

The background of the slide features a large, light blue watermark of the coat of arms of the Town of Ayr. The coat of arms consists of a shield divided into four quarters. The top-left quarter shows a castle tower, the top-right shows a stag's head with antlers, the bottom-left shows a three-masted sailing ship on waves, and the bottom-right shows an eagle with wings spread. Above the shield is a crown with four floral motifs. A banner at the bottom contains the motto 'AINE FOR A'.

# **Agenda Item 15**

**Town Centre Capital Fund 2019/20**

Falkirk Council

**Title:** Town Centre Capital Fund 2019/20

**Meeting:** Executive

**Date:** 10 December 2019

**Submitted By:** Director of Development Services

**1. Purpose of Report**

1.1. This report updates the Executive on the work taking place to revitalise Falkirk's town centres. It includes proposals for the delivery of works relating to the Scottish Government's Town Centre Capital Fund allocation for the period 2019/20.

**2. Recommendation(s)**

2.1. **It is recommended that the Executive agrees to:-**

- (1) proceed with the delivery of the town centre capital fund projects as summarised in the table at para 4.4 of this report;**
- (2) that further reports on the progress of this programme and further measures to assist in revitalising town centres be provided to members during 2020.**
- (3) consult with tenants where work arising from the programme would result in the disposal of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) assets.**

**3. Background**

3.1 The Council is committed to a programme to regenerate its town centres in the face of increasing pressures being experienced through economic decline and changes in shopping habits. The Council has completed regeneration programmes at Stenhousemuir, Bo'ness and phase 1 of works in Denny.

3.2 In the past year, efforts have been focusing in particular on Falkirk and Grangemouth. A new '*Revitalising Falkirk*' town centre partnership was formed to drive forward an action plan of measures to help transform the fortunes of the town centre. In Grangemouth, '*Making Places*' community consultation work has been taking place to bring forward a programme of work to help transform the town centre. These measures align with the work

taking place to promote an 'Investment Zone' initiative to help attract UK and Scottish Government funding to help boost the area's economy and attract new investment.

- 3.3 To assist the national town centre regeneration effort, the Scottish Government launched a £50 million fund earlier this year to improve amenity and help regenerate town centres. The 'Town Centre Capital Fund', has been set up in partnership with COSLA and offers support to Councils to ensure their high streets are more diverse, sustainable and successful in the face of changing and evolving retail patterns.
- 3.4 A report to the June 2019 Executive, confirmed the allocation of £1,976,000 to the Falkirk area from the fund, explaining that this must be committed by March 2020. The projects are intended to stimulate and support place based investment to encourage town centres in the Falkirk area to diversify and flourish. The report proposed a number of projects for the allocation of this fund and it was agreed that further work should take place to firm up these projects for delivery.

#### **4 Considerations**

- 4.1 The project submissions for Town Centre Capital Fund accord with the Strategic Community Plan, town centre regeneration strategy and action plans and the Scottish Government's Town Centre Action Plan. Discussions have taken place with partner agencies and stakeholders in each town centre to help define the set of regeneration projects to be taken forward.
- 4.2 The decision to invest in town centres reflects concerns over the drop in footfall and increasing town centre vacancy rates which the Council's 'Town Centre Health Check' report (2019) demonstrated are proportionately higher in Falkirk, Grangemouth and Bo'ness. Recent town centre promotion and regeneration activity, including the Falkirk Townscape Heritage Initiative has taken place, however its benefits have been unable to reverse the decline in economic performance.
- 4.3 In Falkirk, the town centre working group (formed in response to the recent closure of major stores in the town centre) developed an agreed vision and action plan. Following this, the March 2019 meeting of the Executive agreed to the formation of the *Revitalising Falkirk* partnership to take forward the town centre action plan. This action plan was an important framework for the selection of projects to be taken forward. As agreed by Council in November, a further report will be presented to Council in January on short term measures to assist the town centre.
- 4.4 It is proposed that funding is allocated to develop the following projects in Falkirk, Grangemouth and Bo'ness to help address the needs of these town centres. A summary of the proposed programme and anticipated allocation of costs is given in the table below.

