



REPORT TO: WEALTHIER AND FAIRER GROUP – 21 MAY 2009

SUBJECT: MORAY TOWNS PARTNERSHIP

**BY: MORAY COUNCIL, PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

1.1 The Group is asked to note the implementation of the Moray Towns Partnership 2009/10 action plan which is aimed at the economic development of the towns of Buckie, Forres, Keith and Lossiemouth.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Group:

- i. notes the implementation of the Moray Towns Partnership action plan which is aimed at the economic development of the towns of Buckie, Keith, Forres and Lossiemouth**
- ii. notes that a funding contribution of £100,000 was agreed from the 2009/10 Council Economic Development budget for the action plan which is costed at £200,000.**
- iii. notes that appropriate external funding applications will be submitted in order to match the Council's contribution.**

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 On 26 August 2008 the Council's Economic Development & Infrastructure Committee granted its approval for the development of a Moray Towns Partnership (MTP) project for Buckie, Forres, Keith and Lossiemouth.

3.2 The four towns of Buckie, Forres, Keith and Lossiemouth have been recognised by two recent reports as being of major strategic importance to the economy of Moray. The 2005 Donaldson "Towns Promotion and Development" report recognised that whilst Elgin is the principal commercial and retail centre in Moray, "Buckie, Forres, Keith and Lossiemouth need to have well defined, complementary roles in the regional hierarchy". The Moray 2020 report recognised that Buckie, Forres, Keith and Lossiemouth "are all within 15 miles of Elgin and have the potential to form a mini-city region strategically positioned between Aberdeen and Inverness".

- 3.3 Steering groups have been established in each of the four towns and each town has developed an action plan of economic development projects to take forward (**see appendix 1**). An overarching MTP steering group has also been established. The MTP steering group has agreed the project's aims and objectives and will oversee and co-ordinate joint projects.
- 3.4 **In Buckie**, it was agreed that a sub group of the Area Forum would be an appropriate body to take forward the work of MTP. The group consists of representatives from the Area Forum, the Council, Moray Chamber of Commerce and local businesses.
- 3.5 The Buckie group has drawn up an initial action plan for 2009/10 including projects such as: a Buckie "eco shopping bag"; a Buckie website; the development of a Buckie community radio station; the extension of the start/end of the Speyside Way into Buckie town centre; marketing of events in Buckie; and a Buckie information booklet.
- 3.6 The Buckie group has also begun the task of establishing a Buckie business group who would work in partnership with the Buckie steering group.
- 3.7 **In Forres** it was agreed that the Forres Neighbourhood Forum would be the best body to take forward the Partnership with input from local businesses.
- 3.8 Consultation with local Forres businesses has identified for this year a number of marketing projects, such as Tourist/business maps, Tourism panels in key areas and Forres handbook/Business Directory. In addition, priorities include a shop front improvement scheme and developing Forres as a disabled friendly town.
- 3.9 In **Keith** it was decided by local community groups that the Keith Strathisla Regeneration Partnership (KSRP) would be the most appropriate body to take forward the work of MTP. KSRP consists of representatives from local community groups and businesses. Council officers and Councillors also regularly attend KSRP meetings.
- 3.10 KSRP had previously developed an action plan, so they have now updated this to fit with the economic aims and objectives of the MTP project. The Keith proposed actions include: Mid Street flags project to attract people to the main shopping area; an environmental business audit; toilet and shower facilities to encourage drivers to spend more time and money in Keith; a Keith information booklet; reusable leaflet wallets; and farmers'/continental markets.
- 3.11 In **Lossiemouth**, the Lossiemouth Business Association was agreed as the most appropriate body to take forward the work of the MTP project.
- 3.12 The Business Association has developed an action plan to include a seasonal manned visitor information point/development of Lossiemouth tourism strategy; tourist walks around town with fingerposts; Lossiemouth information leaflets; and an upgrade of the Ramsay MacDonald viewpoint.

