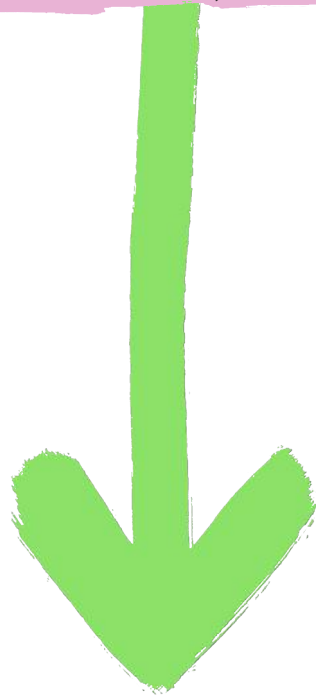




Huntly Room to Thrive

*A town centre that belongs to us,
With a campus for learning and play.
A rural place with transport that works for us,
Where the focus is people, environment and culture,
And real opportunities exist for enterprise.*



Huntly's To-Do Lists

January 2019

January 2019



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The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development:
Europe investing in rural areas



**Scottish Rural
Development
Programme**



**Scottish
Government**



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Survey seeks views on quality of life in Huntly

By Neil Brown
COMMUNITY
Huntly's quality of life is the focus of a survey that will be carried out by the town's residents. The survey is being carried out by the town's residents and is aimed at gathering views on the quality of life in the town. The survey is being carried out by the town's residents and is aimed at gathering views on the quality of life in the town. The survey is being carried out by the town's residents and is aimed at gathering views on the quality of life in the town.



Introduction

Over the course of 2018 people from the Huntly community came together undertaking a number of different exercises to develop a long-term strategy for the town that would provide shared purpose in the years to 2030. *Room to Thrive* the strategy sets out key priorities and objectives to help Huntly to **thrive** as a community:

*A town centre that belongs to us,
With a campus for learning and play.
A rural place with transport that works for us,
Where the focus is people, environment and culture,
And real opportunities exist for enterprise.*

This document contains Huntly's to do lists. These are the initial actions to be taken forward over the next few years that will help deliver change to meet Huntly's priorities for action, and the strategic objectives set out in the *Room to Thrive* strategy.

While the strategy sets the overall ambition, the actions within this document build a picture of how that ambition forms in reality. As with the strategy, it has been developed over the course of the project by people from across the town. As such they are not for one organisation or group to deliver, but open to delivery by anyone in the town.

Huntly Town Team will update the to do list with progress achieved on the actions, and adding any new ones that arrive.



A town centre that belongs to us

Strategic objectives for Huntly's town centre:

- 1.1 Community control of town centre buildings with the purpose of:
 - providing flexible and affordable options for community and business use
 - carrying out appropriate modernisation
- 1.2 The town has a people-friendly centre; bringing life and colour to the streets making a distinctive place to be that's easy to get around.
- 1.3 Bring new activity and purpose that creates a positive and modern story of Huntly as a place to live, work in or visit.
- 1.4 Develop partnership working between the community, proprietors and the local authority to protect and enhance Huntly's built heritage.

Over the next few years, these strategic objectives translate into initial actions based around the following themes:

- Addressing vacant properties and finding new purpose for the town centre
- Making a people-friendly town centre
- Protect and enhance Huntly's historic built environment

□ Accept the challenge of repurposing the town centre

Town centres across the country are facing the challenge of changing consumer habits, this is affecting communities big and small. In Huntly, these effects are being seen in high levels of vacant commercial properties. Bringing new life and purpose to buildings in Huntly's town centre is the biggest challenge it faces. As such it is not for one group, individual or organisation to solve, it requires a whole town effort to recast the town centre. The following principles should shape the work of Huntly in repurposing the town centre:

- Accepting that town centres are always changing. The exact form and type of businesses and services offered in settlement centres has always changed over time, and in turn the new uses over the next few years will be different;
- Resilient town centres host a range of different activities, and more importantly today experiences, that give people a reason to visit them and different times of day, week and year;
- Through no fault of its own Huntly's commercial property market has become slow to react to the changing demands and value of premises; the town has an opportunity to start to change this so properties can be more dynamic in future;
- Supporting initiative is vital. When someone steps forward and is willing to invest time and energy to provide something new, the town and its organisations should reciprocate to make that happen with appropriate assistance. Whether that is giving advice, access to buildings or spaces, lending equipment or manpower, or bringing custom to it.

□ Access vacant buildings to test possible new uses

Starting something new, whether that is a shop, service, charity, group or event takes significant investment and commitment of an individual's time and resources. Therefore for new things to happen, the barriers to starting something new should be reduced as much as possible. Unlocking property assets in the town centre for test use of new startups would remove one of the barriers. Fledgling startups can struggle to take on the risk of a long-term lease when they are still testing the viability and form of their business plan. Providing a variety of free or affordable short term spaces for rent by new startups can put them to the test, allow them to develop and have confidence to take on a space of their own.

This action is key to unlocking a thriving town centre. It addresses a key concern of people who are interested in starting something new in the town. By reducing the initial risk of investment to get things started, it makes them more likely to happen. With the experience of testing the new venture, people will have more confidence to invest and ultimately it will have greater chance of success.

□ Employ town centre activators

The activators would act as champions of the town centre to local and visiting communities, and be an easily identifiable and approachable people who can assist others in getting things done; whether that is practical help, giving advice, networking or helping to unlock funds from a variety of sources that can help deliver projects in the town centre.

Huntly has lots of ideas, events, assets and proactive people that bring life, excitement and enterprise, however the town centre is lacking in activity. There is a capacity issue regarding the amount of free time and energy that people are able to commit to making things happen in the town centre. Creating salaried positions will enable empowered people to be linked with appropriate unlocked assets in the town centre and ensure parts of the action plan relating to the town centre are delivered and ideas, events and enterprise are focused where needed most.

□ Take control of key vacant buildings, refurbish and lease for new uses

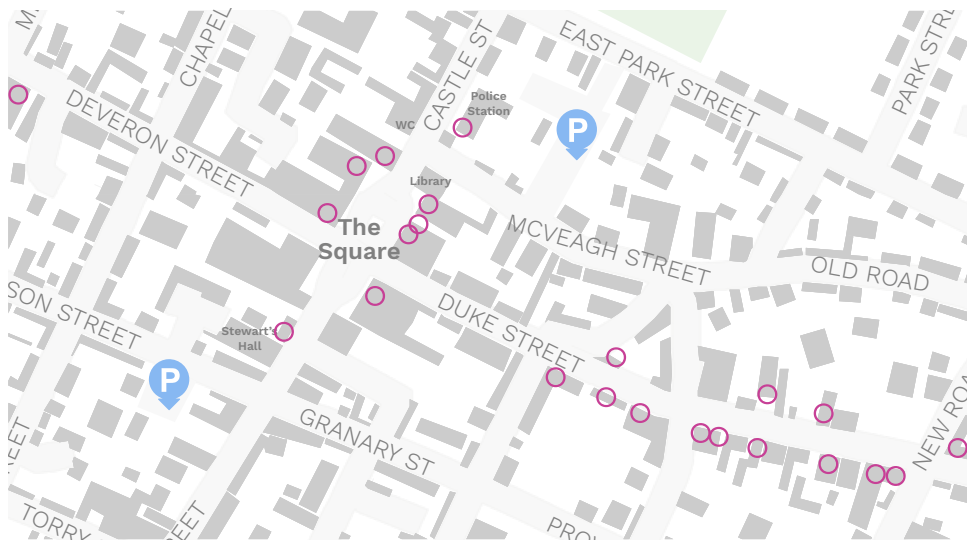
Huntly's commercial property market is currently suffering. A number of properties have laid vacant for several years and, as such their condition and modernity has slipped (e.g. inefficient heating, poor glazing, lack of accessible facilities). Compounding this marketed rental prices often far exceed possible returns to start-up businesses. The result is a growing feeling that the town lacks control of its own future. A number of different factors are currently at-play within Huntly's commercial property market:

- Property ownership has often been closely linked with the operation of a specific business, when that business ceases operation the building has fallen into disuse;
- Owners can often be detached from the town, whether a distant individual or national investment company;
- Investment that can facilitate change is deemed too risky.

