

# Granttown Action Plan



Granttown Initiative

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# Contents

Introduction..... 1

Town Centre ..... 3

Tourism..... 10

Community ..... 17

Appendix..... 19



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# Introduction

This Action Plan sets out proposals to rejuvenate Grantown-on-Spey to make the most of the town's social, economic and physical assets over the next five years. It was commissioned by Grantown Initiative, the town's community development company, in response to a number of issues identified during previous consultations carried out in Grantown. The overriding aim of the Action Plan is to put Grantown back on the map – to revitalise the town and its visitor economy, building on its unique cultural heritage and its historical association with the surrounding woods. The Plan sets out key themes around which lines of activity will be based. It contains proposals to strengthen community action in Grantown giving it more focus and better co-ordination, supporting the community's efforts to secure additional funding for the development of the town.

The Grantown Initiative, which has led the project to develop this Action Plan, is grateful to Cairngorms LEADER (Small Grants Programme) and the Highland Council for providing funding for the project.

## Background

Grantown's community has contributed to a number of consultations in recent years. The most recent involved a cross-section of community groups and organisations which informed the Town Centre Pilot Project published by Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) in May 2016. Prior to that, a Team Grantown workshop was held in 2012, and consultation in 2008 informed Our Community - A Way Forward Action Plan. In addition, a visitors' survey was undertaken in 2015 as part of the Grantown Gateway Project.

Findings from the above consultation have informed this Action Plan, particularly the most recent findings from the Town Centre Pilot Project. Although it was focused on the town centre, the pilot project was not limited to physical projects and it references social and economic issues raised by the community.

## Action Plan

The development of this Action Plan has been informed by a number of sources.

An initial document review examined the findings of the previous consultations undertaken in Grantown, relevant policy documents which have a bearing on Grantown such as Highland Council's [Single Outcome Agreement](#) and [Highland First](#), CNPA's [Economic Strategy](#), [Local Development Plan](#), [Sustainable Tourism Strategy](#), and [Partnership Plan](#), Cairngorms LEADER [Local Development Strategy](#), as well as project-related documents such as previous research and plans. A short review of the development of other small towns in Scotland was also undertaken to consider examples of good practice elsewhere.

Consultation with local stakeholders took the form of an initial fact-finding workshop in May 2016, individual discussions with key community groups and organisations, and a second workshop in June 2016 to discuss emerging themes and actions. The development of specific project ideas has been informed by a desk based review of costs and funding sources, and further consultation with stakeholders.

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## Themes

The town centre, tourism and the community are the three central themes of this Action Plan. The themes are interlinked and should be progressed in unison. Each theme consists of a series of proposals including a small number that have the potential to make a significant contribution to Granttown's development.



**Town centre** – a plan to protect and enhance the built heritage, and to provide an attractive offering for those who work, live and visit Granttown-on-Spey.

**Tourism** – a plan to develop Granttown as an attractive tourist destination to a broad range of visitors, providing quality facilities and attractions.

**Community** – a plan to strengthen community action, and to address issues raised by the community.

## Action Plan structure

The following sections of this Action Plan focus on each of the themes. A summary of the issues is followed by an overarching response and a detailed plan of action. The plan's final section outlines how Granttown community can take forward this Action Plan, in collaboration with local partners including Highland Council, CNPA and Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey. A summary of the proposed actions is shown in an appendix.



## Protecting, enhancing and promoting Grantown's town centre

### ISSUES

Grantown-on-Spey's community has consistently highlighted a number of issues regarding the town centre and its built environment. The development of this Action Plan revisited the findings of the most recent consultation undertaken for the Town Centre Pilot Project and the key issues are summarised below. For the purposes of this Action Plan the town centre includes the High Street and The Square however a loose definition is used which should not exclude surrounding streets as a tightly defined town centre is unnecessary and potentially restrictive at this stage.

### Empty/poorly maintained properties

There continues to be a number of empty retail properties on Grantown High Street. While the number is relatively small the empty units are prominent and the community have raised concerns about the image this portrays and the economic benefits that a vibrant town centre would bring. CNPA's Town Centre Health Check recorded seven empty properties out of a total of 77 – a void rate of 9.1% which was marginally higher than the 8.6% rate across the whole of Scotland reported by the Scottish Retail Consortium<sup>1</sup>. It has previously been noted that some of these properties are not adequately maintained and the condition of some High Street properties continues to be an issue. In addition, it has been reported that due to the age of the properties, renovation is required to make them suitable for modern business and retail use although some landlords appear to be reluctant to invest in their properties. CNPA's Town Centre Health Check noted that there had been some investment by landlords in a number of previously empty properties which had contributed to an enhancement of the town centre. Previous suggestions to address this issue included exploring funding opportunities for upgrading and maintenance of properties to help bring them back to productive use, enforcing upkeep of empty buildings and using shop fronts as notice boards to improve the image of the High Street.



