

**City and Area of Inverness Economic Recovery Sub-Group
Thursday 19th August 2021 at 12:00am**

ACTION NOTE

Present:

Cllr Carolyn Caddick (CC); Cllr Duncan Macpherson (DM); Cllr Isabelle Mackenzie (IM); Cllr Janet Campbell (JC); Cllr Jimmy Gray (JG); David Haas (DH), Inverness City Area Manager; Allan Maguire (AM), Head of Development and Regeneration; Cllr Helen Carmichael; Cllr Bill Boyd; Jo Page (JP), Visit Inverness Loch Ness Digital Engagement Manager; Craig Baxter (CB), Planner; Scott Dalgarno (SD), Development Plans Manager; Joanna Murray (JM) Victorian Market Manager; Mike Smith (MS) BID; Alison MacNeil (AM) Corp Comms; Rory Kellet (RK); Anthony Hubbert (AH)

Items	Note/Action Agreed	Action For	Action Undertaken
1. Appointment of Chair for the Meeting			
	NOTED DH asked for Chair Nominations for meeting. JG was nominated and accepted, there was no contrary view.		
2. Welcome/Apologies for Absence			
	NOTED apologies were received from, Cllr Alasdair Christie, Cllr Davidson, and Cllr Robertson		
3. Update On master Plan			
	<p>RK and AH presented an update on the Town Centre vision plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last met in May and have taken on board comments made. They have also met with BID and Network Rail • The plan is only at Stage 1 of a lengthy process and is trying to create the framework for the vision. • It is not prescriptive but aspirational. Advises that the project is a solid foundation for the city recovery. • 5 Key outcomes – Making Inverness as a destination where people and businesses want to invest their time and money. - To become welcome mixed neighborhood providing quality homes for young families and the older. - Attractive built and strong environment where people can meet and socialize- safe and accessible space- low carbon region- become a safe place which is easy to walk and wheel around, public transport is easily accessible, and Cars do not become the dominant vehicle. • We undertook a mapping analysis of the city Centre, looking at the current status of the city Centre using this as a basis to create some ideas, outcomes of which are tailored to the needs of the city. Issues identified are not unique to Inverness and are similar to issues found across many Scottish cities City Centre's and their overall reliance on retail. • Majority of the projects detailed do lie within the City Centre boundary. • Out of the analysis was the need for diversity away from retail. There are insufficient Civic Green spaces within the city. The River is an asset, we need to recognize its potential and link it better to the city Centre. There is growing tourist economy as seen through the building of several new hotels, we could support this more through culture and tourist attractions. Distinct lack of residential accommodation within the heart of the City Centre 		

- There has also been a number of positive moves made, The new Inverness Justice Centre, Rose Street Foundry, Castle Brae steps, The new works on Academy Street, The Town House redevelopment.
- Posed a series of questions, essentially 'what ifs' responses to the analysis- what if we encouraged new residential development, bringing people back to live in the heart of the city, with a mix of tenures which appeal to everyone. What if we looked to improve ground floor activation, looking at alternative forms of retail public services i.e., creche or workspaces. What if we looked at strengthening the economy through new leisure uses which would improve footfall? Looked at new performance venues for music and comedy which would strengthen the economy working in tandem with the bar and cafes and also help with tourism. What if we looked to improve culture to encourage tourism? What if we looked to offer new and improved spaces for people or communities to gather? What if we transformed how people travel and move through the city Centre by promoting sustainable forms of transport?
- Proceeded to present regarding the 9 Recovery projects that are already progressing- combined with the opportunity sites and accessibility and connectivity elements.
- Recovery projects themselves- aiming to create a solid foundation from which the city can recover from the pandemic- Potential Rail improvement to Academy Street. Revitalizing and refurbishing the Victorian Market. Work is taking place on Union Street which is providing much needed residential accommodation and providing new front facing to Baron Taylor Street. Inverness Castle, transforming the castle into a major tourist attraction. Potential of the new hotel on Church Street. Castle Street Housing project currently on site. Moxy Hotel project on the old swimming pool site which is a major element on the river front. Hampton Hotel development on the site of the old carpark next to the bus station and near the Spectrum Centre. The River Hydro Project is progressing.
- Potential Opportunities sites-; What ifs'- Hill House- Key gate way from south in the city Centre. Looking at a Cultural and heritage quarter located around abouts Eden Court and Cathedral. Baron Taylor Street a key route from Falcon Square down to the river. Is there more that could be done to make this route attractive. This is an old, established route through the city could it be remodeled along the concept of Ashton Lane in Glasgow, making a bright lit up street of bars and places to eat. Looking at Phase 2 of the castle project using the Town House car park, extending the public space to the castle linking to the Town House. Looking at the Upper levels of the High Street retail units, could we use for accommodation.
- Active Travel Network- Currently 2 new routes in progress, one which passes along the Leisure Centre and the River into the city with signs and points of interest along the way. (route 4)
- Potential of a new pedestrian bridge outside the cathedral
- Shore Street- ways to combat this barrier to connectivity to the proposed Maritime Heritage trail due to the Longman roundabout and the A82
- Longman Road- better connectivity, improving the planned boulevard up to the New Justice Centre.
- Connections to the River – improving main routes down to the river, Fraser Street and Queens Gate to Church Lane
- A wayfinding strategy which is already under development will bring much more clarity for people moving around the city,