To address the current situation, the community need to:

- Take control of key town centre buildings, whether that be by purchase, short or long term lease.
- Carry out refurbishments to make them habitable for specific uses (this will vary on the condition and type of building so will range in scale from basic clearance and re-decorating to comprehensive improvements or building amendments).
- Lease out the use of them to community traders on graduated rents.

Taking this approach will represent a key shift, with property and land assets under community control, a greater diversity in ownership will empower the people of Huntly, create resilience and allow the people to control their own destiny. Spaces will be created that can flex to the changing needs of the town in a more responsive way than is currently possible. As detailed in the *enterprise* section of this document, there are plenty of ideas waiting to be activated (whether it is a heritage baker, micro start-up, community café or arts & crafts shop).



Each ○ marker on the map represents a commercial unit that was vacant in November 2018, which illustrates the scale of the issue. While the ambition should be to activate all vacant property the initial priority focus should be key on buildings on The Square:

- Huntly Hotel
- Cruickshanks
- Square Deal
- Old RBS branch
- Old Post Office
- Old Tourist Information

□ Encourage relocation to The Square and high streets

A first port of call to addressing Huntly's town centre vacancies is to consider functions that are already happening elsewhere in the town and appraise the suitability and benefits of relocating to a different location in the town centre. This can open opportunities for existing businesses, organisations and services to move to premises that allow for growth or a new method of operation. Consideration should also be given to the premises that would be left behind, as relocation by the current use could open possibilities for a change of use e.g. housing.

This would be achieved via detailed discussions held in confidence with proprietors and tenants, with a priority focus on public-facing uses (e.g. public services, leisure, shops, public events (like the Farmers Market) and other organisations/businesses. This conversation (as such) should also include businesses or services that are currently located out of town currently to increase the prospective pool of new tenants and proprietors. Potential relocators should then be supported in negotiating relevant purchases, leases or planning permissions to facilitate moving.

A proactive approach to encourage relocations is a necessary part of revitalising the town centre. It supports the functions and activities that have an established role or market in Huntly to take place, and complements efforts to introduce new uses to the benefit of all. They already have the consumer spend or footfall that the town centre needs, unlocking suitable town centre buildings can in-turn bring new opportunities for growth and change.

Making a people-friendly town centre

- ❑ **Activate quick win maintenance tasks**
- ❑ **Introduce more planting throughout the year**
- ❑ **Bring more colour onto the street throughout the year**

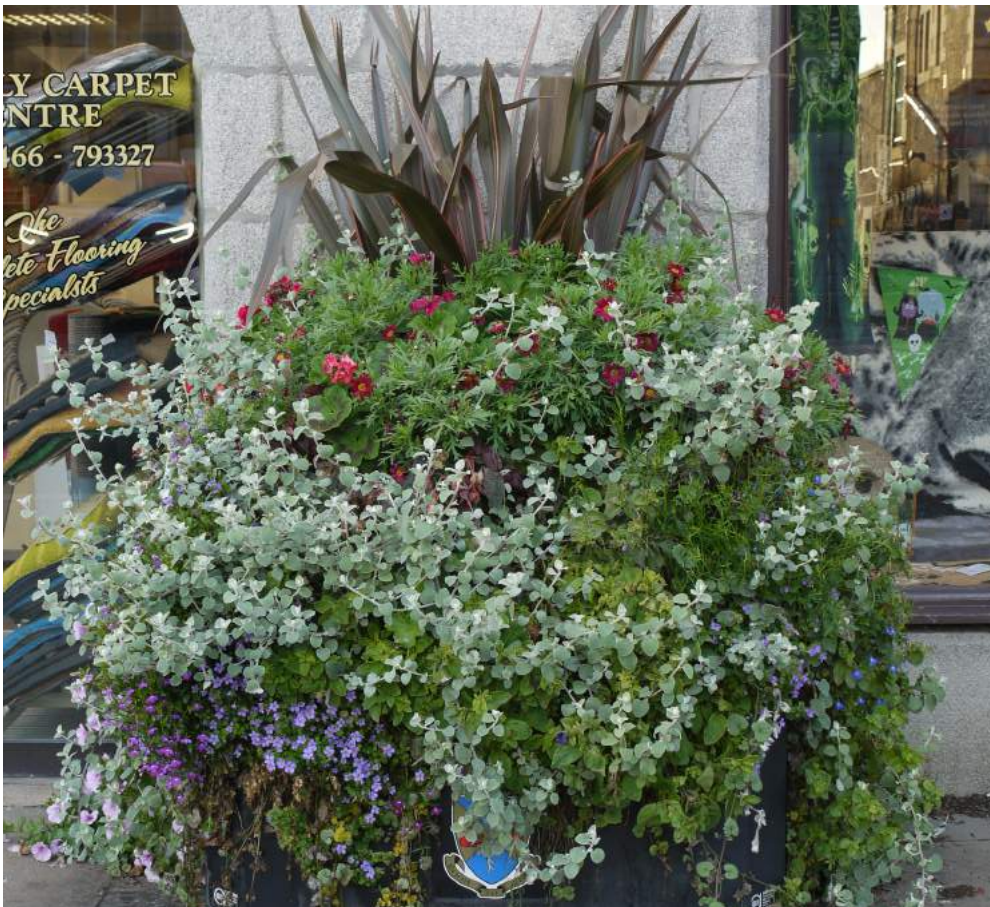
Huntly has a picturesque town centre as it stands, but has the potential to stand out from other towns in the north east. With so much creative talent in the town, improvements should bring a unique character to the public realm; with colour, planting, space for activities and a blend of the heritage and contemporary narrative of the town.

Two volunteer groups (Huntly Floral Fund and Huntly Christmas Lights) raise funds and organise seasonal decorations that help brighten The Square. This should be expanded to a programme that brings changing colour and spectacle around the year to The Square and surrounding high streets; more planting of flowers and greenery, flags, banners, buntings, digital projection and shop window dressing. Immediately, some parking spaces could be given over to growing and seating spaces.

Other simple improvements will make a big difference to the town's presentation. Delivering these will require coordination, and should be led by the Town Centre Activators to bring together public services and community volunteers, examples include:

- Metalwork painting of sign and lamp posts;
- Repairing the lamp above Stewart's Hall entrance;
- Ensuring that bins are replaced with bird-proof designs.

These small actions can make a big impression, shifting the perception of the town will help cement civic pride. They will also complement some of the larger or longer term projects bringing new life and activity to Huntly's town centre.



Seasonal display by Huntly Floral Fund

Making a people-friendly town centre

□ Identify and test alternative approaches to access and parking

Much of public space in The Square is currently used by a pay-and-display car park. As buildings take on new uses, there is an opportunity to identify and test alternative approaches to accessing the town centre, and parking in it that provide more of a mix in uses than there is currently. This could take the lead from temporary interventions that already happen at the monthly farmer's market by exploring other temporary interventions.

The premise for testing alternative approaches should be from what different use it might unlock; suggestions have included space for children to play, picnicking in The Square, seating to sit in the sun or places to grow food. A new approach would help change the reasons *why* people visit the town centre and should be taken hand-in-hand with other efforts that diversify how people access it, e.g. walking, cycling, community transport or park and stride.



Looking southwards over The Square, Huntly

□ Install wayfinding signage around town

A study in 2012 developed proposals for wayfinding posts and signs at key locations within the town. This work should be taken forward and integrated with details from the town trail and town map to create unique wayfinding signage for Huntly that:

- Displays the town map physically in The Square, railway station, Market Muir car park, caravan park and at Huntly Castle;
- Reveals snippets of information and stories of Huntly's history and culture;
- Gives key directional signs to attractions and facilities.

Installing something in the physical environment that is unique to Huntly and respectful to the Conservation Area will literally help signpost to visitors that the town has something to offer them. While offering directional signposts is important, being imaginative and incorporating interesting details from the town trail will help bring the richness to Huntly's story to life in the streets and spaces that make up the town. Aberdeenshire Travel Trails have been developed in other towns as treasure trails sourced from the local libraries.