### Condition of upper floor properties

As above, there continues to be a relatively small but nonetheless prominent number of upper floor High Street properties in a state of disrepair and in need of maintenance or upgrading. A visual inspection of the High Street in early June 2016 suggests the issue is not widespread but is visible in around 10% of the properties with obvious signs of poorly maintained windows and guttering for example. It also appeared that some upper floor properties were

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Retail Consortium data published in October 2015. CPNA data relates to June 2015.

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unoccupied/unused although it was not possible to verify this or estimate the number of properties involved. It has been reported that due to the age of the properties, they can be expensive to renovate or maintain with some landlords appearing to be reluctant to invest in their properties. Previous suggestions to address this issue included exploring funding opportunities to support maintenance and conversion of properties to help bring them back to productive use, and enforcing upkeep of properties.

**Shop fronts**

Previous consultations have shown the community generally regard the town centre as an asset with a range of independent shops. There has been support to ensure shop fronts are well maintained with a degree of consistency without losing the individuality which helps to make the town centre an attractive place to visit.

**Strathspey Hotel and site at rear**

The former Strathspey Hotel and the vacant site behind the hotel have both featured in previous consultations with concerns expressed that the hotel and the site have been empty for a number of years with the condition of the hotel appearing to deteriorate. It has previously been suggested that development of the hotel and the site at the rear should be supported by the community and it was noted that the Local Development Plan supports the conversion of traditional buildings to



alternative uses where appropriate. In January 2016, a planning application was approved for the development of four flats on the site at the rear of the hotel and in February 2016 a planning application was approved for the conversion of the former hotel to a house and two flats. Both the hotel and the site at the rear are in private ownership.

**YMCA building**

The YMCA building is a prominent landmark on Grantown High Street. As well as being a historically important building which opened in 1898, it is also one that the community value highly and it continues to support young people and the wider community as it has done for many years. Plans to renovate the building and modernise its facilities have previously been discussed, and a design brief was produced in 2010. The plans involved the refurbishment and extension of the building to provide a multi-purpose community centre, including the YMCA and other users; the total cost was estimated at £3.2m excluding VAT at 2010 prices. These ambitious plans have not been progressed, although YMCA has recently undertaken some small scale improvements.



**Conservation area**

Grantown town centre is a designated conservation area which protects its historic identity as one of Scotland’s first planned towns and its Georgian architecture. The absence of a management plan and previously relaxed planning conditions have resulted in some irregularities within the conservation area such as newer houses and modern street lighting which have been highlighted by the community in past consultation exercises as not in keeping with its conservation area

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status. A review of the conservation area has previously been suggested to focus on the key areas of architectural significance, and a management plan was suggested to help guide development within the conservation area as a means of improving the town centre.

### **Parking and traffic problems**

Parking and traffic problems were identified in previous consultations in Granttown-on-Spey, and have been raised on a number of occasions with a local Councillor. The High Street and The Square/Seafield Avenue have been highlighted as the two main areas of concern.



It has been highlighted that some cars park on the High Street beyond the free one-hour limit denying other town centre visitors access to these spaces. This is perceived as inconveniencing visitors by increasing the distance they have to walk, which is seen as particularly problematic for those with mobility issues, and making it more difficult to load or unload bulky items. It has been suggested that town centre business owners are among those that exceed the one-hour parking limit. The lack of enforcement of the one-hour limit has been

highlighted as a key factor in perpetuating this practice. It has also been reported that there is a growing problem of heavy goods vehicles parking on the High Street. Parking enforcement has recently transferred from Police Scotland to Highland Council and the local authority plans to recruit a team of 11 Parking Enforcement Officers to cover their entire area, including Granttown. Previously suggested actions include enforcing the one-hour parking restriction and marking parking bays for deliveries.

There are traffic management concerns around the Co-op store in The Square and Seafield Avenue with customers and delivery vehicles reportedly making access difficult for others. There are also fears this could, potentially, lead to accidents involving vehicles and/or pedestrians although accident data shows that the area has not been the scene of any significant incidents<sup>2</sup>. Previously suggested actions include re-painting yellow lines around the Co-op and adopting a one-way system to improve traffic flow and reduce parking congestion.



### **Other issues**

Three other issues have been raised regarding the physical environment in Granttown. The first relates to signage and it was reported that bigger and clearer signage was needed for the likes of car parks, tourist information and the caravan park, the number of signs could be rationalised and that street signs should have more conformity. A project to create consistent threshold welcome signs for Granttown was previously undertaken although not all signs were renewed and it was suggested that there was potential for further work on this issue with other signs still in need of replacement. The second issue related to the roundabouts on the outskirts of Granttown which it has been proposed would benefit from a facelift to make more attractive entrances to the town. There have previously been a series of discussions to install art or sculptures on the roundabouts

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<sup>2</sup> Traffic Assessment (Waterman, 2016) undertaken as part of the Beachan Court planning application.

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and an outline plan was developed. The third issue involves improving the entrance to Grantown cemetery on the B9102 and some preliminary work was undertaken on this issue.

## **RESPONSE**

In response to the above issues, a coherent series of actions is proposed to **protect, enhance and promote Grantown's town centre**.

