Keith Town Centre Improvement Plan
|October 2022

Vision

The Plan reflects on Keith's historic character and heritage to identify improvements to the town centre to make it an attractive, inclusive, greener and safer place that encourages people to visit, supports local businesses and community facilities, and promotes healthier lifestyles.

Aims

- Explore opportunities to bring vacant and derelict buildings and sites back into use for residential and/or community uses by working collaboratively with landowners and other relevant parties;
- Encourage people to walk and cycle (active travel) by improving paths and roads to make them easier and safer to use for people of all abilities (inclusive);
- Improve the attractiveness of the streets and public spaces through enhancements to paving, street furniture, planting, etc. (the 'public realm'), particularly Reidhaven Square;
- Improve signage to direct people to Keith's main attractions and provide a stronger link to the Strathisla Distillery;
- Develop an interpretation trail that embraces Keith's unique heritage;
- Light up important and prominent buildings and/or public spaces;
- Develop a shopfront improvement scheme to retain traditional facades and enhance the attractiveness of Mid Street and Reidhaven Square;
- Explore the opportunity to make the town centre more inclusive and pedestrian friendly through a review of parking provision and disabled parking;
- Explore further opportunities for electric vehicle (EV) and bike charging points, cycle parking and storage; and,
- Support the refurbishment of public toilets that have been the subject of a Community Asset Transfer (CAT).

TC1   BRING VACANT BUILDINGS AND SITES BACK INTO USE

Proposed Outcome

- Redevelop and/or refurbish vacant and derelict buildings and sites for residential and/or community uses;

There are a number of vacant and derelict properties within the town centre which detract from the appearance and inhibit the vibrancy of Keith. The Council will explore opportunities to bring vacant and derelict buildings back into use by working collaboratively with landowners and other relevant parties such as Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) and constituted community groups. This will help to encourage people to live in the town centre, and support local businesses and community facilities.

The old tourist information is an example of a vacant/derelict building where development options, including demolition, will be explored. The identification of other vacant/derelict buildings/sites and exploring potential opportunities with landowners to bring them back into use will be a continual piece of work for the Council.

TC2   SUPPORT WALKING AND CYCLING (ACTIVE TRAVEL)

Proposed Outcomes

- Develop the Active Travel Network and an Active Travel Masterplan for Keith in consultation with the community;
- Provide new and improved cycle parking at key destinations within the town centre (see TC6).

Active Travel

The Council's Active Travel Strategy 2022-27 sets out a number of actions to encourage people to walk and cycle. These include further developing the Active Travel Network and developing Active Travel Masterplans for key settlements across Moray, including Keith. The Council will continue to work with the community to deliver the Active Travel Strategy and secure external funding sources to implement.

Cycle Parking and Storage

Provision will be made to upgrade and add cycle storage and parking facilities in key locations in Keith identified in consultation with the community. Further facilities for storing and charging electric bikes will be investigated subject to finding an operator.

TC3 ENHANCING STREETS AND PUBLIC SPACES
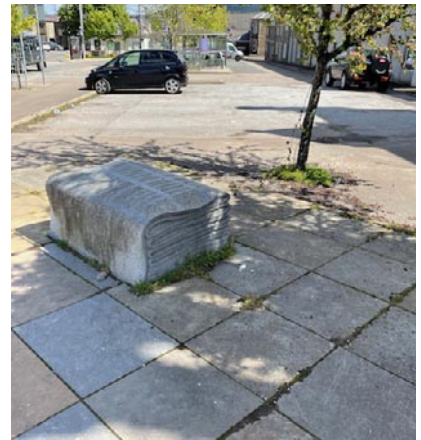
Proposed Outcomes

● Make the town centre more attractive and inclusive by upgrading and providing a cohesive approach to paving and street furniture, in particular Reidhaven Square as this is a focal point within the town;

● 'Greening' streets and public spaces through additional landscaping and planting.

The public realm includes streets, squares, green/open spaces, etc. The public realm is an important element that 'knits' together the town and is fundamental in creating an attractive place where people want to visit and spend time, which in turn increases footfall for businesses and facilities.   The Council will explore opportunities to enhance the public realm and potential funding opportunities to implement proposals.

Reidhaven Square

Reidhaven Square is a focal point within Keith and forms the entrance to Mid Street. The Square consists of 4 quadrants that are all used for car parking. The public realm (seating, planting, etc.) has been developed in a piecemeal way which detracts from the appearance of the area. The Square has the potential to become an attractive, high quality civic space that could be used for events such as markets to attract people into the town centre and support local businesses.