Consultation- Scott Dalgarno-

- Really exciting mix of some of commitments that are under way with the achieved outcome already identified and also some exciting ideas for options to be taken forward
- We are interested in hearing other people's ideas, hoping that the master plan is helping to draw out some of the ideas. To help bind all these ideas together is a strategy map which is being prepared between now and the city committee in November which will help see the City Centre in the wider context.
- Also help to bind this piece of work with other work streams that members have been made aware of over the

last few months which are relayed and complimentary to the City Centre master plan, like the Rail station masterplan, work done around branding and how we want to profile the City Centre.

- Local development plan as well as the transport strategy plan which is being presented to members.
- Useful for us to talk to key business groups between now and the report coming back to the CIAC, trying to get some alignment and understanding about a joined-up approach before we put before CIAC for formal consideration.

Members comments

CC- thanks for presentation. Excited about the opportunities, **Q** How do we work in partnership with the people who do own the businesses? It can be difficult to engage with some of these owners and sometimes we do not know who actually owns a building or area., likes the idea of making Baron Taylor the Ashton lane of Inverness but would need to get the lighting right to make it work. Looking at the Maritime trail and its connectivity sounds great however recent issues in planning have identified the difficulty of any sort of change of use or development in this area due to the location of the Gas works.

BB- Q; Integration of ideas and strategy that brings them together, beneficial to everybody. Could he ask that any engagement includes residents, members of the public and businesses, this would promote support. Love the idea of openness of stairs and public square. Agrees with the concept that Baron Taylor street could be an asset and opportunity.
NOTED- asked for a copy of the report.

IM – NOTED Loved the diagrams vitality and interesting ideas. Think consultation is the main key, around the City Centre a lot of Different owners, so may be difficult to engage. Media coverage shows that working from home doesn't help retail. Need to encourage people to come back into the City Centre. Some business owners feel that people are not coming into town due to the street scape and interventions. Network rail and bus station needs to be developed as messy currently. Public transport already queried, key park and ride. How do we pull together all the stands, lots of opportunities?

Response – In terms of engagement, this will be a key thing going forward. Roundabout at shore street, whatever happens in relation to the maritime trail this roundabout is crucial to the connecting to Merkinch as well so important area to look at. The issue in regard to individual owners is a big issue and we have looked at individual sites, these have been removed from the document because of commercial sensitivities, hopefully after this Allan Maguire and his team would be able to approach individuals with a view to working with the council. Regarding the movement of bikes and pedestrians we need to be careful not to alienate car drivers, so want to make City Centre accessible but perhaps inconvenient to drive around.