### **Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme / Townscape Heritage Programme**

A comprehensive programme of capital works is proposed which would address many of the issues highlighted above providing financial assistance to repair poorly maintained properties, to modernise historic properties, to bring empty properties back into productive use, and to enhance the physical appearance of the town centre; it could also potentially improve signage in the town. The capital works could be complemented by a programme to promote the town's built heritage which would contribute to proposals outlined elsewhere in this Action Plan to promote tourism in Grantown. Key to delivery of this proposal will be securing external funding from Historic Environment Scotland's [Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme](#) (CARS), the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) [Townscape Heritage](#) Programme, and Cairngorms LEADER.

CARS provides significant financial assistance, over a five-year period, for conservation area based regeneration undertaken by Local and National Park Authorities, community groups and other third sector organisations experienced in delivering multi-funded projects. The scheme can fund: 1) a repairs programme for priority projects; 2) a small grants scheme (such as to homeowners or retailers); 3) community engagement through providing training opportunities in traditional skills and through education programmes; 4) training opportunities for traditional craftsmen; 5) public realm conservation and restoration; and 6) administration costs including the appointment of a dedicated project officer. The average CARS award to date has been approximately £620,000 and a quarter of CARS have also benefitted from Townscape Heritage programme funding. A two stage application process is used with successful bids at stage 1 receiving an offer of funding and support from Historic Environment Scotland to develop a full detailed programme.

The HLF [Townscape Heritage](#) Programme helps communities regenerate deprived towns and cities across the UK by improving their built historic environment. Grants range from £100,000 to £2m and are available for a period of up to five years; the applicant is expected to contribute 5% of the total cost where a grant of less than £1m is sought or 10% if the grant requested exceeds £1m. The scheme is made up of a portfolio of projects that have the potential to regenerate and transform conservation areas in need of investment. Schemes should aim to halt and reverse the decline of historic townscapes by creating attractive, vibrant and interesting places where people will want to live, work, visit and invest. It aims to achieve this by funding physical works to repair and enhance the historic area in order to encourage business confidence, by providing local people with the opportunity to learn new skills, and by inspiring the local community to take an interest in and get involved with their townscape heritage. Applicants can submit a very simple one-page project enquiry form which HLF will review and indicate whether the proposals fit with the programme and provide support with the application. A two stage application process is in place with success at stage 1 leading to a development grant to put together a detailed stage 2 bid. Stage 1 bidders must provide outline proposals including: a Conservation Area Appraisal; an Outline Scheme Plan identifying high, medium priority and reserve target properties and any public realm, or gap sites; an initial breakdown of the capital work; outline proposals for

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architectural elements; outline proposals for non-architectural elements such as interpretation or digital outputs; and detailed plans for the development phase. If successful at stage 1, the development grant provides finance for professional fees including the cost of a Conservation Area Management Plan which is a requirement for stage 2. To date the deadline for stage 1 bids to the Townscape Heritage Programme - and CARS - has been the end of August.

Cairngorms LEADER may also be a potential funder of this proposed action, particularly the initial stage of gathering the information required for the stage 1 CARS / Townscape Heritage Programme applications. One of the themes of Cairngorms LEADER is protecting and enhancing the National Park landscape, wildlife and local heritage. LEADER is seeking to invest in training, skills development, engagement and participation initiatives (including voluntary and paid participation), resources to deliver initiatives and support for the acquisition of community assets including land, where support is not available through another scheme or loan fund.

Grantown Initiative, and partners, may find it useful to visit a town which has benefitted from CARS and/or the Townscape Heritage Programme. Potential towns of interest include Killin and Callander in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs which are the only two towns to date where the partnership has been led by a National Park Authority, or Wick and Dingwall which were led by Highland Council.

The following specific actions are suggested to take forward plans for CARS / Townscape Heritage Programme applications in Grantown. Firstly, it is proposed that the community seek confirmation that CNPA and Highland Council are supportive of the plans including the submission, in due course, of bids to CARS and the Townscape Heritage Programme. Without support from both organisations bids for external funding are very unlikely to succeed. Without external funding it is difficult to envisage how the issues summarised above can be addressed as property owners have demonstrated an unwillingness to date to invest, while the financial situation of Highland Council and CNPA means they are not in a position to fund the programme directly. At this stage, support from CNPA and Highland Council could take the form of support in principle to submit partnership bids to CARS and Townscape Heritage, a commitment from one of the organisations to host a dedicated project officer should development funding be secured, and support with the collation of the relevant information required for the stage 1 bids.

If support can be secured from CNPA and Highland Council, the community should also seek to engage property owners in Grantown High Street to discuss the proposed programme. The consultation should include the owners of the former Strathspey Hotel and the site at the rear of the hotel to establish the current status of their development proposals and to discuss how the programme could potentially support their development. Discussions should also be held with YMCA to consider how their prominent historic building fits with the proposals. In addition, a preliminary survey should be undertaken by a surveyor with expertise in conservation to provide outline information on: 1) the number of properties in need of repair, 2) the nature of the repair needs, and 3) a ballpark estimate of the cost involved. Ideally this task would be undertaken by CNPA or Highland Council, however if this cannot be provided external support will be required which will incur a cost, estimated at approximately £4,000.

