

**The Highland Council**

**City of Inverness Area Committee**

**5 March 2015**

Agenda Item	8
Report No	CIA/6/15

**Update on key City Centre initiatives and the Inverness City Centre Development Brief**

**Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure**

**Summary**

The report highlights ongoing investment, fund-raising and activity to address key priorities identified in the recent public consultation on the City Centre, including the development of tourism and cultural facilities, improvements to city centre access and connections and the regeneration of Academy Street.

It seeks Members' approval for the delivery of a pilot project aimed at achieving a better balance between vehicle movement and pedestrians on Academy Street.

It also asks Members to consider and approve a timetable for the publication of the updated Inverness City Centre Development Brief.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 At its meeting on 2 September 2014, the City of Inverness Area Committee noted progress on City Centre projects arising from a public consultation on land use and transport priorities in the City Centre. The Committee agreed that work should proceed on City Centre initiatives focussing on:
  - redevelopment of key sites to create visitor and cultural attractions;
  - development of Academy Street and its surroundings; and
  - improvements to City Centre access and connections.
- 1.2 The Committee also agreed the proposed scope of an update of the Inverness City Centre Development Brief (ICCDB), and noted that the timetable for publishing the updated brief for public consultation would be presented for approval at a future Committee. The Inverness City Centre Development Brief is Supplementary Guidance that identifies and promotes opportunities for the re-development and enhancement of the city core. The updates are intended to provide a clearer steer for the determination of future planning applications in the City Centre.
- 1.3 Sections 2 to 5 of this report set out an update on the various initiatives being progressed in the City Centre and Section 6 provides an update on the process for preparing the City Centre Development Brief.

## **2. Improvements to Cultural and Tourism Facilities**

### **2.1 Inverness Castle - Future Use**

In a joint initiative between The Highland Council and the Scottish Government a Ministerial Working Group was set up in Autumn 2014 to consider potential future uses for Inverness Castle. The group is co-chaired by Fergus Ewing MSP and Cllr Drew Hendry, Leader of The Highland Council. Acting on behalf of the group, High Life Highland recently commissioned a study to analyse the viability and sustainability of adapting the castle complex for high quality tourism use. This study is due to be completed this summer. Later this year a public consultation will take place to consider and comment on the findings. The study is jointly funded by the Council, the Scottish Government, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

### **2.2 Inverness Castle - Viewing Platform**

In December 2014 the Council submitted a planning application to open up the North Tower at Inverness Castle as a tourist attraction. This part of the Castle is owned by the Council. The proposal includes the creation of two viewing platforms and a tourist shop at an estimated cost of £360k. Further information on this project is provided in a separate report on today's agenda.

### **2.3 River Ness Flood Alleviation Scheme (RNFAS) - Public Art Project**

The RNFAS Public Art Project has raised more than £0.75m to deliver five art projects in association with the city's new flood alleviation scheme. The project is under the governance of the Inverness City Arts Committee supported by the City Manager and contracted support supplied by High Life Highland.

### **2.4 Artists have been commissioned to deliver each of the five projects, which are:**

- River Connections
- Rest Spaces
- The Sculptural Destination
- The Gathering Place
- The Trail (mapping and signposting the river physically and digitally)

In addition, the Inverness City Arts Working Group has agreed to add a Children's Feature to the list of commissions.

### **2.5 The project is funded by The Highland Council (£106k), Inverness Common Good Fund (£281k); Creative Scotland (£306k); and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (£66k).**

## **3 Improved access and connections**

### **3.1 Place-making proposal**

In parallel with consultancy work associated with the Inverness Townscape (TH) Heritage project, the Council is employing an urban design team to develop a "place-making" proposal for the area surrounding Academy Street, as shown in **Appendix A**. This work complements both the regeneration outputs of the TH

project and the Council's wider objective to improve the urban public realm of Academy Street, with a particular emphasis on:

- achieving a better balance and integration between pedestrians, street users and all forms of transport;
- improving connectivity between Inverness bus and rail stations, and associated parking facilities; and
- enhancing all three rail station entrances.

3.2 The place-making proposal will also support collaborative work between the Council, Hitrans, and Network Rail towards applying to the Scottish Stations Fund for funding to improve Inverness Rail Station. In addition it will assist the Council in costing and developing detailed proposals for public realm improvements that, in turn, could inform future bids to the Council's Capital Programme.

3.3 Pilot project to improve pedestrian crossing points on Academy Street

The Council is one of four Scottish planning authorities to be awarded a grant of £12,000 to develop and implement a practical project from the ideas put forward in the Scottish Government's draft Masterplanning Toolkit for town centres. The toolkit showcases a range of practical steps to make town centres more active, attractive and accessible.

3.4 Members are asked to approve the delivery of a pilot project aimed at achieving a better balance between vehicle movement and pedestrians on Academy Street. In addition to fulfilling Scottish Government grant conditions, this pilot will inform the development of the place-making proposal described in paras 3.1- 3.2 above.