AM- Re Market Bae and potential gardens we are currently doing a title check on this to find out who the owner is. Falcon square we are having discussions with Eastgate but really need to sit around a table and a positive discussion. The issue of various owners of the upper floors of the retail units in the High Street is more complicated as many of them are in Pension funds. We are lobbying the Scottish Government to try an incentivize private investment in the City Centre. We have been very successful in delivering affordable housing in the city Centre. We cannot attract at the moment private investors to invest in private housing unlike other City Centre where it has been seen as a good development opportunity. In the Highlands it is very much the case that the private developers still want to build in the greener areas, this has been further exasperated by Covid as people don't want to live in congested areas. In regard to the Inverness railway station, we are aware of the individual who we can pass some ideas onto. **CB** has already had a meeting with the individual and ideas have been passed on to network rail who are the lead on that development.

CB- following on from what Allan said, it is important to note that the Master Plan is for a long-term vision of what the City

Centre could look like and embedding it into local development plan policy. The gas tank has been a barrier to redevelopment; however, the H&S executive have a model that you can look at with rings of risk moving further out away from the tank. It may be a barrier but its not an exclusion zone. Specifically, on transport, difficult balance to be struck around access and people's ability to travel by the means they have available to them. Retailers still have the presumption that people need to park outside the shop they are shopping in. We do have adequate car parking facilities which are not fully utilized.

Further Members Comments-

BM- Excited by all the potential changes, thinks change is the future. Agreed that The Problem on Academy Street is the Traffic. Added that along with the issue of contacting Private owners of buildings, private owners do not in general look after the external side of their property. Weeds are out of control and buildings look very dirty. Likes the idea of a new bridge outside the cathedral.

HC- Amazed at the amount of work that has already gone into this report. They have looked at both the bad and good elements of the city. Think the 'what if' basis is a great way to look at it. The detail is quite incredible. Would all love to see it asap. Would be great to redevelop Baron Taylor street into the inverness Ashton Lane.

DM - Great Vision, how do we take these wonderful ideas and what ifs and show people? Until the opportunities are shown to the people how to we communicate this to our public, how do we communicate it to commercial business, What's the mechanism of going about this. How do you frame a conversation with private business owners about the improvements we want them to make? How we can remove some of less desirable houses of multiple occupancy which do act as a barrier to some people wanting to live in the City Centre.

JG- Agreed with most of what's been said, thought that there may be issue with people and members understanding that a lot of the report is based on 'What ifs' and is not prescriptive. We must be careful that this is fully understood. Key issues- is the communication with the public and members themselves. 1st port of call is that we communicate with all the inverness members. Asked the Question- At which CIAC will this be presented? Should be done as a matter of urgency. Regards to the green space- Could we not use existing green spaces like the church yard at Old High, as long as it was done respectfully.

Officers Responses

DH- The presentation is that it weaves in things that are happening now and also gives elements of what we should be thinking about for the future. We will be presenting to CIAC in November.

AM- The only way of taking forward negotiations with Business owners is to show a benefit to them, most do not want to do business with the council. The Discussions we are having with the Scottish Government is about incentivizing businesses. The Issue regarding HMO's is a known one, however historically if we attempt to relocate an HMO into a residential area the Local Cllr and Residents would complain. Inverness does have a Homelessness problem we need to tackle. The idea about using Cemeteries as public green spaces is a good idea and used as a positive the well used large Cemetery in Glasgow which is used a green space. The issue with this is tackling Social behavior and making them attractive to use.

Members Comments

HC- ACTION happy to arrange a briefing after this CIAC if appropriate time, so that everybody could get the benefit of this

