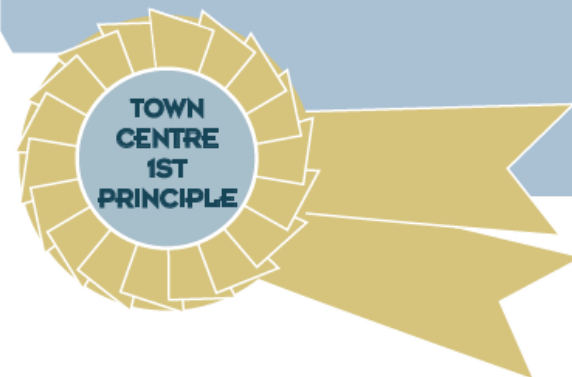


AGENDA ITEM 12

APPENDIX 3

GRANTOWN TOWN CENTRE PILOT PROJECT

Town Centre Planning Pilots Programme



Granttown-on-Spey

Providing a platform for local stakeholders
to take forward ideas for the town centre

'How To' Guide

CAIRNGORMS
NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
ÙGH DARRAS PÀIRC NÀISEANTA A'
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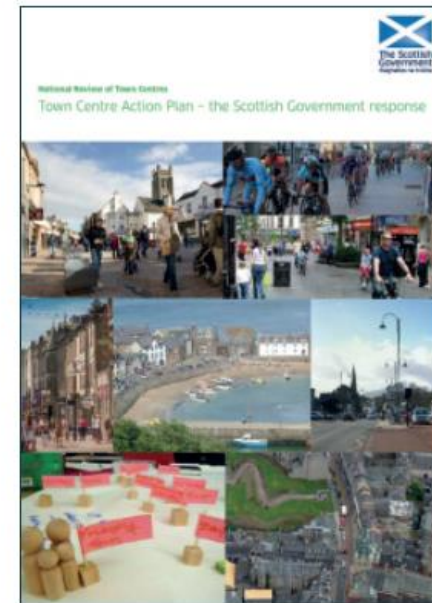


Town Centres Planning Pilots Programme

Town centres are at the heart of their communities and can be hubs for a range of activities. It is important that planning supports the role of town centres to thrive and meet the needs of their residents, businesses and visitors for the 21st century.

The **Town Centre Action Plan** (November 2014) sets out various actions to bring a focus on town centres.

One of its key themes is **Proactive Planning**, the Scottish Government fully embraces the Town Centres Review recommendation for a simple, encouraging and pro-active planning policy in support of town centres.



Town Centre Action Plan

We committed in the Action Plan that:

We will identify pilots with interested planning authorities who wish to consider collaboration and test approaches which could help simplify planning processes in town centres.

The Town Centres Planning Pilots Programme is working with **9** planning authorities and Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS) supporting **14** pilots based around **7** key areas, as shown on the map.

- ➔ This 'How to' guide sets out how the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) have applied the principles of the Town Centre Toolkit in practice by working with local community organisations and businesses to develop a framework for improving the vitality of Granttown-on-Spey's town centre.



Project Details: The story behind it all...



The Grantown-on-Spey (or 'Grantown') Town Centre Project has been prepared as part of a pilot to put into practice the principles set out in the **Scottish Government's Town Centre Toolkit (2015)**. It focuses 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.

There had been little work to date focusing on the vitality and viability of town centres within the Cairngorms National Park. Annual Town Centre Health Checks have been undertaken however these have been simplistic and there continues to be a lack of information illustrating the relative health or decline of town centres.

The Grantown pilot provided an opportunity to work with local stakeholders to explore the strengths and weaknesses of a 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 / used for other town centres within the National Park.

The pilot theme has a strong focus on collaborative working which has and will be central to the delivery of this pilot. With limited resources to deliver 'on the ground' improvements in town centres, the pilot sought to reflect the priorities of the local community and give them greater ownership of the project. This has not only created momentum for taking forward existing projects but also for pursuing new opportunities with support from organisations including CNPA and Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS).