3.5 The pilot is focused on improving pedestrian experience on Academy Street at the junction with Strothers Lane and Queensgate. Its key objective is to reinforce a pedestrian desire line linking Inverness bus station, car parks and the Library to the Old Town, Victorian Market and the river. This involves:

- removing obstacles to pedestrian movement, such as metal railings;
- use of temporary surface treatment on streets and pavements to make it easier and more attractive for pedestrians to cross Academy Street; and
- reconfiguration of traffic signals to achieve a better balance between vehicle and pedestrian movement.

3.4 **Appendix B** provides further details on this proposal, including the use of "Before" and "After" on-street observation techniques to examine the impact of the pilot study.

3.5 Funding bids for improved walking and cycling links to the city centre

The Council's transport team are bidding for funding from Sustrans Community Links grant programme to:

- improve walking and cycling infrastructure between Slackbuie and the city centre (anticipated spend £30k); and

- create a network of high quality integrated active travel routes along the River Ness, Caledonian Canal and the seafront at South Kessock that will improve access to the city centre from the west side of the river (anticipated spend £220k).

The outcome of these funding bids will be announced by Sustrans in April.

### 3.6 Inverness Railway Station

Discussions are taking place between the Council, HiTrans and the new rail franchise operator Abelio on the potential of redevelopment of the railway station. A workshop is taking place in Inverness on 24 February 2015 and a verbal update will be provided to members at the committee meeting.

## **4 Development of Academy Street**

- 4.1 The Council has pledged £750k towards a Townscape Heritage project on Academy Street that is set to attract £1.67m from the Heritage Lottery Fund and £946k from Historic Scotland to:

- bring vacant buildings back into use;
- reinstate original shop fronts;
- improve historic public spaces; and
- provide education and training opportunities.

Further information on this project is provided in a separate report on today's agenda.

- 4.2 In partnership with the Highland Housing Alliance, the Council is re-developing the site at 92-94 Academy Street to provide 31 housing units for affordable rent. In total, the Council is investing £4m in this re-development, including site purchase.

## **5 Inverness Common Good Fund: city centre investment**

- 5.1 Members recently agreed to expenditure from the Inverness Common Good Fund on the following capital projects:
- a six-year project to maintain the structure and public safety of Inverness Town House at a cost of £4.2m; and
  - renovation of office accommodation 1-5 Church Street, including a refurbished façade, that will cost £1.9m and support a significant number of jobs in the City Centre.

## **6 Inverness City Centre: Bin Collection**

- 6.1 Discussions have taken place with colleagues in Community Services on bin storage in the city centre. Clearly there are a range of issues given the number of waste management companies that operate in the city centre. In order to support upper floor conversions of city centre properties, the collection of domestic waste

(which the Council has a statutory duty to uplift) is of clear importance. In order to ensure that sufficient space is available as and when residential developments come forward in the city centre, officers intend to investigate the practicality, feasibility and design of communal bin stores throughout the city centre – initially on the basis of a pilot location. Local members will be fully involved in the process, and a further report will be brought to the Committee depending on the outcomes of this initial work.

## **7 Inverness City Centre Development Brief (ICCDB)**

7.1 The current ICCDB was approved by this Committee as Supplementary Guidance to the Highland-wide Local Development Plan in October 2012 and adopted in March 2013.

7.2 In September 2014 this Committee approved the scope of an updated ICCDB that takes into account a need to:

- refine the city vision to reflect the outcome of the recent public consultation;
- introduce development principles for each of five key themes; and
- re-structure the approach to delivery to reflect and incorporate:
  - city centre priorities;
  - the City Centre Action Plan; and
  - design criteria for key sites with development potential.

7.3 Members are asked to consider and approve the following timetable for preparing the updated ICCDB:

<b>Key Milestone</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Draft City Centre Development Brief to be considered by the City of Inverness and Area Committee	10 Sept 2015
Public consultation on draft Development Brief	Sept – November 2015
Report back findings of consultation and agree Development Brief	3 December 2015
Completion of Statutory Procedures (including submission to Scottish Ministers)	Up to early 2016
Adoption as Statutory Supplementary Guidance at Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee	Early 2016

## **8 Implications**

### **8.1 Equality**

There are no known direct equality implications arising from this report.

## 8.2 Environmental

Strategic Environmental Assessment has not been undertaken as the City Centre Action Plan would not be considered a qualifying plan, programme or strategy under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.

## 8.3 Resource, Climate Change/Carbon Clever, Legal and Risk Implications

Given the nature of this report, there are no direct implications immediately arising with respect to these matters. However, such is the subject matter that significant implications will arise and will need to be considered as integral to decision making going forward.