		<p>presentation.</p> <p>CC- Need to be realistic with expectations, as the report does set down longer term possibilities. CARG as a rule discusses short term issues, perhaps this forum is too limited to discuss all these longer-term issues and visions. We need a separate strategic planning meeting, and need updates every 6 months as to progress.</p>		
4.	Key Strategic Projects			
		<p>Allan Maquire gave a update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church Street Housing development is progressing well and is on Target. • Castle Project- has a few more concerns in particularly with the construction industry issue with shortages of building supplies, prices increase. Tender Return date is the 6th September, we will know how keen the contractors are at this time and will have a better understanding of the impact of the supply shortages. • Castle Street HHA project – has been delayed due to problem with the rear of the property. Issues have now been resolved and is now progressing very well. <p>DH-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are reporting on the Victorian market at the August CIAC, we will be giving more details on how it is progressing. Has faced a couple of challenges as an old building, had an issue with the floor with additional attached costs. This was absorbed through the contingency. This does present a small risk with the contingency available. We are moving forward with the project at pace and with efficiency. We also have some healthy interest in the new units. <p>JG- Who can get access to the master plan? I think people need some time to go through the report as a lot to digest.</p> <p>AM- Not a public document yae as needs more consultation.</p>		
5.	Marketing			
		<p>Mike Smith BID Manager proceeded with update-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since entering Level Zero Business is picking up with footfall running at about 40% below where it was in 2019. • Despite the lower footfall the average spend of those shopping has increased. • Retail has been the hardest hit with large Nationals taking a big hit. M&S food sales is back up to pre pandemic level although they have reduced staff numbers. • The biggest changes in entering Level Zero have been to the Hospitality industry who are now able to extend their opening hours and the reduction in the social distance rule has meant increased numbers. Feedback from those establishments that were open was they were very busy, and the mood was positive. • They are up to about 60-70% of pre pandemic levels. • Unfortunately, some establishments have had to temporary close due to Covid. • One issue effecting all hospitality is staffing numbers, for instance the Den is not open yet as they don't have adequate staff. There is also a issue with the staff training as training hasn't been available due to the pandemic. • Other cities have taken on the board the training of people for the hospitality industry. • Hotels have been doing good business mostly UK tourists. They are missing the international Travellers who tends to spend more during his trip. • Cruise liners carrying about 25% of their normal capacity are now returning to Inverness with some passengers visiting the city. • Concern over Office workers and their hybrid return back to the office, they are crucial to the economy. Some large officers have returned with about 90% capacity, along with other BIDS we have sent a letter to the Scottish Government to discuss the return to offices and its effect on the economy. 		

Jo Murray presented update for the Victorian Market

- Are working Collaboratory with BID and VILN, huge opportunity to link up our marketing message on Social media
- Last year was struggle with footfall being very down on previous years, as most of our custom is through tourism the lack of tourists greatly affected footfall. However, in the last couple of weeks we are tracking only about 20% less than 2019 so positive forecast. In 2019 we approximated about 2.5K visitors a day. In 2020 this dropped to about 100 and presently sits at about 2065.
- Local Trade is not as strong as it used to be, feedback provided for an explanation- People still cautious about coming back into the city centre and find the environment not very attractive in main due to various interventions,
- Trading varier widely with some business Thriving and some struggling. Thinks that has a lot to do with the activity a retailer undertakes to promote their business. With some owners closing at 4pm or not opening certain days.
- Positive news- getting a lot of enquiries regarding the new retail units at the Market.

jo page- VILN Digital Engagement manager

- Slide presentation shared. Following up Michael Goldings previous updates on some of the projects, some have been completed and some have just started.
- Our Inverness city Marketing campaign 'see you soon' has now been running for 4 weeks. With 4 weeklong social media campaigns using local imagery and also video content. All content is linked back to a blog that promotes activities taking place in Inverness city. The campaigns were created and promoted to a local and UK wide audience. Chosen by the statistics provided from website visits and social media insight. The campaign to date has reached 1.2 m people with over 500K video views, 14,500 clicks to the blog.
- Remaining deliverables are seasonable videos to be created, 4 individual videos.
- Going to be embarking on a Sky Advert campaign, looking at quotes
- Hosting of influencers media and film,
- Working on our printed map consistency, in process
- LNER Project- had a visit from a family who visited in July, they created social content and it started from their home and included their train journey direct up to Inverness and 2 days spent around the area using the city sight scene bus. The social content created about 115K views of everything to do in the city centre and easy it is to travel to Inverness using LNER. The main campaign will start in September, a video campaign across all social media channels. There is competition to win a highland break package.
- LNER are also partner in the food and drink trail x, lots of planned activity for promotion.
- Started the second phase of the Visit Scotland and Lochaber partnership, the 1st phase took place last year and looked at winter, this phase looks at transition from summer to Autumn. It is a video campaign, gone out to central belt and North England. Who ever engages in the video will be retargeted.
- Click link to a dedicated landing page with inspirational content to encourage more visits.
- Development on our website, a discovery hub, new blog content we have had generated, People going into the HUB can search the website for particular destinations or activity and then look at particular content and blogs on this subject.
- Launched recently was our 'Bucket list' facility- visitors to this webpage can create their own personal trip and itinerary by saving their favourite locations.
- Social Media activity update- organic reach, contacting people organically without costing any money. In May 2020 reach of about 89K per month, in May 2021 hit the 1m for the first time. Following has increased from 46K from May 2020 to 60K this may. Our shared content is being shared about 2.5K per month. This is getting our

