

Agenda Item	5
Report No	CIA/28/25

The Highland Council

Committee: City of Inverness Area

Date: 18 August 2025

Report Title: City Strategy – City Centre Review

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The number of developments in the City Centre including the Inverness Castle Experience, the Victorian Market, new Hotel accommodation and the refurbishment of Inverness Townhouse provide an opportunity to re-visit how we approach supporting the built environment. This is supported by increasing visitor numbers and the Inverness Partnership Action Plan which supports improving City amenity.
- 1.2 This report also builds on an overarching strategy for Inverness ([The City Strategy](#)), which was most recently [reported to Committee](#) on 2 February 2025 with particular emphasis given to the City Centre. The Strategy gives partners shared responsibilities and actions for delivery of improvements and the report builds on this process. The Strategy develops and supports a place-based approach to Inverness, as originally outlined in the December 2021 report to [Full Council](#).
- 1.3 Resources will be required to deliver improvements, and whilst the report highlights potential initial opportunities the recommendation is that no decisions on resource allocation are made today with the Committee agreeing to hold a Members Workshop at which options can be appraised in more detail in the context of available resources and funding opportunities.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **Note** the background to the opportunities to improve the built environment within the City Centre;
- ii. **Agree** to support the principle of supporting efforts to improve the built environment; and
- iii. **Agree** to hold a Members Workshop to develop options to be given further consideration by this committee in the context of available resources.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - The initial work undertaken to date has involved a range of Officers across a broad range of Council services. Going forward, projects will require to be funded, and potential funding sources will be identified. The Senior Community Development Manager and his team will support initial work to develop a project programme and will help drive forward projects and external funding opportunities will be capitalised on wherever possible. However, dedicated resources will need to be provided by the Council and partners to deliver the projects. It may be possible to allocate funding from the Community Regeneration Fund, subject to further work on potential projects.
- 3.2 **Legal** - No direct implications.
- 3.4 **Risk** - There are no implications arising directly from this report. However, the place-based approach is fundamentally a new approach for service and project delivery across the Council and is built on partner collaboration. Expectation is also an issue, and care will need to be taken to ensure that financial implications of each potential project are clearly understood.
- 3.5 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** - No direct implications.
- 3.6 **Gaelic** - There are no implications arising directly from this report. However, in accordance with the Council's Gaelic policy, there are likely to be Gaelic elements to some of the projects.

4 Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5 Background

- 5.1 The City Strategy has given context to focus on the City Centre as a hub for attracting investment and bringing benefit to the residents of the City and Area. The City Centre is also often the first exposure visitors have to the Highlands noting the approximately 150,000 coach visitors who use the Common Good Fund supported Coach Friendly arrangements in place operated by Inverness BID which have earned the City Coach Friendly Status and the increasing number of visitors arriving by Rail, all being delivered to the heart of the City.

- 5.2 In addition, developments led by the Inverness Castle Experience and the Victorian Market – with weekly footfall in the Market rising from 4,000 per week to upwards of 6,500 - enhance the profile, visibility and the importance of driving further improvements to the built environment of the City.

6 Initial Work

- 6.1 Noting the focus on the City Centre and Members established support for a culture of continual improvement, the Inverness and South Community Development Team met with officers representing:-

- Roads Operations;
- Amenity Services;
- Planning;
- Building Standards;
- Community Regeneration Fund; and
- Street Cleaning and Waste

The objectives were:-

- to gather cross-service input on improving the Inverness City Centre environment;
- to inform a report for City of Inverness Area (CIAC) Committee on 18 August, leading to a Member's workshop;
- focus on street scene, cleanliness, infrastructure, planning and community engagement; and
- emphasis on quick wins, strategic planning and resource implications.

All agreed the focus on the City Centre and to provide data regarding resources and current service levels applicable to the City Centre in anticipation to Members agreeing to hold a Members Workshop to consider options.

- 6.2 Inverness Business Improvement District (BID) have an important role to play once we develop options. BID work with the Council in several key areas which support City Centre vibrancy with the financial assistance of the Inverness Common Good Fund (ICGF). There are also other City Centre stakeholders such as Police Scotland and the remaining partners involved in projects to support public space such as Operation Respect.