Keith is a rural area and it is acknowledged that people visiting the town require parking spaces to visit shops and services. Given that the majority of representations received to the draft Improvement Plan did not support the removal of any parking spaces, the public realm improvements will initially be limited to existing spaces in and around the Square. This will include upgrading seating, signage, planting, etc. A future review of parking provision will also be undertaken to monitor usage to identify whether there is potential to create a temporary public space for events such as Saturday markets, given the wider benefits this could have for the town centre, and the potential to accommodate further parking spaces for the disabled. Any proposals for the Square would be the subject of public consultation.

St Rufus Park

St Rufus Park is located in close proximity to the town centre and the Council will work with local community groups to further enhance the Park should proposals be forthcoming. The Council will explore options for the adjacent old Tourist Information building including demolition. There are known contamination issues that may impact on any proposals.. The park has previously been the subject of regeneration proposals by a local community group.

TC4 IMPROVE SIGNAGE, DEVELOP INTERPRETATION TRAIL AND LIGHT UP BUILDINGS & SPACES

Proposed Outcomes

- Work collaboratively with Moray Speyside to review and rationalise street signage, and consider opportunities for digital (i.e. QR codes) signage;
- Develop an interpretation trail based on local knowledge and Discover Moray's Great Places; and,
- Light up important and/or prominent buildings/spaces to showcase Keith's heritage.

Signage

Signage is an important element within a town centre as it helps visitors find their way around. It is important for promoting tourism and directing visitors to local attractions. However, too much is confusing, leads to clutter and detracts from the appearance of the town. The Council will work collaboratively with Visit Moray Speyside to review signage and explore opportunities to rationalise and incorporate digital wayfinding. Integrating ground level waymarking that ties in with a heritage or other trails will be investigated to help reduce the clutter of multiple signs. The review will focus on providing clearer directions to all of Keith's attractions and amenities and creating a stronger link between the Strathisla Distillery, Keith & Dufftown Railway and the town centre.

Interpretation Trails

The opportunity to showcase Keith's heritage as a market town through an interpretation trail along with other public realm improvements (see TC3 above) which would help to attract visitors to the town will be investigated. A significant amount of work was undertaken through the Discover Moray's Great Places project and the Council is intending to develop this into a heritage trail that will cover the whole of Moray. This will provide a coordinated and consistent approach. However, the heritage trail for Keith could also build on the success of the recent Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) and 'Mither's Tongue' and involve local heritage groups and schools so that it is supported and promoted by the local community so that there are opportunities for local knowledge to be inform the trail.

Lighting Up Buildings and Spaces

Lighting up buildings and important spaces can help showcase Keith's heritage and make places feel safer. Lighting can also be used to guide people through the town by lighting up key routes. The Council will explore opportunities to light up key buildings and spaces in consultation with the landowners and the relevant parties.

Proposed Outcome

- Develop a Design Guide and a Shopfront Improvement Scheme for premises on Mid Street and Reidhaven Square to enhance the visual appearance of Keith's traditional shopfronts.

Shopfronts play an important role in the appearance of the town centre and coupled with improvements to the public realm will create an attractive place in which people want to spend time. This helps to support local businesses by making Keith's town centre an even more appealing visitor destination and boosting business confidence. The project involves developing a design guide for shopfront improvements and working collaboratively with Visit Moray Speyside to develop and implement a funding scheme, similar to that previously developed for Keith and Elgin through the Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS). The scheme would cover the replacement of shopfronts and historical features.

TC6 ELECTRIC VEHICLE (EV) & BIKE CHARGING POINTS

Proposed Outcome

- Explore opportunities to provide additional EV charging points to promote environmentally conscious travel and encourage healthier lifestyles.

The proposal aims to build on the carbon conscious and active travel provision within the town centre. The proposal will investigate the potential to increase the network of EV chargers within the town centre for use by residents and visitors in keeping with the Scottish Government's new funding requirements and the Council's future EV strategy. The facilities would be located in key destinations such as public car parks surrounding the town centre.

TC7   LONGMORE COMMUNITY HALL

Proposed Outcome

- Explore opportunities to redevelop and enhance Longmore Community Hall including increasing parking provision.

The Longmore Hall is currently the subject of a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) by Keith and Strathisla Regeneration Partnership (KSRP) who have long term aspirations to develop the hall into a community hub. The Council will provide support, where possible, to the KSRP to develop proposals for the hall and seek to identify potential funding sources. The Council will work with KSRP to explore opportunities to increase parking provision for the hall

TC8   PUBLIC TOILETS

Proposed Outcome

- Support the refurbishment of public toilets that have been the subject of a Community Asset Transfer (CAT).

The Council will seek to identify the ownership of public toilets in Keith to facilitate a CAT. The Council will work with Visit Moray Speyside to support the refurbishment of public toilets that have been the subject of a CAT.