The main drivers for focussing on Granttown-on-Spey:

- **The Town Centre:** Granttown has a traditional (and typical of Badenoch and Strathspey) long High Street and central square which form the hub of the town. However, like many small towns, it has potential challenges and opportunities.
- **Pro-active community:** Granttown has a number of pro-active community and business groups, each developing their own projects. This pilot provided an opportunity to bring all of these stakeholders together to collectively discuss existing projects and identify opportunities to initiate new ones.
- **Granttown 250:** The town celebrated its 250 year anniversary in 2015 which was marked by a week-long festival. The focus on the town and its historic identity at this time provided the perfect opportunity to get local people together and involved in this project.



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Cairngorms National Park Authority.
Scale 1:4000



About Grantown...

Grantown lies in the north of the Cairngorms National Park and is one of the main service centres in Badenoch and Strathspey. It was founded in 1765 as an original planned town for which the town centre has a designated Conservation Area.



The town benefits from a picturesque setting and an attractive historic centre making it a popular place to live and visit. However it does have some potential issues including:

- A perception that the town centre is in decline (vitality and viability);
- An increased turnover of businesses with some empty shops and properties (including space above shops);
- The closure of a number of local hotels;
- Some decline in physical fabric;
- Some decline in vitality when moving away from the core area around the High Street;
- A Conservation Area containing a mixture of building styles;
- A traditional narrow High Street restricting mobility and accessibility; and
- Increasing traffic and parking pressures in the town centre.



What was done...

Creating a framework to improve the vitality and viability of Grantown's town centre, with the local community leading the way...

The focus on collaborative working to **'make things happen'** meant community involvement was central to the preparation of this Pilot.

The project has been led by the CNPA, working closely with VABS who were involved from an early stage to support the engagement with local community groups and businesses.

The stages involved in the process are set out here.

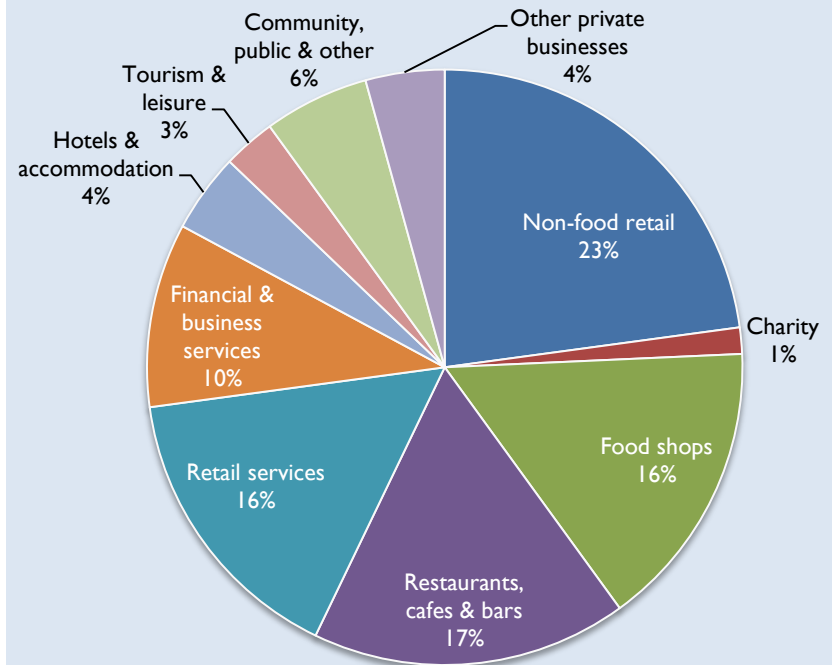
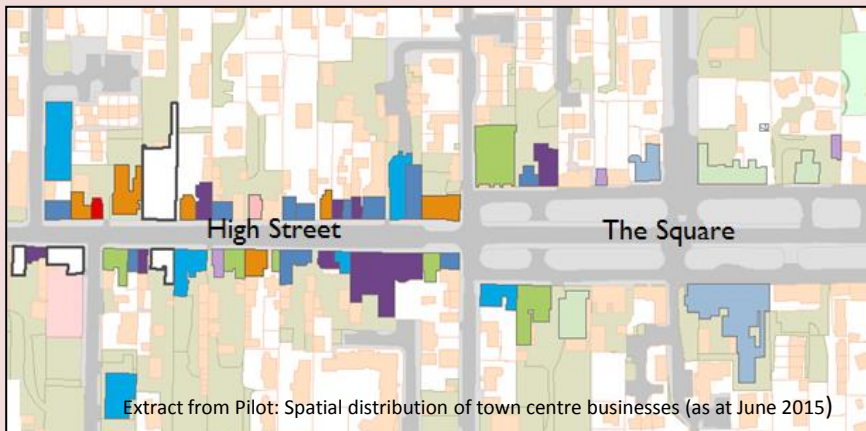
Stage	Description
1. Gathering baseline data and visioning	<p>A Town Centre Health Check and local business survey was undertaken to provide baseline data about the types and numbers of town centre businesses.</p> <p>A community engagement workshop, facilitated by VABS was held in July 2015. Bringing together representatives of the different community groups, the workshop provided local perspectives on Grantown's town centre – what is good about it, what is not so good and where improvements should be made.</p>
2. Production of draft Planning Pilot for Grantown-on-Spey	<p>Taking into account the information and perspectives gathered in Stage 1, a draft of the Planning Pilot was prepared.</p>
3. Consultation on draft Planning Pilot	<p>The community groups involved and other stakeholders were consulted on the draft Planning Pilot between 18 January to 26 February 2016.</p>
4. Finalise Planning Pilot	<p>Following the consultation, the Planning Pilot was amended in response to the feedback received. It was then be taken to the CNPA Board for approval.</p>
5. Monitoring	<p>The Planning Pilot will be monitored over the coming months to examine how it is being used and if there is community interest in pursuing similar projects in other town centres.</p>