- 3.13 The MTP steering group agreed that the management and administration of the overall project should be within existing staffing resources within the Council and that the Council's Planning & Development section would be the lead department responsible for the project.
- 3.14 Each town will have devolved responsibility for their own action plans. This will allow for a degree of flexibility in the projects that are being taken forward, enabling towns to react quickly to local circumstances. The devolution of responsibility will also encourage grassroot involvement in each town. Moray Council's Planning & Development section will ensure that the decisions and actions of each town fit with the Council's and other funders' requirements and fit with the agreed economic aims and objectives of the project.
- 3.15 Finances and monitoring of the project will be overseen by Moray Council's Planning & Development section. This will make use of the well-practiced processes within the Council of monitoring and overseeing externally funded projects.
- 3.16 The aims and objectives of MTP have been agreed by the MTP Steering group. The overall purpose is "to enhance the economic prosperity, vitality and viability of the towns of Buckie, Forres, Keith and Lossiemouth through co-operation and implementation of agreed action plans."
- 3.17 The aims of the MTP have been agreed by the steering group as:
- Develop the economies of the four towns
 - Foster a network of the four towns that can exchange ideas and solutions
 - Assess the health of the towns' economies
 - Provide strategic support and guidance and to promote, deliver and advise on identified initiatives
 - Promote the four towns for tourism and as retail destinations
- 3.18 The project will aim to increase footfall, decrease business vacancies and increase employment in the towns.
- 3.19 It is a requirement of the Council's Economic Development budget to secure funding contributions from external sources. For 2009/10 two major funding opportunities are being pursued. The first is the Scottish Government's proposed £60million Town Centre and High Street Regeneration Fund. Details have only recently become available. It is a one-year capital projectfund, but it is anticipated that the Moray Towns Partnership project will match the criteria. On a pro-rata basis Moray could expect to receive over £1 million of this fund. The second identified main funding opportunity for 2009/10 is LEADER.

- 3.20 Spending on the 2009/10 action plans will not begin until match funding has been successfully secured. However, much of the preparation work for the projects can begin prior to this (such as receiving quotes).
- 3.21 Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership has agreed to hold a joint best practice event with Moray Towns Partnership. This will provide opportunity for the Moray groups to learn from the experiences of the towns in Aberdeenshire.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Development Plan/Community Plan/Service Improvement Plan

This project represents one of the agreed priorities of the Wealthier and Fairer Priority Action Plan.

(b) Policy and Legal

This project is a development from the 2005, Council commissioned, Donaldson "Towns Promotion and Development" report which states the need for a strategic approach to economic development in Moray's main towns. The project is also supported by the Moray 2020 report which sees Moray's five main towns as acting as a "mini-city region strategically situated between Aberdeen and Inverness."

There are no legal implications as a result of this report.

(c) Resources (Financial, Risks, Staffing and Property)

There is a proposed contribution of £100,000 from the Economic Development budget for 2009/10 which will be used as match funding to secure external funding.

To date, £246,325 of the total £500,000 budget has been committed.

Work will be undertaken within existing staffing resources.

(d) Consultations

There has been extensive consultation with the local community and local businesses. Consultation for this proposal has also been undertaken with representatives of the relevant Council services, who are in agreement with its recommendations.

5. CONCLUSION

- **The development of the Moray Towns Partnership (MTP) will enable a strategic approach to be taken to economic development in Moray. The MTP project will complement ongoing economic development**

work in Elgin (BIDS and “City of the Future”) and in rural Moray (under the LEADER strategy). The project also fits well with the Community Planning Partnership’s priority of economic development.

- **First phase economic development action plans for 2009/10 have been developed by local groups in Buckie, Forres, Keith and Lossiemouth.**
- **This is the start of a process and each town will develop more comprehensive action plans for future years and these will be reported to a future meeting of the Group. Future action plans will also be designed such that the projects become financially self-sustaining.**
- **It is anticipated that Council funding of the project in 2009/10 will enable Moray Council to take advantage of the one-off Scottish Government’s £60 million Town Centre and High Street Regeneration Fund (and other appropriate external funding).**

Authors of Report: Alan MacBeth and Fiona Limbrey, Development Officers,
Environmental Services

Background Papers: Moray 2020, Towns promotion and Development Project
Ref:

Signature: _____

Date : _____

Designation: Planning and Development Manager

Name: Donald Lunan