Protect and enhance Huntly's historic built environment

□ Improve knowledge and understanding of Conservation Area regulations

Huntly's historic environment is protected by its Conservation Area status with a number of listed buildings. With this protection come regulations and responsibilities; however there is not a common understanding of these in the general population of the town. It would be worthwhile for the local authority to collate the relevant rules and regulations relating to the conservation area within an easily-digestible guide, easily accessible by the public, written in plain English. This should also include details of the statutory powers that the local authority holds with regards to non-compliance and building disrepair.

Completing this action should be relatively simple, and could help increase understanding of why protections exist and how appropriate developments can enhance the Conservation Area for all.

□ Draw up a town centre maintenance and improvement plan

A Town Centre Maintenance and Improvement Plan should be agreed between the town, local authority and organisations which details the following:

- **Ongoing maintenance services delivered by local authority:** Setting a standard of the level of services that will be delivered in the town centre, for example lamp-post repainting is carried out every X years;
- **Maintenance and upkeep works to be delivered by the local community:** Allowing the community to agree 'top-up' maintenance activities that can be carried out with the agreement of the local authority, for example annual litter picks or arranging repainting of lamp-posts halfway between the local authority maintenance cycle;
- **Scheduling improvements and investment in the town's public realm:** Involving the public in deciding where improvement and investment is required, for example there is a desire for more public seating around the whole town to provide resting places for those who cannot walk long distances;
- **Encourage property owners to undertake remedial, maintenance and improvement works:** This could be achieved by assisting property owners through a mix of information provision, grant funding and enforcement of regulations.
- **Continue the Huntly Gull Project:** Continuing the partnership project that supports gulls to move to a more natural habitat outwith the town. Persisting with this work over the long term will help restore Huntly's natural setting, making to town centre a pleasant place to live, work and visit.

Bringing these together in an agreed, shared plan will encourage partnership working and give local people a greater stake in the upkeep of the town; complementing larger or longer term projects bringing new life and activity to Huntly's town centre.

□ Ensure Huntly's buildings protect the native swift population

Swifts are an urban bird that typically nest within gaps of eaves, roof tiles, gutters or stonework and whose numbers globally have been declining. In Huntly there is an active 'Swift Group' dedicated to helping care for and protect Huntly's Swift population for future generations; they have identified over 60 natural nesting locations for swifts in the town.

There is a continuing risk that in the ongoing upkeep or renovation of buildings in Huntly that the nesting sites of swifts is put at risk. To combat this, a number of different steps can be taken by building owners or custodians:

- Preserving natural nest access holes in existing buildings that may be about to be repaired.
- Providing additional access in the form of Swift Bricks in either new buildings or those undergoing stonework renovation.
- Installing external nesting boxes where appropriate.

Protect and enhance Huntly's historic built environment

□ Invest in the Stewart's Hall to modernise it as an events venue

The Stewart's Hall is a much loved public building in the town, and is used frequently for a variety of uses throughout the week; one of these is for special events and live performances of music, comedy and theatre. The hall has the potential to raise the quality standard of facility it provides for these events by making investments at a range of scales:

- Ensuring black-out curtains are available in the main hall.
- Painting and re-decoration throughout the building to make the building unique to Huntly (as opposed to any other Victorian town hall).
- Installing modern heating systems, alongside insulation to make the building more energy-efficient.
- Renovation of backstage facilities.
- Modernisation of toilets.
- Upgrading seating available, including retractable 'banked' seating.
- Sound insulation to compartmentalise different spaces.

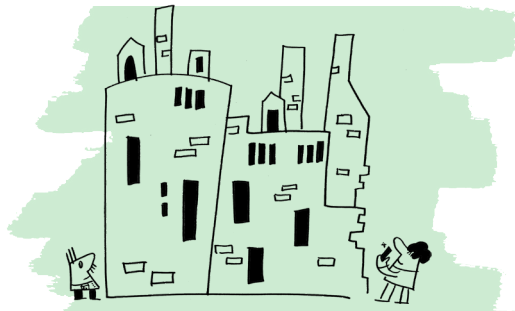
Delivering this investment will help the Stewart's Hall to become a premium venue, attracting more live events and special occasions to be held there, which in turn attract more footfall in town and support the development of other new town centre enterprises (such as places to eat in the evening).



Exterior of Stewart's Hall, Gordon Street



*Community Christmas Day Lunch in the main hall
Image credit: Deveron Projects*



A campus for learning and play

Strategic objectives for a learning and leisure campus:

- 2.1 Everyday learning and leisure activities blend together creating a town-centre campus of first-class facilities. This campus is a network of coordinated and sustainable facilities generating income and retaining profit for re-investment.
- 2.2 A shared plan exists for minor and major capital investment to continually raise the standards of facilities available.

Over the next few years, these strategic objectives translate into initial actions based around the following themes:

- Delivering modern school, sports and recreation facilities
- Improve the facilities in Huntly's parks for all ages

Delivering modern school, sports and recreation facilities

□ Draft a community-led vision to improve learning and leisure facilities in the town

Huntly historically has a self-starting attitude towards activities, learning, wellbeing and leisure with over 100 different clubs, groups and organisations operating. However investment has failed to keep apace with the level of activity in the town. With a number of buildings and facilities currently in a sub-standard condition or not fit for purpose, different groups and organisations are pursuing independent ambitions for improvements and developments across the town. There is a risk that without a coordinated plan the end result may be a group of disparate developments and facilities rather than a complementary campus of learning and leisure amenities.

A vision that brings together the active, planned and aspirational developments and considers how these build a comprehensive campus of first-class facilities for learning and leisure should be quickly developed. This process should be community-led with input from relevant design professionals and public-sector partners so that a detailed and deliverable plan is developed that will help secure the investment required to build the new facilities.

The north area of town has plenty of potential for positive development that can support the local economy, supply more jobs, and offer first-class facilities for those living in Huntly and its District. Pursuing developments in an individual and haphazard way risks the town missing out on the maximum benefits available to it; with some developments proceeding successfully and others falling to the wayside. Bringing interested people in the town together to develop a vision and plan makes it more likely for successful developments to take place.

□ Build modern learning and leisure facilities

Once a vision and plan have been developed, the whole community and different organisations can put their full weight behind a programme of different developments—taking place over a number of years—that delivers modern learning and leisure facilities befitting the diversity and quality of different activity that takes place in the town.

Securing the investment that delivers these modern developments will be a vital milestone in the strategy to ensure that all parts of life in Huntly are thriving; and will be a vote of confidence in what Huntly has achieved in the past and aiming to achieve in the future.

Improve the facilities in Huntly's parks for all ages

Around 30% of Huntly is publicly-accessible or owned greenspace. Offering a wide array of different amenities and activities to take place. It is frequently recognised as a key asset that is right on the town's doorstep. Outdoor play is recognised as an important part in child development; it can also provides a free 'thing to do' in town, which was noted as a key priority for action in Huntly.

- ❑ Install signage offering directions to the nearest public toilets currently available in the area of Cooper Park and the playpark by the River Deveron.
- ❑ Sport and fitness forms a strong strand of life and activity in Huntly, with a diverse range of clubs and groups available to join. Installing free-to-use outdoor gym equipment is a small action that can diversify the sport and fitness offering of Huntly beyond formal groups and activities.
- ❑ Make additions to the range and quality of equipment available across all sites, including 'natural play' items; to give new and exciting outdoor play opportunities, not only for children in and around Huntly, but for attracting visitors to the town.
- ❑ Support Friends of Market Muir group to enhance the facilities the park currently offers.
- ❑ Investigate ways to reopen the pavilion at Cooper Park, which in turn will provide publicly accessible toilets closer than is currently available.



Cooper Park overlooking Huntly Castle



A rural place with transport that works for us

Strategic objectives for getting about in Huntly:

- 3.2 Easy access to active travel—irrespective of age or ability—to get into town, around town and accessing rural leisure routes like Battlehill, Clashindarroch or The Bin Forest.
- 3.3 A range of attractive transport options that meet the needs of people living, working and visiting Huntly and District is available.