What was done...

Town Centre Health Check

A Town Centre Health Check (TCHC) was carried out by a CNPA Planning Officer to gather information about the quantity and nature of businesses in Grantown's town centre.

Previous Health Checks were based on a basic set of vitality indicators and SWOT analysis which did not provide a full picture of the town centre's vitality. Therefore the methodology was amended to better reflect the indicators set out in Scottish Planning Policy (2014). This included gathering quantitative data on retailer representation, vacancy rates and pedestrian footfall along with qualitative observations on the town centre's physical structure, sense of place, historic environment, public realm and accessibility (including pedestrian movement and ease of navigation).



The data collected helped to provide a picture of current activity in the town and also provide an indication of vitality. It showed that Grantown's town centre has a good mix of businesses and despite perception, a low number of vacant shops.

This data was presented on large posters for discussion at the workshop.

What was done...

The Workshop

A workshop was held on 28 July 2015 at the Grant Arms Hotel in Grantown to find out what local stakeholders felt were the town centre's strengths and weaknesses and to collectively identify opportunities for further improvement.

The workshop was independently facilitated by VABS.



The workshop was divided into four broad parts looking at:

- What is good about Grantown;
- What is not good about Grantown;
- What stakeholders want Grantown to be; and
- What are the Priorities for Action

What was done...

How the Town Centre Toolkit was used

This Pilot has used and incorporated principles set out in the **Town Centre Toolkit**, focusing around the **'Making it Happen'** theme. The following pages set out how this was done.



MAKING IT HAPPEN

Positive action is needed to implement real change. This section covers:

- Local people leading
- Agreeing a collective vision
- Information and data
- Planning and action
- Proactive town planning



What was done...

The Town Centre Toolkit principles...

Evaluating Strengths and Weaknesses (p.11 of the Toolkit)

Principle: 'The use of visual materials can provide valuable tools to help identify strengths and weaknesses and to develop a vision'.

What we did: The workshop recreated the town centre (High Street and Square) using photographs laid out along the tables and attendees were asked to use post-its to say what things they liked (green), didn't like (pink) and where. This was followed by discussions about how improvements could be made.



Involving Everybody (p.122)

Principle: '...it's important... to hear the views of a good cross section of... community organisations, businesses, residents, local authority and public agencies'.

