
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: GRANTOWN-ON-SPEY TOWN CENTRE PILOT PROJECT

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Purpose of Report

To ask the Planning Committee to note the publication of the Grantown-on-Spey Town Centre Pilot Project.

Background

1. The Grantown-on-Spey (or 'Grantown') Town Centre Pilot Project was undertaken as part of a Scottish Government funded trial to put into practice the principles set out in the national Town Centre Toolkit (2015). The Scottish Government wanted to have case study examples of the Town Centre Toolkit in use to help promote it across Scotland. The pilot focused on the 'Making it Happen' part of the Toolkit which explores how local communities, businesses and organisations can work together to improve their town centre. Grantown-on-Spey was selected for the Pilot Project because the Grantown 250 celebrations were already bringing together the community and businesses to think about the history of the town and opportunities for the future.
2. The Pilot Project provided an opportunity to work with local stakeholders to explore the strengths and weaknesses of Grantown-on-Spey's town centre in more depth and identify opportunities to help maintain and improve its vitality for the benefit of local people and businesses. It also created a framework that could be applied or used for other town centres within the National Park.

Summary of the Pilot Project

3. The preparation of the Pilot Project involved the planning team undertaking a Town Centre Health Check (something that must be done as part of the monitoring and review of the Local Development Plan) to help build a picture of current activity within the town centre. The CNPA had undertaken this exercise previously, but in a relatively crude way in order to comply with the requirement to do so, rather than exploring whether the health checks could add value to the LDP process. Staff took the opportunity on this occasion to test a finer-grained approach with more detailed information, creating a more accurate baseline to use for monitoring in future. A further advantage of this approach was that the information could be presented in way that people would find interesting and engaging, reflecting characteristic of the town centre they could recognise.
4. Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS) were commissioned to facilitate community engagement in the project and organised a workshop in the Grant Arms Hotel in July 2015 attended by representatives from local community groups, businesses, CNPA and The Highland Council (THC). The workshop was used to explore what local stakeholders felt were the town centre's strengths and weaknesses and to collectively identify opportunities for further improvement. The town centre health check information provided a focus and stimulus for discussion during the workshop.
5. As the project progressed it became apparent that the initial concept of producing planning guidance at the end of the project was unlikely influence the issues that were identified by stakeholders. It became clear that the diverse range of issues and projects considered important by the community could be best addressed by individual projects, owned and led by a range of local groups. The CNPA and Highland Council's roles would be to support where possible but not lead these projects.
6. The range of community groups saw the issues and opportunities for Grantown town centre and could see the importance of their own role in addressing issues. The project helped create momentum for taking forward existing projects and pursuing new opportunities with support from CNPA and other organisations including Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS). The Grantown Initiative in particular have used the project to stimulate and back up ambitious plans for projects focussed on Grantown Town Centre.
7. A draft report of the Pilot Project was consulted on between 18th January and 26th February 2016. The report was amended in response to the comments made where possible. A summary of the consultation comments is included in Appendix I and the

final report of the Pilot Project for publication is included as Appendix 2. The report sets out:

- Current projects being carried out by local community and business groups;
 - What local stakeholders value about Grantown's town centre;
 - A collection of issues and possible actions to help improve the vitality of the town centre; and
 - 'Actions for Planning' which could help support specific issues and actions.
8. One of the requirements of the pilot project was to prepare a case study report for Scottish Government. The 'How to' guide outlining how the project was undertaken is included as Appendix 3. The Scottish Government will publish this and reports from other pilot projects across Scotland in 2016.

Lessons Learnt

9. The pilot project showed that the Town Centre Toolkit can be used successfully in a community of the size of Grantown on Spey. It shares some methodology with the Community Action Planning process that communities in the National Park undertake and could be undertaken alongside that process. Although the CNPA planning team led the pilot, it could be used by other organisations or a community themselves with a little support. The ownership of a community's issues and the solutions to them often come from within that community so they will often be best placed to lead such work.
10. The planning team's development of our Town Centre health check process has been successful. The better quality of information we have gained will improve the LDP process and monitoring of plans, but also gives us information that that can be understood by the community and shared with and used by them or other groups. The pilot also allowed the planning team to present mapped information in new ways that are more engaging and easier to understand. We will bring this into our work on development briefs and the next LDP.

Next Steps

11. Following this Planning Committee, the Grantown-on-Spey Town Centre Pilot Project report will be published on the CNPA website and publicised through VABS. It is a community document and will be available for anyone to use. The Grantown Initiative has been closely involved in the project and are keen to build on its outcomes as well as continuing to deliver their planned projects. The CNPA, along with VABS, will provide guidance and advice to local stakeholders interested in taking forward projects.

12. The specific 'Actions for Planning' will be progressed by the CNPA. These include monitoring issues such as building condition and the number of empty properties through future Town Centre Health Checks, and including key redevelopment sites within the Local Development Plan's Action Programme to monitor progress on delivery.

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Appendices

1. Summary of Consultation responses
2. Final draft of Town Centre Pilot
3. Scottish Government 'How to' guide