		<p>content and our members content out to a wider audience organically.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary- last 12 months we have reached 12.2 M people, potential visitors with our social media activity. With scope through all the campaigns taking place to grow this figure by another 3M. • Have been awarded 80K from the visit Scotland destination fund, looking at marketing specifically between November through to March 2022, <p>Members comments-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q- DM-How do we allocate Units to potential retail applicants in the VM. This. has been an issue historically, which has sometimes undermined the VM's success. Should a Panel be appointed to look at applicants? How is the footfall counted? A-JM, work has previously been undertaken leading up to the development and it was decided that applications would be open to Class 1 and Class 3 uses, usefully enough these are the classes of applicants had so far. We do work closely with new tenants to adapt their offerings to match our vision. Normally businesses are happy to work with us. If 2 applicants are bidding for the same unit, we have been able to discuss and reallocate another unit. There ill be another closing date for applicants in November. Footfall is counted manually, with an average taken. This does give an accurate picture of which entrances are being used. DH- Completion date should be close to the original completion date provided i.e., Spring 2022. Governance is a key component into looking at tenancies and looking at if they match the framework and environment we are trying to create. Applications received will go to local Cllrs to make a decision. CC- Thinks until the wearing masked restriction has been lifted retail will be difficult. Additionally, Public sector workers are being asked to work from home unless it is essential to work in the office, until everybody back to the office the city centre will struggle. Feels dismayed at shops closing early as doesn't project a good image. 		
6.	Transport Strategy			
		<p>Craig Baxter gave Members a brief update on the transport strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inner Moray development plan which focuses on the big picture in the region and how people travel around the city centre and what they do when they get to the edge of the city. • Trying to come up with appropriate solutions for the conundrum of supporting growth in the region and the city without encouraging traffic growth. • Developing a far-reaching ambitious transport policy which will require future developers to demonstrate how they can make their development competitive for other modes of transport other than car. • Wider strategy work very many centres on diversify of networks, trying to balance the need of those who need to use vehicles against trying to promote active travel. • City centre was looked at as to various interventions which could be instigated and how its transport network could be transformed to be more sustainable. This is being worked up into a detailed master travel plan. • We know what interventions we want to make on the streets so at committee in November when you receive papers, we will outline particular interventions in specific locations and a way of taking form concept through to delivery. • Bus Priority rapid development fund- The Rose Street Bus gate is now open taking about 10 buses an hour out of academy street and EH are looking at the data for the Air quality, and if there are any improvements. 		

		Members Comments JG- we should raise awareness of things positive i.e., bus gate taking buses out of Academy street. Potentially improving Air quality		
7.	Communications Plan			
		DH- further to a decision made at the July CARG meeting, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A paper has been circulated which is a communications plan which sets out objectives, prepared in collaboration with Stewart Nichol at the Chamber. • The plan sets out the key objectives, sets out the relevant proposals and communicate with the right people building in confidence and protecting the reputation of the council and its partners. 		
8.	Notes Of previous meeting			
		Meeting finished early due to Technical difficulties, so item not discussed.		
9.	Matters Arising from Previous Notes			
		Meeting finished early due to Technical difficulties, so item not discussed.		
10	Date of Next Meeting			
		Meeting finished early due to Technical difficulties so proposed date was not agreed- Monday 4 th October at 10am	RR	