The town is prepared to:

- engage with the route planning of the new A96
- take advantage of the economic and development opportunities the final route will bring

Over the next few years, these strategic objectives translate into initial actions based around the following themes:

- By foot or pedal
- Transport that serves the needs of the community
- Planning for the future

□ Promote Cycling Connections and the Bike Shack and support the expansion of these services

Cycling Connections and the Bike Shack are projects run by Networks of Wellbeing to promote an active life and exercise (proven to help in overall wellbeing) and supports people on a mental health recovery journey through supported volunteering placements. They provide a full range of bicycle related services:

- Refurbishing donated used bicycles of all types and sizes for resale.
- Servicing and repair of bicycles.
- Assistance in assembling new bicycles purchased online.
- Running basic maintenance classes to groups and on a one-to-one basis, to teach the skills required to maintain and repair bicycles in working order.
- Sales of second hand parts for a range of bicycles.
- Offering led cycle rides in and around Huntly (including beginners and confidence building cycle rides).

These projects offer Huntly a fantastic and affordable resource and the services should continue to be promoted across Huntly and District. There is room to expand the current offering of both Networks of Wellbeing's Cycling Connections and the Bike Shack activities, however to do this an increase in staff and financial resource will be required. This could be achieved through partnership working where one or more organisations work collaboratively with Networks of Wellbeing to diversify the services available. Another approach would be making links with the Huntly Cyclists Group or international movements such as 'Cycling Without Age'.

□ Construct more active travel paths that are accessible for all

Using the AB54 path network plan (see: *planning for the future*), funding from a variety of sources should be sought to upgrade and construct new paths that are accessible to all for active travel whether that is walking, cycling, scooting, roller-skiing, roller-skating. Delivery should be by a phased approach to expand on what already exists so a joined-up network is built up.



Part of new active travel path connecting Deveron Road and Meadow Street with the schools and Meadows playing fields

□ Make key crossings more pedestrian friendly

Within Huntly, four locations were frequently cited as requiring improvements to make them more pedestrian friendly. Changes that will bring improvements to these section could be considered by the local authority:



- Two busy crossroad junctions should be made much easier for pedestrians to cross, at the War Memorial where Castle Street meets East and West Park streets and at Market Muir where Gordon Street meets Market Street.



- There is confusion for motorists and pedestrians on the shared surface at Duke Street (at the junction with The Square). This should be reviewed and pedestrian priority highlighted.
- The busy A96 is currently a barrier for many to access walking routes south of Huntly, particularly to the Clashmach and Clashindarroch, Cabrach and Cairngorms. A traffic controlled crossing, footbridge or underpass would be welcomed here.

There is also a support for introducing more zebra crossings in Huntly so that the flow of people on street are prioritised over the movement of bikes, cars, buses and lorries.

□ Advertise local long distance walking routes

Since 2012 Deveron Projects have co-developed seven themed 26-mile walking routes as part of their Slow Marathon events in and around the Huntly area. These routes are a fantastic asset that should be collectively documented and advertised to instil Huntly and its District as a base for completing a range of long-distance walks. This can be done in a number of ways:

- Documenting details of the routes themes and mapping collectively online.
- Printed material marketing the existence of the 'Marathon Walks'.
- A collective physical guide that can be used to undertake the different walking routes.
- Posting details of the routes to other websites such as www.walkhighlands.co.uk
- Developing a simple 'app' that incorporates the walking routes with maps and GPS technology.

Long distance walking may be a niche activity rather than have mass appeal. But the availability of different themed walks in and around one place is an untapped asset that people, who it does interest, should know about. Long distance routes are also often undertaken in stages, to build up an experience of a full route, encouraging repeat visitors to the area. This work should also tie in with the Integrated Travel Towns (ITT) projects.



*Slow Marathon in progress
Image credit: Deveron Projects*

□ Tour hire bikes to different locations

A number of people would like to see the short-term hire bikes offered by HDDT to be toured to different locations over the summer months (e.g. Leith Hall) to give visitors and locals alike a chance to explore the area by bike.



A Huntly hire bike on tour

Transport that serves the needs of the community

□ Work out what options exist for a ‘community transport’ initiative

Huntly has strong social connection with a number of neighbouring communities but there are many people separated from life and activity in Huntly due to lack of private car access. Akin to many rural areas, public transport provision is sparse, expensive, lacks competition and has limited scope for local accountability and control.

This leads to timetables and services that do not meet the needs of users and further suppresses demand. People want to travel into and out of Huntly, and will pay to do so. This market should be exploited to develop a community transport initiative that can meet the needs of the people of Huntly and district.

The first step in developing this is ascertaining the scope for any initiatives that could be piloted:

- Where is Huntly the service centre for?
- Where are people in Huntly and district looking to travel to outwith AB54?
- What are the current transport connections to these places?
- How could these be made more publicly accessible?
- What no-to-low risk methods for experimentation exist?
- Would any of these experiments provide a scalable and long term financially sustainable solution?

□ Pilot a community transport initiative connecting people into town and beyond it

Once the above study has been completed, a six to nine month pilot should be undertaken that tests the viability of different approaches to community transport. These should be undertaken as close as possible to the long term vision, including financial contribution from passengers to offset any costs of running the pilots.

The nature of the pilot will be informed by the earlier work setting the community transport scope; however a number of example experiments that could be tested include:

- Using the Community Minibus to offer a timetabled shopper service between outlying villages and Huntly.
- Use the Car Club to provide ride-sharing to events taking place outside Huntly.
- Work with Rhynie Car Aid to expand the services they can offer.
- Hire a coach from Deveron Coaches to provide an express service between Huntly and Aberdeen calling at the airport, Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and city centre.
- Coordinate a taxi-share service to and from events in Huntly.

Planning for the future

□ Draw up plans for an AB54 path network

There is a desire to expand the current network of paths for walking and cycling to include new routes but also enhance existing paths to make them more accessible to the whole community. One example is the network of paths in the Meadows area and along the River Deveron, where some are paved tarmacs and others are country tracks limiting accessibility.

To expand the current network a coordinated plan for phased expansion should be developed. The Integrated Travel Town masterplan has already developed a plan for the immediate environs of the town centre, and this should be used as the basis for an AB54 path network that includes the whole town, Meadows area and beyond to outlying areas as is desired by the community. The proposed network should comprise of high quality, traffic separated routes.

Any existing routes should be submitted as local routes to the National Cycle Network information held by Sustrans, and new extensions added when completed.



*Accessible paths around the Nordic Outdoor Centre are a well-used resource with potential for expansion
Image credit: Huntly & District Development Trust*

□ Prepare the town for the dualling of the A96

Transport Scotland is currently working to upgrade all sections of the A96 road between Aberdeen and Inverness to dual carriageway, shortening the length and bringing more reliability to journey times. This large national project will have profound effects on Huntly itself, these are likely to be a combination of positive and negative changes. The introduction of the A96 bypass in the late 1970s facilitated the expansion of the town southwards; depending on the eventual route of the dualled A96 similar opportunities of town growth may arise.

The current A96, with significant traffic levels, is considered to be a barrier to people looking to walk and cycle out of the town - something that the development of the new road may be able to address. The needs of non-motorised users (NMUs) will be considered within the route planning and delivery by the project team. Linking with ambitions within the proposed AB54 Path Network plan provides the opportunity to bring added benefits to the community.

Outlined are sets of actions that will help Huntly achieve the maximum benefits possible from the road development. These should be undertaken once the route options are released in 2019, through the assessment period and beyond when the route is confirmed (expected by end of 2020).

Once route options assessment is published:

Walking & Cycling Integration

Once the route options are released (expected 2019), evaluate these compared to the AB54 Path Network plan for synergies and opportunities for improvements. Any proposals to improve access for walking and cycling should be outlined to the community as well as the A96 project team so there is a wide level of understanding.

Enterprise Opportunities

A quicker and more reliable road connection to the key cities of Aberdeen and Inverness itself will bring growth opportunities for business. However the town should explore the viability of new business and community enterprise opportunities that may arise from the road itself, including rest stops/areas and service provision such as motorway services. The construction project itself will contain opportunities for enterprise, at a high level through procurement to a more local level of overnight accommodation of construction teams.