What we did: Working with VABS, CNPA was able to involve a wide range of people including representatives from Grantown Initiative, Grantown & Vicinity

Community Council, Grantown Business Association, YMCA, Grantown Museum and local High Street businesses as well as the Highland Council and Cairngorms National Park Authority.

Local People Leading (p.118)

The principle: '...local people and enterprises have the power to take the lead in making their town centre a busier and better place, supported and encouraged by professionals in the public and private sectors'.

What we did: Local people including community groups, businesses and other stakeholders were central to this project. Bringing them together in one place enabled CNPA to find out their collective priorities for the town centre and enable them to take greater ownership of the project. The community will be the key drivers for delivering the project, supported by CNPA, VABS and other organisations.

● Local people leading

What was done...

The Town Centre Toolkit principles...

Agreeing a collective vision (p. 121)

The principle: ‘Having a clear sense of ambition and vision gives a framework for action that everyone can understand and into which they can buy’.

What we did: The workshop included a visioning exercise which sought to find out what local stakeholders wanted the town to be. Rather than a specific identity, the stakeholders felt that Grantown is and should be associated with many things:


Festival Town
Busy Lively
Historic Attractive
 United Central hub Destination
Unique Community Wildlife Capital
 Clean Traditional
Memorable Vibrant
Friendly & welcoming Accessible
Successful Independent businesses
 Town for all seasons Mixed demographic
 Tourist activity Interesting

Planning & Action (p.126)

Principle: ‘It is important...to have an idea of where the town centre is heading – that’s why a vision is so important. Actions already being implemented, such as fund-raising for a new theatre or preparing a shop-local campaign, can be usefully incorporated into the plan’.

What we did: CNPA have included existing community projects to identify work already going on. In addition, the Pilot sets out specific issues raised through the workshop and identifies possible actions – some of which are linked with existing projects and who could be involved.

Theme: Creating an attractive and inviting town centre

Issue Raised	What stakeholders said	Suggested and other possible Action	Who's involved
	<p>There are still too many empty and boarded up properties which are letting the High Street down.</p> <p>In addition, some empty properties are not being adequately maintained. Although the maintenance of each property is the responsibility of the owner or tenant, due to the age of most properties in the town centre, maintenance can be more expensive.</p>	<p>Empty buildings should be utilised and maintained by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> using shop fronts as notice boards to help improve the image of the High Street enforcing the upkeep of empty buildings exploring opportunities for funding to support the upgrading and maintenance of properties to help bring them back into productive use - See Funding (Page 30). 	<p>Property and business owners, the community and other organisations</p>

Working Together (p.130)

The principle: ‘Throughout the country, town centre businesses have proven that working together to improve a town’s offer increases footfall, generates more income, saves costs and shares risks’.

What we did: The need to improve collective communication and get businesses working together to promote each other and local attractions was raised at the workshop. This has therefore been identified as an action in the Pilot.

There is currently a Grantown ‘totally locally’ initiative which a number of local businesses are involved in. Building on this may provide

an opportunity to develop a broader business group that can work together and ultimately benefit Grantown more widely.

Outcomes from the Town Centre Pilot

The Town Centre Pilot Project aims to provide a platform for local stakeholders to take forward projects connected with the town centre. It sets out:

- current projects being carried out by local community and business groups;
- what local stakeholders value about Grantown's town centre; and
- a collection of issues and possible actions to help improve the vitality of the town centre.



The Pilot also identifies **'Actions for planning'**, which set out how planning can help support and facilitate development within the town centre.

Action for Planning: 1

The Cairngorms National Park Authority will incorporate the qualities most valued about the town centre in Grantown's Settlement Statement in the next Local Development Plan.

These are the aspects that people feel are most attractive about Grantown and future changes to the town centre

Policy Links

Using the principles contained within the Town Centre Toolkit, this Pilot also contributes to the delivery of:



Scottish Planning Policy (2014)

Policy Principles

60. Planning for town centres should be flexible and proactive, enabling a wide range of uses which bring people into town centres. The planning system should:

- apply a town centre first policy³³ when planning for uses which attract significant numbers of people, including retail and commercial leisure, offices, community and cultural facilities;
- encourage a mix of uses in town centres to support their vibrancy, vitality and viability throughout the day and into the evening;
- ensure development plans, decision-making and monitoring support successful town centres; and
- consider opportunities for promoting residential use within town centres where this fits with local need and demand.