7 Opportunities – Overview

- 7.1 Officers have considered several initial thoughts around potential work which would require resourcing either in terms of funding or dedicated project management. It is planned to carryout feasibility appraisals after Members consider options at the Workshop, which will be attended by officers from the services referred to above.

8 Suggested initial scope

8.1 Planning & Built Environment

- Need for a masterplan or urban design framework for the City.
 - Suggestions include street typologies, shopfront and signage design guides and heritage strategy.
- All in the context of challenges which are:-
- amenity notices and enforcement are limited by cost and legal complexity.
 - building maintenance is the responsibility of owners. Incentives may be more effective than enforcement.

8.2 Green Space & Connectivity

- Opportunities to enhance burial grounds as green spaces (e.g., Chapel Yard, Tomnahurich)
- Improve active travel corridors and connectivity between key sites (e.g., bus/rail stations, Riverside)
- Leverage natural assets and existing infrastructure for placemaking.

8.3 Street Cleanliness & Waste

- Bins are not fit for purpose. The current designs are ineffective and unattractive.
- Commercial waste remains a challenge due to poor business compliance.
- Nighttime economy creates additional litter. Suggestion to explore evening cleaning shifts.
- Jet washing and deep cleans were previously effective but need resourcing.

8.4 Streetscape & Infrastructure

- Millennium circle is poorly located and frequently damaged. Suggestion to relocate.
- Slabbed areas are not durable under heavy traffic. Asphalt replacements are more practical.
- Lighting concerns raised, especially in vennels and steps. Some improvements made.
- Street furniture and signage clutter the environment. "less is more" approach recommended.

9 Potential Funding & Resources

- Community Regeneration Fund (CRF)
- Historic Environment Scotland and Lottery Heritage Fund – potential sources for built environment improvements.
- Emphasis on the need for dedicated project officers to coordinate and deliver initiatives.

10 Initial Options – More detail

10.1 Although further work is needed including discussion at the Members Workshop, there follows a few suggested early projects which could be considered. These are detailed in sections 10.2-10.5.

10.2 **Lombard St Corridor** - Consideration of a pilot project (e.g., Lombard Street corridor) to model improvements. A pilot project (e.g., Lombard Street corridor) to model improvements is one of the considerations for prioritisation being an area which is well used and in need of investment.

- 10.3 **Millenium Circle** - The re- positioning of the Millenium Circle from its position at the junction of Inglis Street and the High Street to potentially the top of Church Street is also suggested. This would prevent further damage to it from heavy vehicles and place it adjacent to the Three Virtues and uplift streetscape in Church Street.
- 10.4 **Greenspace** – easing access to Chapel Yard Cemetery and investing in greenspaces adjacent to the former Old High Church and the Inverness Castle Experience are ideas for further consideration especially as some of this work could be supported by funds from the Burial Ground Commutation Fund.
- 10.5 **City Centre Masterplan** – this would need significant resource potentially partially supported by the ICGF. It could encompass:-
- shopfront design;
 - signage;
 - building maintenance – through utilisation of a system like that used in Edinburgh City; and
 - streetscape layouts to include seating and Litter – Bin design

11 Governance & Next Steps

- 11.1 Should the Committee agree, a Members Workshop would provide the necessary detail which would allow for consideration of priorities, information would include:-
1. current service levels and performance;
 2. links to Local Plans, Place Plans and the City Strategy;
 3. cost and feasibility implications; and
 4. need for a governance structure and project lead to oversee delivery

12 Conclusion

- 12.1 With the City strategy in place, increasing visitor numbers, the completion of several major developments, including the Inverness Castle Experience, Victorian Market, Northern Meeting Park and Bught Park, there is an opportunity to crystallise the progress made to date on improving City Streetscape, potentially through the creation of a Masterplan. Further assessment of priorities needs to be undertaken following the Members Workshop, involving key stakeholders and potential funding partners.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 4 August 2025

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Background Papers: Inverness City Strategy

Appendices: None