Speaking with One Voice

Organisations within the town should make their own assessments of the route options that are proposed, and come to a consensus of a preferred route taking account of the business, investment and social opportunities it may bring to the town. This discussion should take place within the wider community so that the town, as much as possible, speaks with one voice on what will be a decision that will have a major impact on the future of the town but will ultimately be taken at a national level.

Development Possibilities

As happened in the 1970s, the route of the new A96 may open up new areas of the development for the town. The most likely area is southward beyond the existing A96. Steps should be taken to ensure that the community is involved in any discussions regarding the nature of any possible new development so that it supports, integrates and brings benefit to the whole town.

Once route has been decided:

Walking & Cycling Integration

Update the AB54 Path Network Plan accordingly, and advance any improvements that will facilitate greater access to new routes created by the road development.

Enterprise Opportunities

Advance on the business and other enterprise possibilities that will become possible with the new route of the road.



The focus is people, environment and culture

Strategic objectives for Huntly's people, environment and culture:

- 4.1 Making use of a range of tools to communicate to locals, visitors and potential visitors alike.
- 4.2 Empowering people of Huntly to contribute towards life in the town through the sharing of skills or resources and actively pursuing ventures that include opportunities for socialising and inclusion across communities.
- 4.3 Take action that reduces greenhouse gas emissions and allows the town to transition to a circular economy.

Over the next few years, these strategic objectives translate into initial actions based around the following themes:

- Tools to make people & culture visible
- New projects to enhance people, environment and culture
- Making the community more self-sufficient

Tools to make people & culture visible

□ Find a new home for Huntly's tourist information

There is a demonstrated need in Huntly for a place central in the town, open to visitors and the local community alike which is highly visible, free to access, independent and regularly open across the day/evening and into the night. Combining this with the sharing of information can provide an important civic service for the town and begin to open the possibilities of new ways of using town centre buildings.

Local volunteers stepped up to provide a town tourist information centre when the VisitScotland iCentre closed. Finding a suitable base for this service that is highly visible to visitors arriving in town should be a key priority ahead of the 2019 tourist season starting in spring.

□ Market the unique attractions Huntly already has to visitors

Hundreds of thousands of people visit the Grampian area each year, Huntly's location on the main road between Aberdeen and Elgin places the town well in the reach of many of these visitors.

While there is room for improvement in Huntly's 'things to do' offering, it already has some unique attractions, that if distinctively marketed can stand out from the traditional tourist offering in the north east. These include but are not limited to:

Huntly Nordic Outdoor Centre

Huntly Nordic and Outdoor Centre is Britain's only purpose-built all-weather facility for nordic skiing, roller skiing and tubing; it also offers bicycles for hire.

The Town Collection

Since 1995 Deveron Projects has built up a living archive of artworks and other artefacts known as The Town Collection. The works comprising the collection are hosted in local shops, businesses, public buildings and private residencies in the town and the surrounding area.

Farmer's Market

Held on the first Saturday of the month between February and December, it is the only regular market of its kind within a seventeen-mile radius of Huntly.

Orb's Bookshop

The community-run bookshop is the only independent bookshop between Elgin and Aberdeen, and stocks a vast collection of books that would be of interest to locals and visitors alike.

How to market these can be as simple as a run of posters and flyers, distributed to existing attractions, significant tourist areas (Royal Deeside and Speyside) and accommodation providers to increase awareness of what Huntly has to offer today. This approach should then be continued as new attractions and offering of things to do in Huntly grows over the years.



Orb's Bookshop



Huntly Farmer's Market

Tools to make people & culture visible

□ Launch a refreshed town website

The current town website (www.huntly.net) is over 10 years old, so the town needs a modern website offering that can showcase the town's assets, tell you what events are happening, links seamlessly with social media so communications are streamlined, and help attract visitors to the town.

The town has previously taken advantage of what online platforms can offer to share information, but this hasn't kept apace with developing technologies and ways of using the internet. There is a recognised need to change this and learn from previous experience to ensure that the refreshed website can change and develop over time.

□ Centrally record the number of visitors coming into Huntly

How many visitors are attracted to Huntly each year?

How does this compare to other towns?

What can be done to increase these numbers?

Without a benchmark of data, it is difficult to answer these questions. Centrally recording the number of visitors to Huntly coming each year can help address that. This task will require the collation of data from public venues and attractions (like Huntly Castle, which can be accessed by Freedom of Information requests if required), along with occupancy figures of places to stay and footfall of businesses. It should be done in a way that is as easy as possible, fitting into the normal practices and recording of business that individuals already take.

With collated data, an assessment can be made on how well Huntly is performing in attracting visitors over time in comparison to other towns and a result of other actions undertaken. For example, if Huntly attractions registered with the North East 250 long distance route, did this investment bring an uplift in visitor numbers?

□ Document the past and present for the future

A vast amount of historical knowledge on Huntly is held by a diverse set of people. Combined with the lived experience of today, there is a call to ensure that this is all documented for future generations. This obviously includes formal collections but should embrace the personal historical knowledge of people from across the town past and present.

Personal Histories

The Huntly Histories Facebook group is emblematic of the breadth of knowledge that exists and the demand to explore it. Part of the appeal of the group is the impromptu conversations and details that come up, but by bringing this together in a structured archive, it would guarantee all-community access for many years to come. A bespoke tool or platform could be created to do this, or encouraging the use of free tools such as Scotland Urban Past's 'Urban Detectives' tools (<https://scotlandsurbanpast.org.uk/urban-detectives>) to document location based history, photographs, sketches and memories on Canmore (the online National Record of Scotland's historic environment). Whichever approach is chosen should be incorporated into a project with local schools to help document stories and information (from the past and today).

This action should integrate with the curation of the Huntly Express archives (page 34).

Tools to make people & culture visible

□ Coordinate one town map of walking & cycling routes, history, culture, and facilities

Huntly needs a town map. A curated map that brings together details of Huntly's history, culture, businesses and services into one place combined with details of walking and cycling routes available in town and beyond it (for example to Battlehill). The knowledge of all this information already exists collectively within the town, but a coordinated effort will make it accessible to locals and visitors alike.

Maps promoting walking and cycling in the town are earmarked for development as part of Aberdeenshire Council's Integrated Travel Town masterplan; the scale of Huntly lends itself to one coordinated map that brings everything together. As such the community should work with Aberdeenshire Council to develop a fantastic map that encourages walking and cycling and promotes the other assets the town has to offer—in a way that makes it easily updatable over time so that when new things open, or facilities move, the collective map can quickly change with it.

In recent years, Huntly hasn't been shouting loudly enough about what it can offer. Creating one curated map of the town that can be deployed in a number of different ways and then used by a variety of people to help tackle this. This information should also be made available digitally on relevant town and tourism websites (e.g. www.visitabdn.com), and incorporated to physical signage around town.

What should be included in the map:

- Naming of all streets and parks in the town;
- Key visitor and leisure attractions;
- Signposts to key business/service areas available; shops, hospitality, medical, religion;
- Traffic-free cycling routes in town;
- Accessible walking routes in town (using Perambulator routes documented by Clare Qualmann for Deveron Projects);
- Connections to out-of-town walking and cycling routes;
- Principal parts of a town trail.

New projects to enhance people, environment and culture

□ Give young people a space to call their own for use out of school hours

Young people in Huntly currently lack a social space or place that they can call their own. There is a desire to have a modern, well maintained space that is which is managed by young people themselves with the support of adults in the town to get it off the ground and sustain it in the long-term. This space should be welcoming and central in the town, rather than tucked away in the corner. Such a space has the opportunity to give somewhere for socialising, studying, film screenings, making things, small groups or activity based classes.

20% of Huntly's population is aged 21 or younger; by making space available for young people in the town centre it gives them a real stake in their town and empowers them to be part of the actions repurposing the town centre. It addresses a key priority of things to do outwith school and has the potential to develop and grow over time.

□ Open a Huntly Hub in the town centre

A Huntly Hub could be a programmed space in the town centre that draws locals and visitors in to explore what Huntly has to offer. This would be a curated and lively space that tells the story of the town using artefacts and interpretation from Huntly's rich heritage through to pop-up shops of artworks and produce that highlight its contemporary culture. The space could host activities for young people, families and events for locals and visitors. The schools will be encouraged to use the space for specific modules and showcasing their work.