Preparatory work would also need to be undertaken on the outline engagement, education and learning programme to be included in the bids. This would cover the themes, target groups,

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activities and potential costs of the programme to be outlined in the stage 1 applications. Grantown Museum is well placed to lead on this preliminary work although the organisation's capacity is limited and initial support from heritage consultants may need to be sought which would incur a cost, estimated at approximately £3,000.



If a Townscape Heritage Programme stage 1 bid is successful, the development grant would enable partners to develop a detailed stage 2 bid, with the support of external experts where required. The stage 2 bid must include: a Conservation Area Management Plan; a detailed Scheme Plan identifying high, medium priority and reserve projects; detailed plans and proposals for other capital work; detailed plans for architectural elements; and detailed plans for non-architectural elements, such as interpretation or digital outputs. Partnerships have twelve months to submit their stage 2 bid.

### **Parking and traffic**

Actions to address the traffic and parking issues, ultimately, rest with Highland Council as the body responsible for parking enforcement and traffic management in Grantown. Highland Council's response to the planning application at Beachan Court – to develop 43 private and 10 affordable residential properties off Seafield Avenue – shows that the local authority is aware of the community concerns regarding this area and is attempting to implement a solution. Highland Council Transport Planning Team's official response to the planning application stated that *'it is recommended that any permission granted is conditional requiring a Traffic Management scheme to be submitted and approved by Highland Council for refreshing the existing parking restriction traffic signs and road markings at the eastern end of Seafield Avenue in the vicinity of the junction with High Street and the existing Co-op Store. The scheme should also include the provision of new "Keep Clear" road markings on Seafield Avenue across the mouth of the junction with the side road that runs across the front of the existing Co-op Store'*. A decision on the planning application is due in the near future. Further action is dependent on the outcome of the planning application, and the imposition of the Council's recommended condition.

If the Beachan Court development is not approved, it is proposed that a meeting be convened including Grantown-on-Spey and Vicinity Community Council, Highland Council and Grantown Business Association to consider alternative solutions. A local Councillor has previously led discussions with council officers and the Co-op manager and a further meeting could consider alternative solutions such as no parking road markings outside the Co-op as well as discussing possible funders such as Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee.

While a solution to the issues on the High Street ultimately rest with the Council and the recruitment of a Parking Enforcement Officer, Grantown Business Association still has a significant role. The Association could, for example, encourage or even incentivise/penalise members not to park outside their properties for longer than an hour. Any actions to address parking problems on the High Street should not however lead to Grantown being regarded as a town with strict parking enforcement as this could be counterproductive to the prosperity of the town, particularly one seeking to promote tourism. An alternative solution would be for local businesses to contribute towards the cost of a Parking Enforcement Officer perhaps as part of a Business Improvement

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District initiative. However, this option would involve local businesses incurring costs which are unlikely to be met favourably in the current financial climate.

### **Other actions**

The other issues highlighted above – improving the appearance of the roundabouts and the entrance to the cemetery – are included in this Action Plan albeit as relatively low priorities. Both initiatives would initially require the development of more detailed proposals and are likely to require planning permission. Neither of the proposals are likely to be eligible for funding as part of CARS/Townscape Heritage Programme and alternative sources of funding are limited. While funds exist from the likes of Creative Scotland and charitable trusts for public art (to improve the appearance of the roundabouts), the chances of success are low although they may be improved if linked to the proposed town centre improvements and the promotion of Grantown as a tourist destination and the resultant economic benefits. As stated above, discussions have been held regarding improvements to the roundabouts and it is proposed that the community revisit the earlier plans to finalise their requirements and estimated cost. The proposals to build a cemetery wall at the entrance on the B9102 appear more difficult still to fund although they could potentially, be taken forward as a voluntary project or as part of a training programme in traditional construction skills.



## Developing tourism and events in Grantown

### ISSUES

Grantown has a number of tourist attractions including Grantown Museum, Anagach Woods, Craggan Outdoors, salmon fishing on the River Spey, golfing, walking, mountain biking, cycling, the historic town centre, and the Grant family connections. It is also home to a series of events such as the Hogmanay celebration, Grantown Show, Motormania, Highland Games, Thunder in the Glens and Grantown 250 which attract both locals and tourists. The town has a range of accommodation covering hotels, guest houses, B&Bs and self-catering as well as an award-winning caravan park; in total there are approximately 440 catered bed spaces, a 24 bed hostel, 29 self-catering units, and space for



up to 40 tents and 97 touring caravans<sup>3</sup>. Cafes, bars and restaurants provide places to eat while a range of shops including independent retailers add to the town's tourist offer. Tourism has been identified in previous consultations, and various policy documents such as the Cairngorms Sustainable Tourism Strategy, as a key sector which offers future growth potential. The development of this Action Plan has revisited tourism-related issues identified in the most recent consultation undertaken for the Town Centre Pilot Project and the

following summary provides an up-to-date overview of the issues.