This pilot aims to support proposals and projects that will attract more people into Grantown's town centre, improving vitality and viability for local people and businesses.

It also sets out 'actions for planning' which will influence the preparation of the next Local Development Plan and support decision making.



The Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan (2015)

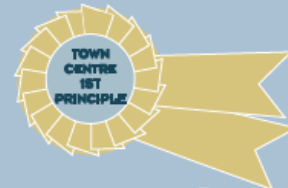
The pilot supports the delivery of the settlement objectives for Grantown contained within the Local Development Plan.

These include:

- consolidating its role as a main settlement;
- protecting its role as service provider to the wider region;
- ensuring the towns built heritage is preserved and Enhanced; and
- facilitating economic growth to support a thriving Community.

The Pilot also contributes to Policy 2: Supporting Economic Growth by supporting tourism and leisure proposals and development that supports the vitality and viability of the local economy.

Achievements



This Town Centre Pilot has helped to:

- ★ Bring together local community groups and businesses to identify a collective set of projects, opportunities and actions;
- ★ Develop a sense of community ownership which will help facilitate the delivery of projects;
- ★ Create a framework that can be applied / used for other town centres within the National Park; and
- ★ Identify actions for planning which can support decision making and inform the towns settlement objectives in the next Local Development Plan.

This has led to...

- ★ The local community development trust applying for LEADER funding to develop a 5-10 year community masterplan of enhancement projects;
- ★ Increased partnership working between key organisations in Grantown to help develop and deliver the proposed masterplan;
- ★ An increase in the number of local volunteers coming forward to work on community led projects including Rails to Grantown and addressing parking issues within the town centre.



People

The project was led by the Development Planning team with guidance from the CNPA's Community Support Manager and Rural Development team where required.

VABS provided key support for the organisation and facilitation of the workshop.

Cost

£4,525 for the support from VABS who:

- Approached a wide range of local stakeholders including community groups, high street businesses and other organisation to engage them in the project;
- Organised the workshop event - inviting attendees, providing information, arranging the date and venue and preparing the programme as per the Pilots theme;
- Facilitated and delivered the workshop;
- Compiled the outputs from the workshop discussions; and
- Circulated the Pilot to attendees and other parties for consultation.

Timescales

Stage	Timescale
Data gathering and workshop	May – July 2015
Preparation of draft pilot	August – October 2015
Consultation	January – February 2016
Amendments to pilot	March 2016
Approval from CNPA Board	April 2016

Challenges encountered through this project included:

- **Managing expectations:** From the beginning, it was vital that the project was realistic about what it could achieve. Therefore, whilst remaining creative and positive, it had to be made clear that the project would provide a framework for future actions rather than delivering actions itself.
- **Pro-active planning:** Whilst pro-active planning was a key principle of this project, the Cairngorms National Park Authority have different powers and responsibilities from a typical local authority. This meant that identifying pro-active planning mechanisms to deliver town centre improvements was difficult as they would have to be done with the direct involvement and support of the relevant Highland Council departments.
- **Community and Spatial planning:** Being a community based pilot brought together elements of both spatial planning and community planning. Many issues raised were not directly related to spatial planning which meant that producing specific planning guidance, as initially intended, was not possible. However, **'Actions for Planning'** have been identified and these can be taken forward into the next LDP and other planning documents. The focus on community planning also provides a starting point for more specific community-led work and is an important mechanism for pursuing funding (such as through LEADER) to bring forward detailed actions.

What we learnt:

- **Engaging with the local community and involving a range of people is key.** With limited funding and resources, an active community who can take ownership and lead on the delivery of actions is vital.
- **Speaking to other authorities and organisations** who have undertaken a similar project is helpful. Highland Council provided useful advice following a town centre based project they had recently undertaken.
- **Using a neutral facilitator is beneficial** – VABS not only have extensive local knowledge but know many local businesses and groups which encouraged greater involvement from local stakeholders.