While there is strong appetite for a hub, it can't operate in isolation. It therefore needs to combine with a number of different projects or activities (e.g. information centre, cafe, exhibition space) within one clearly identifiable package.

□ Support the development of Huntly Heritage Bakery & Cooking Shop

Deveron Projects are working to develop a Huntly Heritage Bakery & Cooking Shop, based on an earlier trial run at 'Number 11' on Gordon Street. The space will provide healthy, exciting food which bridges local producers and consumers, a hospitality training platform relevant to different community groups (e.g. school leavers and folk currently underemployed) and a community space for developing an engaging programme of events that builds the Heritage Bakery & Cooking Shop as a civic space and resource for Huntly.

The next phase of the project will initiate a business plan and set up the Heritage Bakery & Cooking Shop as a social enterprise in the town centre. An essential aspect of the project plan is to provide essential support to develop partnerships in a central town location with a series of partners. The success of the project will rely on the support of local consumers and community groups to strengthen the impact of the social enterprise.

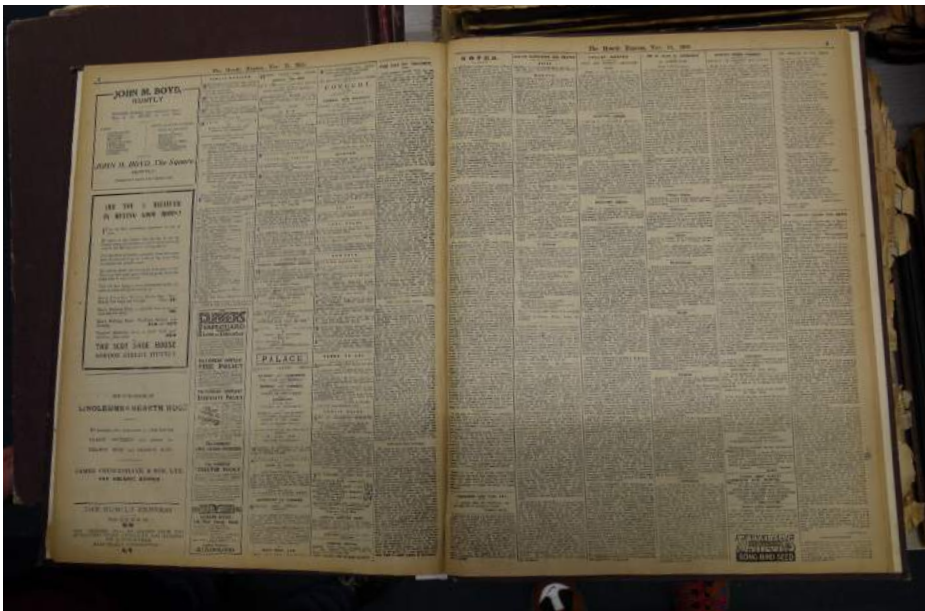
New projects to enhance people, environment and culture

- **Digitise the archives of the Huntly Express allowing them to be accessed online across the world**
- **Curate a complementary space where they can be accessed in person**

Huntly & District Development Trust recently acquired the archives of The Huntly Express newspaper—a valuable and comprehensive asset for the town which should be preserved and digitised to become a useable and accessible archive for future generations.

The vast collection of news stories highlight the importance of the Huntly Express in sharing the current affairs from Huntly, Scotland and across the globe. By continuing to digitally archive the resource and by carefully curating a permanent and changing exhibition of intriguing stories the local newspaper could become a fascinating collection for locals, visitors and Huntly diaspora around the world alike.

Other collections that may exist within the town, such as business archives, should also be digitised and preserved.



Part of Huntly Express archives

- **Hold a ‘Room to Roam’ festival showcasing clubs and groups**

With so many activities and groups in Huntly doing things, it can be difficult for people to always know what is on offer, this is particularly acute for those moving into the town. Embracing the town’s motto of *Room to Roam*, an annual festival or gala where all clubs and groups can have a stall or space to showcase what they offer would help change. Creating a fun event (perhaps combining with an existing event like the Huntly Hairst) where people have *Room to Roam* and see what the community within Huntly has to offer bringing footfall in the town, and encourages people to join new activities.

New projects to enhance people, environment and culture

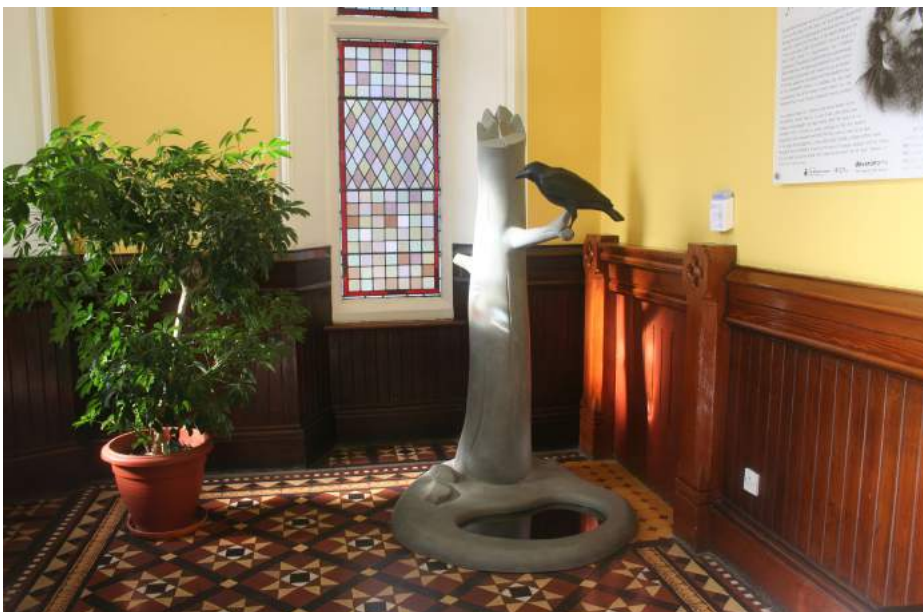
□ Start a befriending project

Currently there is no befriending services offered centrally in Aberdeenshire. This lack of available services can lead to social isolation within the town. Whether you are elderly and live alone, are a young carer balancing school with looking after a loved one, single mums or those who only receive part time care to help living with disabilities, a befriending project would help bring these people into the wider life of the town and community.

□ Put on imaginative exhibitions that generate interest and makes Huntly uniquely stand out

Huntly has plenty of scope to develop attractions that increases its offering, particularly with a town centre focus. The previous museum did not attract high footfall, so for future efforts and investment to be worthwhile Huntly needs to ensure that new ventures are truly distinctive and stand out from what other towns offer particularly in the North East but also nationally or internationally.

One way of doing this would be creating a programme of temporary imaginative exhibitions; whether this is presenting contemporary arts, local culture, architecture, social histories, environment, memorabilia. The people of Huntly have the a diverse capital of knowledge that could create such displays, this needs to be put to use in innovative ways that create spectacle and drive footfall to the town centre. Starting with a temporary programme that is community-driven allows such a venture to expand organically, and therefore have long-term sustainability as opposed to the high capital and running costs a formal museum would have.



Kenny Hunter, Where In? Where At? (2005), Foyer of Brander Building
Image Credit: Deveron Projects

New projects to enhance people, environment and culture

□ Commission iconic public artworks

Large scale, iconic public artworks have a proven record in drawing attention, and more importantly visitors to specific places. For example, The Kelpies (Andy Scott, Falkirk 2013) or 7000 Oaks (Joseph Beuys, Kassel 1982) have brought attention to specific stories or narratives of a place.

Innovative modern commissions would help focus attention on Huntly, its story, and what it has to offer today, or act as a symbol for the town. A variety of models could bring a iconic sculpture to fruition; a community programme would help define the possibilities, location, and support for any such works that could be developed.

□ Establish a town trail

Huntly has a story to tell, about the people, events and tales that has made the town as it is today, however no shared narrative currently exists and as such the story goes untold. To build a collective narrative, a Town Trail should be established that brings the story of Huntly to the streets and public spaces of the town. Importantly, this should be active and not entirely history and fact based to stand out from other towns. This town trail should be fully documented online, and relevant parts of it incorporated into wayfinding signage, marketing, maps, tours and other developments.