### Marketing and communication

Although the various attractions and events promote themselves using their available resources and a [Visit Grantown on Spey](#) website promotes the town as a whole, this activity is generally low-key and uncoordinated across the attractions insofar as it lacks a common message and branding. The [Visit Grantown on Spey](#) website is independently run and although information is regularly updated its content is not comprehensive and the presentation is somewhat functional. Grantown Initiative is progressing plans to develop a community website that aims to serve both community and visitors alike ensuring it becomes the online source, voice and community of Grantown. Businesses and community groups will be able to post full listings free of charge and the intention is to provide a wide range of frequently updated information for visitors and the Grantown community.

<sup>3</sup> Grantown-on-Spey Town Centre Pilot Project (CNPA, 2016)



Previous suggestions to adopt consistent marketing including welcome signs on the approaches to the town as well as websites, banners, accommodation providers, shops, events and leaflets did not come to fruition due to limited buy-in and funding, despite support from some local groups and CNPA. The situation in Granttown contrasts with that of other towns in Scotland that have developed successful tourist marketing campaigns such as [Moffat](#) which promotes itself as a spa town, [Wigtown: Scotland's National Book Town](#) or [Castle Douglas Food Town](#).

A tourist map for the town has recently been developed by local partners including Granttown Initiative and Granttown Business Association. It highlights the main points of interest and is intended to keep visitors in Granttown for longer. 11,000 maps have been produced and the content will be reviewed and revised if necessary for 2017. It has been suggested that an online version of the map and an App that visitors can download would enable the content to be more readily updated and would appeal to some tourists.

Information on visitors to Granttown is very limited yet it would be extremely valuable for marketing and communication purposes. Although a visitors' survey was undertaken in 2015 as part of the Granttown Gateway Project it gathered the views of only 20 visitors. This means the profile of visitors and why they choose to visit Granttown is largely unknown.

### Visitor attractions

Granttown's existing visitor attractions are popular, however none attract significant numbers of tourists. For example, while Granttown Museum had approximately 8,000 visitors in 2015, the top attractions elsewhere in the Cairngorms had far greater numbers of visitors - approximately 373,000 at Rothiemurchus Estate and 248,000 Glenmore Forest Park in 2014<sup>4</sup>. Both these attractions are close to Aviemore which is a well-known tourist town with ample accommodation and amenities for visitors. While tourism in Granttown is by comparison of a different scale, consultations over the years have consistently suggested the town should seek to enhance its tourist offering. There are two ongoing developments which have the potential to attract significant numbers of tourists and this Action Plan both supports their development and seeks to maximise the benefits for the town. Both developments are linked to the town's rail heritage and they have the potential to make Granttown a heritage railway attraction.

The first proposal is the restoration and conversion of the former Granttown East Railway Station into a visitor attraction promoting the area's cultural heritage. Planning approval was granted in December 2015 for a centre incorporating exhibition space for local crafts and history, a Highland Games demonstration area, craft shop and other retail space, and converting old railway carriages to create a café. The Economic Statement and Business Plan accompanying the planning applications stated that visitor numbers were expected to be well in excess of 35,000 per year and the centre would create eight new jobs. The site is just off the A95, over a mile south of the town centre and the challenge facing local organisations and



<sup>4</sup> [Tourism in Scotland's Regions 2014](#) (Visit Scotland, 2016).

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businesses will be capturing the benefits of such visitor numbers, aside from the onsite employment and opportunities for local craft producers to sell their products.

The second proposal is the extension of Strathspey Steam Railway to Grantown and support for this was raised in previous consultation. This is a longstanding ambition which would extend the service, that currently ends at Broomhill, to a new station on the outskirts of Grantown town centre near the caravan park. The Rails to Grantown Economic Impact Assessment forecast that the extension would lead to 98,000 passengers arriving in Grantown by rail each year and 28,000 starting their journey in the town – numbers that would change the tourist market in Grantown significantly. The economic impact assessment notes *‘that effort would be required to maximise the benefits of the opportunity presented by the railway’*. In particular, the report suggests that marketing will be important to *‘fully inform visitors of the range of activities available in and around the village, especially given the lack of a significant single visitor attraction’*. It also notes that the proposed station is on the outskirts of the town, over 10 minutes’ walk from its centre, and some stakeholders were of the opinion that this could deter visits to the town by passengers especially the less mobile; a shuttle bus and/or a designated picturesque walking route between the station and town centre were suggested. The report also noted that the railway timetable would need to provide a suitable amount of time for passengers to visit Grantown. A significant increase in tourist numbers would also create a further issue as the demand for overnight accommodation in Grantown would, in all likelihood, far outstrip supply which is relatively modest at the present time.

