

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: FALKIRK TOWNSCAPE HERITAGE INITIATIVE
Meeting: ECONOMIC STRATEGY & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
Date: 18 SEPTEMBER 2012
Author: DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report advises Members on the progress of the Council's bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to seek a regeneration grant award and establish Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) status for Falkirk town centre.
- 1.2 THI projects are targeted towards conserving and regenerating traditional town centre areas. The Council's successful Stage 1 HLF application for Falkirk town centre was confirmed in May this year. This report seeks approval to support the Stage 2 application process, which takes around a year to complete. This will involve identifying and working up detailed project proposals which fit with the THI aims, consulting with the agencies and local communities concerned and recruitment of a THI Project Officer and a Heritage Community Engagement Officer to develop and communicate the project opportunities.

2.0 THE THI INITIATIVE

- 2.1 In September 2011 Members were advised that a Falkirk THI Stage 1 bid was being prepared for submission to the HLF by end November 2011. This builds on the Council's success in delivering the THI project in Bo'ness. The Council's Stage 1 bid was approved by the Trustees for the Heritage Lottery Fund in London, May 2012 with an award of £2m to Falkirk. This is the largest award that has been made under the THI scheme to a town in Scotland and the bid was recognised as one of the strongest seen in the UK. The overall cost of the THI has been identified as £5m.
- 2.2 The aims of the Falkirk THI are to:
- Improve the physical historic fabric of the town centre conservation area through repairs, reinstatement work and removal of inappropriate alterations.
 - Provide shop front grants to enhance and improve the historic retailing environment of the town centre.
 - Target grants to vacant properties to encourage vacant floor space to be brought back into economic use.
 - Manage fabric decay, protection of architectural and town centre character detail and prevent buildings falling into a dilapidated state by offering significant grant support
 - Improve the town centre public realm to improve quality of the retailing environment and enhance context of historic buildings.

- Deliver a programme of training activities to progress a range of construction and traditional skills activities
- Deliver a programme of heritage engagement and learning activities, to promote and tell the Falkirk Story within the community, and for the community to understand the significance of the THI project to the town's heritage and character.

2.3 The THI area is highlighted on the plan in Appendix 1. Following extensive discussions with HLF Officers in order to ensure the THI area would meet all HLF eligibility criteria, the THI boundary area was defined prior to the Stage 1 application submission. The plan area indicates that prioritised building grant support will be targeted towards property owners and businesses specifically within the following areas of Falkirk town centre:

- Newmarket Street
- KirkWynd
- The Steeple area
- Cow Wynd
- High Street (East)

2.4 Grants will also be available for building owners within the wider THI boundary where grant applications will be prioritised based on building condition, vacancy and heritage risk. The Falkirk THI initiative is specifically targeted to offer assistance to historic core secondary retailing areas of the town centre where, through historic decline in economic activity and subsequently building conditions, these areas have become increasingly less attractive to retailers and shoppers.

2.5 Critically, The Steeple has also been identified as a priority project where additional opportunities to utilise vacant space will be developed along with repairs and investment in its ageing historic structure. Finally, there will be public realm improvements to streetscape and wynds, building on recent successful improvements to the historic Churchyard quarter and Newmarket Street in the town centre. This was recognised as a significant improvement to the town centres historic core by the HLF Trustees.

2.6 The THI will be delivered in partnership with Falkirk Community Trust, the Council's Employment and Training Unit, the Falkirk BID, and the Falkirk Local History Society. It is envisaged that projects to be delivered under the Falkirk THI will provide training and employment opportunity activities in traditional skill and materials. Additionally the THI will complement and enhance activities of the Falkirk Community Trust and Falkirk Local History Society in broader heritage promotion of the Falkirk town centre environment in the wider Falkirk area.

2.7 The Council is now required to prepare a Stage 2 bid, to be submitted by May 2013. The Heritage Lottery Fund has allocated £50k from within their award to meet key development and promotional costs to aid this submission. The Stage 2 bid will be prepared in line with HLF guidelines and will include the following activity:

- Appointment of specialist conservation accredited design team to prepare detailed costs, design and cashflows for projects identified within the THI area over the projected 5 year life of the THI.
- Recruitment and appointment of a THI Project Officer to promote the THI and liaise with businesses, partners and property owners within the THI area.

- Recruitment and appointment of a Heritage Community Engagement Officer to deliver a THI education, interpretation and participation strategy to the community, schools and businesses served by the Falkirk town centre.

2.8 The Stage 2 Initiative bid will be based on the Stage 1 offer of £2m which, if successful, could be drawn down by building owners and partners using match funding to deliver local projects. The requirement for match funding by businesses will require those working with town centre businesses to facilitate investment. Potential sources of match funding include a recent submission to Historic Scotland's Round 5 Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS). If successful this would support the Falkirk THI and would augment contributions from property owners, Falkirk Environment Trust, the Falkirk BID and the Council.

3.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 **Policy:** The Falkirk THI aims to directly address the objectives of the Council's Town Centres Regeneration Strategy, Built Heritage Strategy and 'Transforming Places' objective of My Futures in Falkirk, as well as meeting key delivery objectives of the Falkirk Business Improvement District. The objectives of the Strategic Community Plan, Corporate Plan, and Development Plan are also met.
- 3.2 **Legal:** At Stage 2 approval the Council would be invited to sign a partnership agreement setting out the governance arrangements for the THI.
- 3.3 **Financial:** The HLF have awarded £50k to allow the Stage 2 Bid to be progressed, to assist with the appointment of specialist heritage consultant and recruitment of both the THI and Community Heritage Engagement Officers during the development period. Additional Stage 2 development core costs will be required and this can be met from existing budgets. Subject to the outcome of a Stage 2 bid, match funding would need to be generated to draw down HLF grant to deliver THI projects. This match funding would be sought from Council budgets and external funding sources and will be subject to a further report.
- 3.4 **Personnel:** Officers from Finance Services, Development Services and Falkirk Community Trust would require to contribute to work on a Stage 2 application.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 It is recommended that Committee:

- (a) notes the successful outcome of the Falkirk Townscape Heritage Initiative Stage 1 bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Programme;**
- (b) agrees to progress a Stage 2 Heritage Lottery Fund submission; and**
- (c) notes that a further report will be brought to confirm the outcome of the submission and implications for the Council.**

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Director of Development Services.

Date: 11 September 2012.

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APPENDIX

- 1) Appendix: Map of Falkirk Town Centre Conservation Area, THI Area and THI Priority Areas.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 1) Report to Economic Strategy & Development September 2011 – Town Centre Regeneration Strategy: Update Report

Anyone wishing to inspect the background report papers listed above should telephone (01324) 500971 and ask for Peter Reid.