Without prior knowledge, there is very little indication to visitors passing through the town centre of there being a reason to stop, or anything new to find out. Establishing a comprehensive town trail, matching individual stories to physical places in a shared narrative, is a key action in addressing this. A town trail can play a key role in supporting other actions to diversify Huntly's town centre offer.

Making the community more self-sufficient

□ Grow more food in town

The traditional long plots that made up the original planned town of Huntly facilitated the growing of food by individual tenants. The town and world has changed a lot since the 1770's, as has the prevalence of growing food in town. That's not to say it doesn't happen, and projects like 'Town is the Garden' are actively encouraging efforts to grow more food in the town. Opportunities to expand the amount of food grown in Huntly should be sought out and actively pursued. One such (as noted in the *town centre* section) is introducing more growing (and eating) within the public space of The Square.

Reducing the journey of food from seed to plate can bring benefits to Huntly with regards to sustainability, resilience (from price fluctuation of national and international markets), improved health and wellbeing.



High street planter by Town is the Garden project

□ Develop a Community Kit of free-to-access resources for events and small projects

Huntly has many active community events and projects undertaken by a variety of people and organisations. As such the town has a range of equipment and resources required to make things happen; currently access to these is reliant on knowing the right place or person to ask. Actively developing a Community Kit can increase access to resources across the town, and increase the scope of what is available to support community events and projects.

Compiling a database: create a database of existing 'kit' that is already available to borrow within the town.

Agreeing access: decide on, how people can access the database, how you approach individuals or groups with things that can be borrowed, any borrowing or service agreements that need to be in place.

Expanding the kit: the kit should be built out to include other things that will make community events and projects easier to make happen. Suggestions for this have included high-spec audio-visual equipment or one shared insurance policy that covers all public events in and around the town centre over the course of a year.

Making the community more self-sufficient

□ Support developments to expand the services offered by Huntly Community Kitchen

Huntly is committed to working towards developing a sustainable food culture which takes it from the 'field to the fork' or the 'plough to the plate'. Our future production and consumption of food will have impacts across the world, and therefore making sustainable and informed choices at a local level will have far reaching consequences.

Any food culture is made up of the environment, the people and processes by which agricultural and farmed products are produced, processed and brought to consumers without sacrificing the long term health of the ecosystems and vital cultures that provide our food. Every aspect of the food system has an effect on the final availability and accessibility of diverse, nutritious foods and therefore on the consumers' ability to choose healthy diets meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need for sustainability.

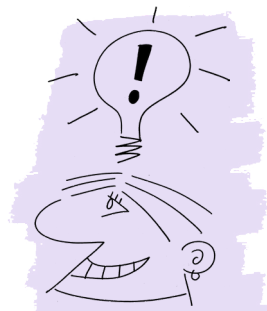
But while food is essential for the growth of life and to help keep us fit and healthy, it also plays an important role in establishing our cultural identity with many countries and areas being famous for their particular foods.

Huntly Community Kitchen, which has been based at the Linden Centre since 2009, wishes to support the AB54 community to work towards achieving such a sustainable food culture. It is, therefore, the aim of the Huntly Community Kitchen to ensure that the facility, which offers a place for up to 8 adults at a time to cook, as well as being a space where other activities can take place around food, culture and the environment, has a new community based management structure which can support the Kitchen to both fulfil its historic aims of 'healthy eating/active living' role which embeds cultural food/physical activity initiatives to support healthy lifestyles, particularly with more vulnerable groups and in areas of deprivation and, at the same time, support its partners and the community to achieve a sustainable food culture under this new, broader heading of 'field to fork and beyond'.



Huntly Community Kitchen

Image Credit: Grampian Health & Social Care Partnership



Where real opportunities exist for enterprise

Strategic objectives for enterprise in Huntly:

- 5.1 Existing businesses and new enterprises complement each other to sustain footfall.
- 5.2 Starting new enterprises is a supported process.
- 5.3 Develop lifelong learning opportunities, within existing organisations, services and businesses that can increase the town's collective skillbase, and capacity to apply these to enterprises.

Over the next few years, these strategic objectives translate into initial actions based around the following themes:

- Support new enterprise ventures
- Improving competitiveness of town centre businesses
- Increase Huntly's skillbase and lifelong learning opportunities

Support new enterprise ventures

□ Start new businesses for the town centre

There are plenty of business opportunities that could be developed in Huntly and could have a place in the town centre. Suggestions of ‘missing businesses’ or gaps where there is room for more competition have included:

<i>community cafe</i>	<i>heritage bakery</i>	<i>cinema</i>
<i>brewery or distillery</i>	<i>local food & drink shop</i>	<i>trampolining centre</i>
<i>garden centre</i>	<i>card shop</i>	<i>cyber cafe</i>
<i>accommodation</i>	<i>greengrocers</i>	<i>furniture shop</i>
<i>eating places open in evening</i>	<i>escape rooms</i>	<i>bowling alley</i>
<i>soft play</i>	<i>Made in Huntly craft shop</i>	<i>laser quest</i>
<i>art supply shop</i>	<i>music shop</i>	<i>clothes and shoe shops, especially for older generation</i>
<i>plastic-free shop</i>		

People in Huntly need to take advantage of the enterprise opportunities these present, whether this is for private financial gain, community benefit or charitable aims. Setting up a business takes a lot of personal commitment and investment, outlined below are sources of help or support that are available:

- **Small Business Bonus Scheme:** the burden of rates is often a dreaded part of running a business; this Scottish Government scheme can give up to 100% rates relief to small businesses with a rateable value of £15,000 or less—most commercial units in Huntly town centre are below this threshold.
- **Business Gateway support:** gives free expert local assistance and advice to people looking to start or grow a business. They can also signpost you to training or other sources of advice and support
- **A different business approach:** most small businesses are run by sole traders or as a partnership, placing the risk of success onto a handful of people. A more appropriate model may be setting up a social enterprise with community benefit aims; this also opens up a different variety of start-up funding or expert support from organisations like Firstport.

□ Make use of vacant buildings to incubate new enterprises

Starting something new, whether that is a shop, service, charity, group or event takes significant investment and commitment of an individual’s time and resources. Therefore for new things to happen, the barriers to starting something new should be reduced as much as possible. Unlocking property assets in the town centre for test use of new startups would remove one of the barriers. Fledgling startups can struggle to take on the risk of a long-term lease when they are still testing the viability and form of their business plan. Providing a variety of free or affordable short term spaces for rent by new startups can put them to the test, allow them to develop and have confidence to take on a space of their own.

This action is key to unlocking a thriving town centre. It addresses a key concern of people who are interested in starting something new in the town. By reducing the initial risk of investment to get things started, it makes them more likely to happen. With the experience of testing the new venture, people will have more confidence to invest and ultimately it will have greater chance of success

Support new enterprise ventures

□ Capture visitor spend through town walking tours

The town has experience of running tours on an ad-hoc basis; for specific projects or special events. However, there is scope to expand this and offer regular walking tours from Easter to October by combining different perspectives and stories of Huntly in tours; providing an activity for visitors while providing seasonal employment opportunities for young people. The Gordon Schools have been working with local historian Patrick Scott to coach some pupils with the confidence and knowledge to deliver tours, and a test-tour undertaken during the Huntly Hairst indicated a tour price of £5 per person. There is also scope to expand a core ‘town trail’ tour offering to include other themed trails, exploring local wildlife, storytelling, cultural or current affairs.

Regular Tour Service

A regular schedule of tours focused on parts of a town trail or different narratives of Huntly emanating from The Square should be developed. This should be advertised locally and at accommodation providers across the north east so it becomes ingrained as an attraction Huntly has to offer.

Bespoke Tour Service

A small number of tour operators visit Huntly Castle as part of wider trips around the North East. This offers a captive market that Huntly can benefit more from. Approaches should be made to these operators to offer bespoke walking tours from Huntly Castle, via the town trail through the town centre, stopping off at Rizza’s for ice cream and onward to Dean’s.