### **Recommendation**

The Committee is invited to:

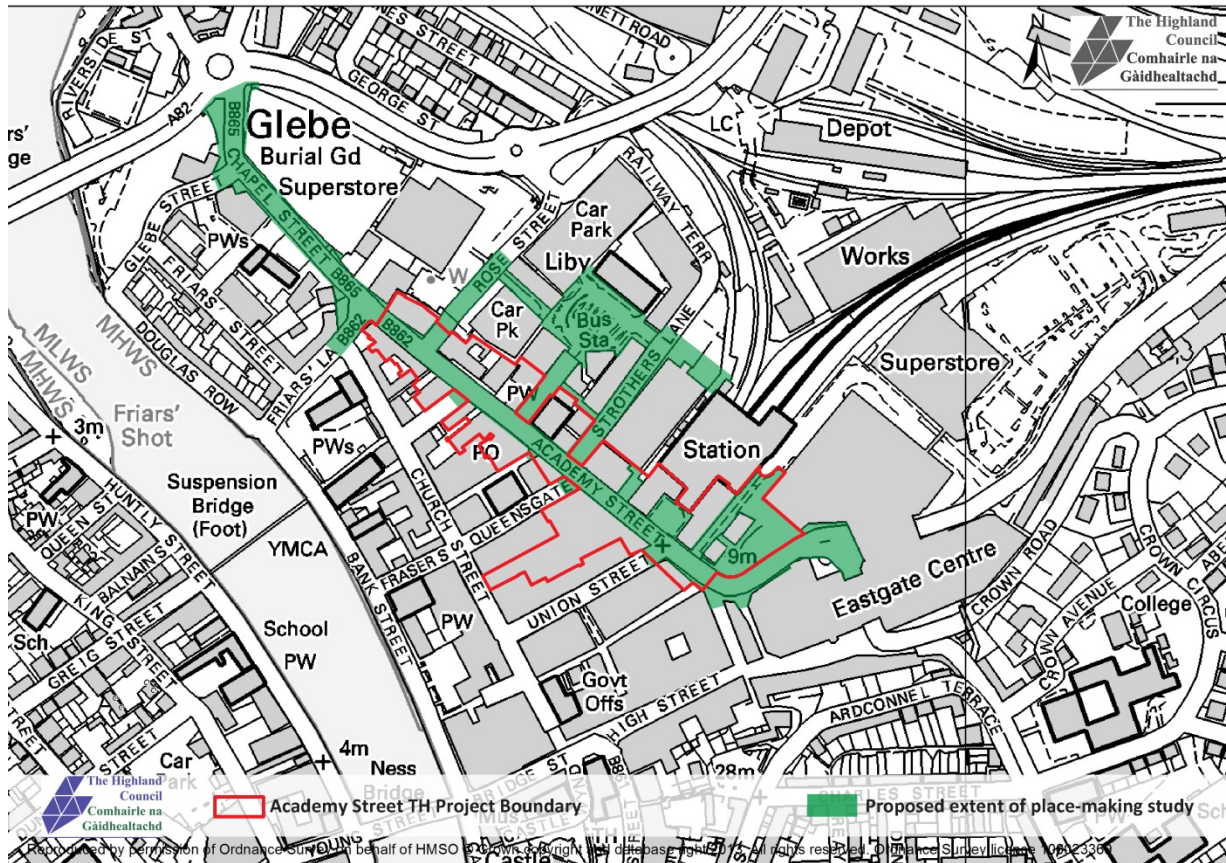
- note progress on the delivery of City Centre initiatives including investment and fund-raising to develop cultural and tourism facilities, improve access and connections and regenerate Academy Street.
- approve the delivery of a pilot project aimed at achieving a better balance between vehicle movement and pedestrians on Academy Street, which will be funded by a grant of £12k from the Scottish Government; and
- approve the timetable for publishing the updated Inverness City Centre Development Brief set out in Para 7.3

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

Date: 17 February 2015

Author: Malcolm Macleod

# Map showing boundary of place-making proposal under development for Academy Street and its surroundings



The Placemaking proposal will examine ways to:

- achieve a better balance and integration between pedestrians, street users and all forms of transport;
- improve connectivity between Inverness bus and rail stations, and associated parking facilities; and
- enhance all three rail station entrances.



### Pilot project to improve pedestrian crossing points on Academy Street

This project is focused on improving the pedestrian experience at one of the busiest junctions in Inverness city centre. Its aim is to identify ways to achieve a better balance between pedestrian and vehicle movement on Academy Street.

Project outputs will inform the development a place-making proposal for Academy Street and its surroundings, due to be completed later this year. The place-making proposal is one outcome of a recent public consultation that identified priorities for maximising footfall in the city centre, including a need to improve to access and connections and regenerate Academy Street.

The project's key objective is to reinforce a pedestrian desire line linking Inverness bus station, car parks and the Library to the Old Town, Victorian Market and the river. Pedestrian movement is currently constrained by metal barriers, the absence of safe crossing points and traffic signals that prioritise vehicle movement.

Changes to the junction are illustrated below. These will include:

- removal of obstacles to pedestrian movement, such as metal railings;
- use of temporary surface treatment on streets and pavements to make it easier and more attractive for pedestrians to cross Academy Street; and
- reconfiguration of traffic signals to achieve a better balance between vehicle and pedestrian movement.

The effectiveness of these interventions will be measured by “before” and “after” on-street observation techniques. Quantitative information such as pedestrian numbers will be gathered using mechanical tracking devices. In addition, the quality of pedestrian experience will be mapped to identify how people occupy, use and move through this junction.



Academy Street looking south at junction with Strothers Lane (left) and Queensgate