In addition, existing visitor attractions such as Anagach Woods and Grantown Museum have plans or ideas that could increase visitor numbers. Anagach Woods Trust for example has raised the idea of a building or log cabin in the woods which could



potentially be used as a visitor centre and/or a base for community organisations including the Trust. Other



consultees highlighted the idea of a visitor centre in the town centre to complement existing attractions and planned developments. Anagach Woods Trust also has plans to further develop the mountain bike trail in the woodlands and the cost of

the extended trail has been estimated at £40,000 excluding VAT. Grantown Museum recently completed a £40,000 refit which improved the museum’s facilities and displays with the aid of grants from Museums Galleries Scotland and The Highland Council. Plans also exist to revamp Mossie play park on the corner of Mossie Road and Castle Road in Grantown. Although the park is primarily used by locals, an influx of visitors, particularly those with young children brought about by the steam railway could greatly increase use of the park.

**Visitor experience**

Previous consultations noted that the experience of visitors to Grantown could be improved, for example it noted that there was a lack of vibrancy to the High Street in the evenings and that some shops were shut for half days or at lunchtimes. Suggestions included World Host and Make It Yours training for businesses to improve visitor handling and experiences; restricting parking, adding tables and updating information boards in The Square to improve visitor experience; and adding

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to events in the town centre to increase visitor numbers. These issues remain important if Grantown is to grow its tourist market and they take on added significance given the major visitor attractions proposed for the town.

### Public events

As highlighted above a number of events are held in Grantown for the benefit of locals and tourists. Local community groups have discussed the need for new equipment for these events including a Public Address (PA) system, marquee and stage. Although Grantown-on-Spey and Vicinity Community Council own a PA system, it is unclear whether the system is fully operational and it has been suggested that it may not meet the community's needs for music events. It has also been reported that not all local groups know how to set up and operate the PA system, and the safety of the current electricity supply (which plugs into a supply on a tree in The Square) has been questioned although it was also reported that it is regularly checked by Highland Council. A stage is hired for the Hogmanay celebration and it has been suggested that owning a mobile stage would be useful. However, the level of additional demand aside from the Hogmanay celebration and storage have been highlighted as issues. A Grantown-branded gazebo to cover the PA system and tables to set the system up on have also been suggested as useful additions. While the Town Twinning Association own two large tents that suffice for their purposes it has been suggested a marquee would be useful for other events and a marquee was hired for the Grantown 250 celebrations. Demand and storage of the marquee have been raised as issues. Previous consultation in Grantown highlighted an ongoing commitment to hold public events in the town as well as a need for equipment and storage facilities. The identification of a suitable venue for events/concerts has also been discussed with the development of a bandstand near The Square raised by some.

### RESPONSE

It is proposed that Grantown Initiative works collaboratively with partners to **develop tourism and events in Grantown**. The response should focus on the development of a co-ordinated approach to marketing and communication, proactive support for the development of new and expansion of existing visitor attractions, and a programme to improve the visitor experience. The programme complements the other themes in the Action Plan, most directly the proposed CARS/Townscape Heritage Programme which includes a significant learning and engagement element to promote Grantown's history and built heritage.

Tourism is one of the key themes in the Cairngorms LEADER and it is therefore highlighted as a potential source of funding for the proposed actions. The tourism theme aims to develop excellence in sustainable tourism and recreation to enhance enjoyment of residents and visitors. Grantown's tourism programme should seek to address the relevant LEADER outcomes which are: a more resilient, competitive, better quality and diverse tourism sector benefitting all communities by 2020; and the Cairngorms National Park recreation opportunities will improve the health and enjoyment of residents and visitors.

The following specific actions are proposed in order to develop tourism and events in Grantown.

### Marketing, research and training

The development of marketing and communications is proposed that promotes Grantown's varied tourist offering using high quality digital and printed material centred around a common message

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and branding. Wherever possible, the message and branding should be used consistently by local attractions for their own promotional efforts thereby reinforcing Grantown as a tourist destination. A key element of the proposed marketing programme should be ensuring the new community website is promoted to potential visitors and that the content is relevant and appealing to them; the development of a tourist App should also be considered. If funding can be secured, external support should be sought from a specialist tourism communications agency to finalise the message and branding. Their work should be informed by research which establishes the profile of existing tourists to Grantown and their reasons for visiting the town as limited information currently exists; this work should also identify Grantown's target market taking into account tourist numbers and characteristics elsewhere in the Cairngorms and the Highlands. Funding could potentially be sought from Cairngorms LEADER for this work and the development of a programme to improve the visitor experience. The visitor experience programme should provide training opportunities for local business such as World Host and Make It Yours. The estimated cost of a marketing, research and training programme is £15,000.

### **Visitor attractions**

Practical support for the new or expanded visitor attractions is a key feature of plans to develop tourism and events in Grantown. For existing groups and attractions with ideas or firmer development proposals, these plans should be progressed, where necessary with support from Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey, to identify potential funders and to benefit from their expertise in bid writing. This should for example, see Anagach Woods Trust progress their mountain bike trail plans with bids to funders such as Sport Scotland's Facilities Fund, and Cairngorms LEADER. Anagach Woods has also been involved in discussions to potentially revamp Mossie play park. The discussions have considered community ownership and/or management of the play park which would open up new funding streams such as Scottish Land Fund and the Big Lottery Fund although ongoing maintenance costs is an issue that should be addressed before approaching funders. The addition of new tourist information boards, enhanced town trails and blue plaques marking points of interest would also enhance the overall visitor experience.