Once a town trail has been developed, and a common narrative of Huntly exists, it develops a small-scale enterprise opportunity that increases the town’s offering of things to do; and an easily deliverable action that can help capture—currently untapped—tourist spend.

□ Capture the opportunities offered by Greenmyres Farm as a venue for enterprise activity

Greenmyres Farm is a community asset owned by Huntly and District Development Trust (HDDT) some 5 miles south east of Huntly. The 63 acre site lies almost next to the A96 Aberdeen-Inverness trunk road and is linked directly by a footpath to Forestry Commission Scotland’s Gartly Moor forest estate. A range of outbuildings, a sizeable pond and ample car parking—together with planned fully-serviced Ecobothy, foot and cycle paths to connect the site to Huntly and Insch—means that Greenmyres offers a unique set of attributes waiting for entrepreneurs to test their ideas. Add to that the possibility of accessing renewable energy direct from HDDT’s community turbine and planned solar PV array and the site can provide a range of benefits for testing, developing and running business.



Greenmyres Farm

Image credit: Huntly & District Development Trust

□ Set-up a ‘Make it Happen’ fund to empower people to do new things

Sometimes getting a new idea off the ground requires a little help. A pot of small funding (£500-£2000) for groups or individuals to do something new would entice someone with a community-led idea to step forward and get started. While some similar funding sources exist, these usually restricted to charitable benefits.

The impetus for starting a new fund is so applications can be open to all to apply; whether that is a charity, individual or community group. The common purpose is that the fund supports people or organisations to do new things for the town. That could be diversifying a group’s offering, funding equipment currently not available in Huntly, or capital costs involved in establishing a new venture.

The application process should be brief; detailing what exactly will the money be spent on, what benefits can be expected, why other methods of funding aren’t suitable, and how the innovation will be sustainable in the long term. Applications should also be publicly available with decisions made by a citizens panel representing people from across the community, to take over the fund and make awards.

Successful awards should be partnered with appropriate support services; that may be mentoring from someone in the town or through an external organisation like Just Enterprise. All spending should be accounted for and publicly accessible.

Improving competitiveness of town centre businesses

□ Make it easier for people to pop into town on quick errands

Businesses in the town centre face a variety of competition threats. Efforts should be made to ensure that visiting town centre businesses are as hassle free as possible. The compact nature of Huntly means a lot of people live within a short walking distance of the town centre, but as a small rural town not everyone does; a number of changes could be made that make it easier for people popping into town on quick errands of town centre businesses.

Bike stands: More bike stands should be installed across town giving secure places for bikes to be locked.

Free Parking Window: There is considerable support to introduce a 30 minute free parking window within metered parking spaces in the Town Square and it is currently being considered as an option within a wider package of parking measure changes across the local authority area and a decision is due in the first half of 2019.

Signposting to Parking: The town centre has a handful of official free car parks, however their location is not immediately obvious to those not in the know. Better signposting to these car parks should be installed to address this.

Collecting a package, buying a newspaper, withdrawing cash, whatever it may be, town centre errands are part of daily life. Making it easier gives town centre businesses a better offer against competition and increases the chance of increasing footfall; for example if you need to post something at the post office, but also need some eggs and homeware supplies you are more likely to do it all in the town centre if it is easy to get there in the first place.

□ Showcase Huntly's business community and opportunities online

Huntly Business Association is currently developing a website that profiles their members and the offer of Huntly's town centre business community at large:

- What do they sell?
- When are they open?
- How can you get in touch with them to ask a question, get a price or make an order?

Opportunities for new business ventures also need to be centrally documented online, keeping up to date listings of available spaces along with landlord and letting details so that people have the opportunity to imagine new things.

These simple efforts help showcase the business offering Huntly already has, including dedicated spaces for businesses that don't have their own website presently. It will also break down some of the barriers for those looking to start a business but don't know where to start in terms of looking for suitable premises by providing neutral but factual information.

□ Improve the 'experience' town centre businesses offer

These days successful town centres rely on offering visitors a unique experience—something that sets them apart from online or large out-of-town retail. In Huntly, this experience can focus on local, bespoke produce and services that are offered by familiar and friendly faces accustomed to the needs of their customers. Changing stock, offers and menus is critical to ensure regular visitors are given a varied experience from their previous visits. Existing businesses should be encouraged to build the experience their businesses create for the town centre.

Diversification is required if small town centre businesses are to set themselves apart from online and large out-of-town retailers.

Improving competitiveness of town centre businesses

□ Offer free business mentoring

Opportunities for support in setting up or running a business already exist, mainly through organisations like Business Gateway. However, Huntly could be doing more within the town to support current and new business ventures alike through a mentoring network. By getting existing businesses to share their experiences with each other, as well as sharing details of businesspeople who are willing to lend advice to those looking to start something new.

Mentoring between businesses in Huntly will help build confidence and trust in what is possible and encourage creative approaches to business issues that arise over the years.

□ Support ongoing and new town centre events to drive footfall

Huntly's Farmers Market runs monthly between February to December, injecting footfall to the Town Square and surrounding high streets. This is amplified when combined with other events, such as the Slow Marathon in Spring or Hairst Festival and Room to Run races in September.

There is scope to replicate this at other points in the year so greater impact can be achieved for the town centre. Combining with Christmas lights in December, the Room to Ride cycle events in spring or re-igniting Huntly Gala or Room to Roam Festival in Summer.

Organising these events requires continual commitment from active members of the community to make this happen. For Huntly to make more from this will require partnership working; the town centre activators should lead this coordination. Coordinating work between different groups of volunteers to minimise duplication, coaching new people in what it takes to organise a new public event, encouraging local businesses to take advantage of the opportunities increased footfall can bring.



The Square during the Hairst in September 2018

Increase Huntly's skillbase and lifelong learning opportunities

□ Foster partnership working between schools and town businesses and organisations

Huntly's Local Learning Community Partnership (LLCP) represents a number of different public-sector partners in education, leisure and lifelong learning, including The Gordon Schools, which together is a valuable resource of people and activity in the town; as are the businesses and community organisations currently running in the town. There are opportunities for more collaboration and partnership working on specific projects or training programmes between the schools, LLCP and the rest of the town. This could be through existing school activities like Developing the Young Workforce or could be new ventures.

□ Use the community asset of Greenmyres as an opportunity to learn and develop skills

Greenmyres Farm is a community asset owned by Huntly and District Development Trust (HDDT) some 5 miles south east of Huntly. The 63 acre site lies almost next to the A96 Aberdeen-Inverness trunk road and is linked directly by a footpath to Forestry Commission Scotland's Gartly Moor forest estate. A fully-serviced Ecobothy will be in place by the end of summer 2019 complementing a sizeable pond and ample car parking—together with planned foot and cycle paths to connect the site to Huntly and Inch—means that Greenmyres offers a unique set of learning opportunities for organisations and individuals. Rural skills, such as path building and drystone dyking, environmental science, learning about renewable energy through the community wind turbine and potential solar photovoltaic array, sports and physical education are but a small selection of the training opportunities that will be on offer.

□ Open a town workshop

Beyond formal school education there are limited lifelong learning opportunities in Huntly, presenting an acute problem for those looking to better the qualifications they gained at school, or take their skills to the next level for their business or career and those who want to retrain for a new career.

This is exacerbated by the town being geographically isolated from further and higher education providers in the region. This limits not only who has access to lifelong learning opportunities, but also what those opportunities are.

One way of addressing this would be opening a town workshop containing a range of quality tools and equipment that can be used for small-scale training and sharing of skills within the community.

A programme for lifelong learning that offers all ages the access to test and learn crafts, cooking/baking or digital skills, in order for the community to become more self-reliant and resourceful. This could range from activities for hobbyists right up to securing accredited training programmes from visiting craftspeople/trainers/educators.

Encouraging local people with skills to lead casual training sessions in order to share their skills and build communities of interest/ knowledge within the town (upcycling, sewing, digital skills, coding, plastering, rural skills, graphic design, laser cutting, cooking etc). The programme could include remakery events, design hacks and exchanges of everyday items.



The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development:
Europe investing in rural areas



**Scottish
Government**



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