

This Press Release is issued on behalf of Inverness and Nairn Enterprise, The Highland Council, Inverness City Centre Management and the City of Inverness Traders Association

For immediate use

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ACTION PLAN TO BOOST OLD TOWN TRADE

City traders in Inverness have agreed to work together with the public sector to boost the Old Town's appeal to shoppers, diners and other visitors.

In common with many other established shopping centres throughout the country, the Old Town's long-term future is under threat as its traditional customers are lured away by modern mall and out-of-town developments and access to the area and parking is becoming more difficult.

Now, however, Inverness and Nairn Enterprise (INE) has brought together a range of influential organisations - including the City of Inverness Traders Association (CITA), Inverness City Centre Management (ICCM) and The Highland Council - to address the area's risk of continued decline.

As a first step, the partners have agreed an action plan which aims both to enhance the traditional heart of the city and promote its attractions more assertively.

Its proposals include:

- * better signposting and banners to direct shoppers and visitors into the Old Town,
- * wider publicity for the Inverness City Heritage Trust grant scheme,
- * stronger branding using Inverness's new 'city IN the Highlands' identity,
- * a number of public performances as part of ICCM's summertime street entertainment programme, and
- * a separate identity created for the Old Town.

INE chief executive Stuart Black welcomed the partners' willingness to work together.

"The Old Town has its own distinctive character, thanks to the great variety of shops, pubs, restaurants and other businesses found there," said Mr Black.

"More needs to be done, however, to attract custom from local people and visitors who have a greater range of options to choose from than ever before.

"There's no single, quick answer that will transform the Old Town's fortunes, but I am certain that the solution lies in the business community and public sector working

together for the common good. There's a great deal of work to be done, and this action plan is a positive first step."

The Highland Council's area manager, Inverness, Chris Claridge, agreed that partnership was the way forward.

"The creation of a vibrant and attractive city centre that meets a range of needs of residents and visitors is one of The Highland Council's top priorities," said Mr Claridge.

"The Council is investing millions of pounds, mainly from the Inverness Common Good Fund and the Scottish Executive, in projects to remove unnecessary traffic, encourage more public transport, improve the physical environment, upgrade the CCTV system, and make the city centre cleaner and safer.

"To achieve this the council is working in partnership with INE, Inverness City Centre Management, Inverness Chamber of Commerce, the City Traders, the bus companies and other users of the city centre.

"Having refurbished the High Street and Eastgate over the last two years, the council is now embarking on a series of projects, costing in excess of £2 million, aimed at improving the appearance of the old town, the historic core of the city, and making it more pedestrian-friendly. Details of these projects will be announced shortly."

Sharon Mackay, Inverness city centre manager, said the main threat to Inverness city centre came from other urban centres and out of town developments.

"It's important that we continue to work together to address city centre matters and achieve optimum conditions for shoppers, residents, employees and investors," she said.

"ICCM has a long-standing commitment to the Old Town and this year we hope to build on past successes with the introduction of guided tours by 'ambassadors', based on our Historic Trail leaflet.

"In addition, new entertainment pitches are being introduced, including the garden at Abertarff house for re-enactments. This has been as a result of sponsorship secured from the Eastgate shopping centre which has bolstered ICCM's annual budget for summer activities in wider pitches throughout the city centre."

The City of Inverness Traders Association represents 110 members in the Old Town, and has put forward formal written proposals to enhance and revitalise the area which have been presented to The Highland Council, INE and other interested parties.

CITA's Charles Morgan said the area had become marginalised and urgently needed 'vital medicine' to halt and reverse its decline.

"CITA is only one year old, but is determined to see a brighter future for the Old Town," said Mr Morgan. "Our members are prepared to put in considerable effort to ensure that the focus, short and long term, is on the refurbishment of the old town

area. We look forward to working with ICCM, INE and The Highland Council to achieve this.

"As well as the specific points addressed in the action plan, we will continue to press for further measures, including new routes and pathways into the Old Town, urgent and substantial infrastructure improvements, the introduction of tram or electric bus services, and either free parking in the centre or parking charges to be introduced at out of town sites."

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