Of the two proposed major visitor attractions, the development of Grantown East Railway Station is being undertaken by a private developer and actions are proposed to maximise the benefits for local businesses and residents. Discussions with the developer and local training providers could inform a new training and support programme for local craft businesses to ensure they are geared up to display and sell their products at the centre when it opens. A training programme should also be considered for local residents, particularly those disadvantaged in the labour market, to equip them with the skills to fill position in catering, gardening and retail. These programme could potentially be part-funded by Cairngorms LEADER, and the estimated cost is £10,000. Linking the development to the promotion of Grantown would also be important to encourage visitors to go to the town itself.

The proposed extension of the Strathspey Steam Railway to Grantown has the potential to change the nature of tourism in the town and it is a key proposal of this Action Plan.

### **Rails to Grantown**

A major barrier to the Rails to Grantown extension was overcome in 2014 when a bridge over the River Dulnain was re-instated and track has been laid from Broomhill as far as the bridge. To complete the extension a further 4.8 kilometres of track will need to be laid at an estimated cost

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of £2.5m and a new station built at Grantown at an estimated cost of £1m. In addition, major work is required to enable the rail to cross the path of the A95 trunk road. The cost of horizontal and vertical realignment of the road has been estimated at £7m with an additional £1.7m required to construct an underpass to allow the railway to cross under the road and progress onward to Grantown. A Transport and Works (Scotland) Order is required by law to enable these major road works to proceed. Strathspey Railway Charitable Trust is finalising the TAWS application which they aim to submit in late summer 2016. An Environmental Statement and Economic Impact Assessment have been produced as supporting evidence for the TAWS.



The Economic Impact Assessment, which was undertaken in 2014, shows that the railway carried 58,000 passengers in 2014. The Assessment states that Strathspey Railway Company (SRC) has ambitious plans to increase passenger numbers and the report includes

SRC's own forecast that passenger numbers will increase to 100,000 by 2018. It also states that SRC forecast the extension to Grantown will add a further 30,000 passengers; it should be noted that this is SRC's own forecast and not that of the economic impact consultants. Using SRC's forecast, the report estimates the extension will result in 98,000 passengers arriving in Grantown and 28,000 starting their journey in the town each year. The report also estimates that the net spend of the passengers in Grantown would be £620,000 per year, however, it also states that *'achieving this would rely on sufficient awareness of, and ease of access to, spending opportunities in Grantown'*. CNPA Local Development Plan 2015 states *'the successful extension of the Strathspey Steam Railway to Grantown-on-Spey is seen as essential to fulfil the town's role in attracting visitors and providing improved transport links so enabling people to live in Grantown and access job opportunities in surrounding areas'*.

Grantown Initiative has provided Strathspey Railway Charitable Trust with a letter of support for the TAWS application. To accompany the letter, it is proposed that Grantown Initiative and partners undertake concerted lobbying of local Councillors, MSPs and MPs to lend their unequivocal support to the application.

Aside from the TAWS process, funding is the main barrier facing the Rails to Grantown project and Strathspey Steam Railway has called on the Grantown community to help secure the necessary funds. Although the community has previously expressed its backing for the project, it is proposed that this support is turned into tangible actions which help to secure the funding, such as:

- The establishment of a Rails to Grantown Action Team to co-ordinate the community's support. The Action Team could include representatives from Grantown Initiative, Grantown Business Association, Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey, and Strathspey Railway Charitable Trust.
- The Team could lobby local Councillors, MSPs and MPs to help secure funding from Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government for the road realignment and underpass which are unlikely to be funded by any other source.
- The Team could promote the proposals to local residents and businesses including use of an empty property on the High Street to showcase the proposals and provide updates, as well as community newsletters, websites including [Rails to Grantown](#), the local press,

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car stickers, posters etc.

- Research funding sources for the new station (£1m) and track (£2.5m). Potential sources include Heritage Lottery Fund, Big Lottery Fund, Cairngorms LEADER, and in the longer term community benefit payments/shared ownership from proposed windfarm development. Serious considerations should also be given to loan finance from Social Investment Scotland or community share ownership of the station which could incorporate other uses such as retailing, office space or meeting rooms.
- In due course the Team could be responsible for submitting funding application. Some of the above potential funders would only support specific elements of the project and applications will need to be tailored accordingly.

### Events Equipment

Action to acquire equipment for public events in Grantown has the potential to provide a 'quick win' and demonstrate to the wider community that improvements are taking place. Initially there appears to be a need to clarify exactly what equipment is required before taking forward plans to purchase new or additional equipment. This should involve checking if the current PA system is in working order to identify deficiencies, and assessing the safety of electricity supply in The Square. It should also involve establishing the number and scale of events in order to specify the marquee, stage and PA system requirements - this will inform the decision on whether to purchase or hire equipment in the future. Ownership and storage of any purchases needs to be agreed among community organisations, alongside a protocol to enable groups to use or hire the equipment (including hire charges, if appropriate). The next step would be to identify relevant funders and submit application forms; potential funders include: National Lottery Awards For All, William Grant & Sons Foundation, and Creative Scotland. There also appears to be a need for training, as well as written instructions, so that all of those who may use the equipment understand how it works. The cost of the training could be incorporated into the funding bids and would be a relatively modest cost of approximately £500. The cost of the equipment is dependent on the community's requirements.

