable active community participation for Thurso's people into the future. The group would have responsibility for discussing how the community and the Local Development Plan will progress the outcomes of the Charrette.

“‘Team Thurso’ could be an offshoot from the Community Council.”

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All quotes are from Charrette participants unless otherwise stated.