Progression of an events/concert venue requires further development work to establish demand and appraise the different options such as using the YMCA building or constructing a bandstand. The latter has been raised in the past but would require the identification of a suitable site and approval from the landowner, as well as securing planning permission and funding. The cost is dependent on the community's requirements and could therefore range from £10,000 for a small bandstand to a six or even seven figure sum for a more substantial building.



## Strengthening community action in Grantown

### ISSUES

Grantown has an active community sector with numerous groups including Grantown Initiative, Grantown-on-Spey and Vicinity Community Council, Grantown Society, Grantown Town Twinning Association, YMCA, and Anagach Woods Trust. For a town with a population of approximately 2,200 this is impressive and demonstrates the willingness of townsfolk to take an active role in their community. As is the case elsewhere, some individuals are involved in more than one group and there is a view among community activists that the number of residents should, if at all possible, be increased.

The development of this Action Plan has highlighted the challenge of turning good ideas into action. Previous consultations in Grantown have identified a plethora of ideas for community action, however, very few have been progressed. As noted above, this is not due to a shortage of community activists, nor the lack of support as Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey appears to be a strong and active organisation that has previously delivered community capacity building across its operational area. There appears to be a degree of inertia or difficulty in developing ideas further and in seeking funding for them, demonstrated most clearly by the issue of equipment for public events.



### RESPONSE

To address the above issues a support programme is proposed to [strengthen community action in Grantown](#).

#### Funding masterclasses and support

Capacity building programmes tend to be wide-ranging taking in issues such as governance, communications, and financial management. In Grantown groups generally appear to be strong in these areas and the need is more specifically related to funding, particularly the identification of appropriate sources and the submission of strong applications.

Therefore, funding masterclasses are proposed for community groups and organisations in Grantown with ongoing support available where required. A potential funder of this activity is Cairngorms LEADER programme as Theme 1 aims to Build Community Capacity to Facilitate and

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Support Local Development Through Partnership Working. The cost of two masterclasses is estimated at £1,000 while some ongoing support should be available from Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey as part of their core services, or as an additional intensive service if funding can be secured.

### **Volunteer recruitment**

Local groups should also seek to engage additional volunteers to broaden their skills base. Groups reported that traditional advertising has tended to have limited impact, and new approaches may be required. This could for example involve open days or a 'plus one' invite where existing volunteers bring a friend to a social event or meeting organised by the group; Anagach Woods has recently found success with similar soft approaches to volunteer recruitment.

### **Action Plan Implementation**

This is a **community** Action Plan which seeks to enable Grantown community to address issues they have raised during previous consultation. Grantown Initiative will seek to work in partnership with other community organisations including Grantown-on-Spey and Vicinity Community Council, Grantown Business Association, Grantown Society, Grantown Town Twinning Association, Grantown Museum, Strathspey Railway Trust, Anagach Woods Trust, and YMCA, and seek support from Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey where required. Grantown Initiative will also seek to work in partnership with Highland Council, CNPA, and local property owners to take forward the actions in this Plan.

A number of the proposed actions rely on the community to take them forward and potential funders, including Cairngorms LEADER, have been identified wherever possible. These actions could be taken forward as individual projects. Alternatively, a joined-up project could be developed which seeks funding from Cairngorms LEADER and others across the three themes. For the Town Centre theme, the project would seek funding to enable the community to undertake the development work for future CARS and Townscape Heritage Programme bids. For the Tourism theme, the project would seek funding to enable the community to progress the marketing, research and training elements. For the Community theme, the project would seek funding to enable the community to progress the funding masterclasses and additional support.

## APPENDIX

Theme	Proposed Actions
<p>Protecting, enhancing and promoting Grantown's town centre</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme and Townscape Heritage Programme applications including comprehensive capital works and a detailed engagement and learning programme.</li> <li>2. Address parking issues in High Street and The Square.</li> <li>3. Finalise plans to improve the appearance of the roundabouts.</li> <li>4. Develop plans to construct a wall at the cemetery entrance.</li> </ol>
<p>Developing tourism and events in Grantown</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Undertake research on Grantown tourists and the potential tourism market.</li> <li>2. Develop high quality, co-ordinated marketing and communications for Grantown.</li> <li>3. Develop visitor experience training programme</li> <li>4. Progress plans to enhance existing visitor attractions.</li> <li>5. Provide practical support for Rails to Grantown and Grantown East Railway Station developments.</li> <li>6. Upgrade equipment for public events, where appropriate.</li> <li>7. Develop plans for events/concert venue.</li> </ol>
<p>Strengthening community action in Grantown</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide funding masterclasses and ongoing support for community organisations.</li> <li>2. Encourage additional volunteers.</li> <li>3. Develop co-ordinated implementation project.</li> </ol>