**Town Centre Capital Fund Programme:**

Town	Project	Anticipated Cost £
<p><b>Falkirk</b></p>	<p><b>Car Park and Signage:</b> a) Audit to enable upgrade of ticket machine infrastructure, improve user experience/business satisfaction and technical advice/costed action plan options.</p>	<p>45,335</p>
	<p>b) Implementation of agreed car park and signage upgrade options.</p>	<p>170,000</p>
	<p><b>Conservation and Regeneration Scheme (CARS) II scheme</b> – an extension of the former THI grant support scheme for refurbishment of heritage properties, giving opportunity to protect and improve buildings in Falkirk town centre.</p>	
	<p>a) Appointment of consultants to develop a future funding proposal, identify and prioritise a grant intervention scheme for the town centre.</p>	<p>25,000</p>
	<p>b) Town Centre Vacant Repurposing Feasibility Grant</p>	<p>350,000</p>
	<p><b>Public Realm improvements</b> to Newmarket Street and Lintriggs. Prepare and implement a scheme for improved pedestrian safety and enhancement of this important area of the historic town centre.</p>	<p>550,000</p>
	<p><b>Provision of luggage lockers</b> at Falkirk Grahamston Station to support local tourism expectations.</p>	<p>3,600</p>
	<p><b>Enhancements at Falkirk High and Grahamston stations</b> to improve accessibility and connection to town centre (matching recently submitted bid to Abellio Scotrail Station Travel Plan Fund).</p>	<p>3,000</p>
<p><b>Wi-Fi</b> - digitally managed service offering town centre users connectivity and digital opportunities for business.</p>	<p>29,408</p>	
<p><b>Public Art</b> - Explore and deliver opportunities for Public Art on High Street and Grahams Road.</p>	<p>30,000</p>	
<p><b>Grangemouth</b></p>	<p>Grangemouth '<i>Making Places</i>' recommendations to be progressed including:-</p>	

	<p><b>Demolition of longstanding vacant and unlettable commercial assets.</b> This would involve clearance of longstanding vacant units to shrink the town centre footprint and enable a re-purposing of parts of the town centre. Where appropriate, consultation will be initiated with tenants to consider measures such as re-location to vacant units elsewhere within the town centre. The subsequent creation of a cleared site would enable re-development.</p> <p><b>Conservation audit</b> of town centre properties and engagement with private owners. Audit of Grangemouth town centre aligning with the strategic vision and aims for the historic environment of the Falkirk Council Area as enshrined within the Local Development Plan.</p> <p><b>Wi-Fi</b> - digitally managed service to Charlotte Dundas and Grangemouth town centre (matched to EU funding)</p>	<p>249,000</p> <p>12,000</p> <p>5,000</p>
<b>Bo'ness</b>	<p><b>Library access improvements</b> – improve access opportunities (including access for people with disabilities) to this facility. .</p> <p>Improved entrance works including lighting and signage to library building.</p> <p><b>Wi-Fi</b> - digitally managed service to Bo'ness town centre. (In addition progress opportunities for a free upgrade to Denny system and introduction of Wi-Fi service to Stenhousemuir)</p> <p><b>South Street/East Partings Grant Scheme</b> (provision of grant scheme adopting similar approach to Falkirk CARS II model above).</p>	<p>175,000</p> <p>21,000</p> <p>16,433</p> <p>280,000</p>
Further Opportunities	<b>Removal of unsightly APC/DPC units</b> across the area including: Camelon, Grangemouth (2), Falkirk (2), Bo'ness (2), Polmont, Bonnybridge (2),	13,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>£1.97m</b>

4.5 Further work will be initiated in relation to each of these projects to progress with scheme designs, consult with relevant stakeholders and conduct procurement for the works involved. This is to ensure that the funds can be committed in the timeframe necessary under the terms of grant award. It is emphasised that several of these projects involve a level of complexity, particular where restoration works of heritage buildings is involved. This is particularly the case with Bo'ness library, a grade 'B' listed building, where further work is needed to confirm the approach to this project, the likely cost of

works involved and ensure that the necessary consents are in place. Discussions with Falkirk Community Trust (FCT) and local community groups will also be needed in order to resolve the way forward in terms of access and future use of the facility. This acknowledges that the longer term prospects for this and other properties occupied by the Council and FCT are presently the subject of the Strategic Property Review. Should any revisions to the approach be necessary, a further update will be supplied to the Executive.

## **5 Consultation**

- 5.1 A number of town centre stakeholders, community representatives and partners have been consulted in order to identify the town centre investment projects proposed for the fund. This work is intended to complement the work underway in relation to the *Revitalising Falkirk* Town Centre Action Plan and the recommendations arising from the Grangemouth *Making Places* Project. Proposals in Bo'ness were developed following consultation with the Community Council and Bo'net, a group involving local community organisations and retailers.
- 5.2 Consultation will be undertaken concerning any impact of these works on any assets currently sitting under the HRA. Where this involves the disposal, transfer or sale of any HRA assets, the consent of Scottish Ministers principally under the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 may be required.

## **6 Governance**

- 6.1 The delivery of the Falkirk town centre action plan will be progressed by the Council, working closely with the *Revitalising Falkirk* partnership and other bodies. Further updates on the work of the partnership will be presented to the Executive.

## **7 Implications**

### **Financial**

- 7.1 The Town Centre Capital Fund award has attracted £1,976,000 to support the projects outlined. These funds have to be committed within the financial year 2019-20. It is anticipated that, while these funds will be committed in 2019-20, there will be a significant amount of carry forward of expenditure into 2020-21. This has been agreed with Scottish Government. The revenue implications of these investments will require to be contained within existing budgets and discussions are ongoing with relevant Services to ensure support for ongoing maintenance of this investment.

## **Resources**

- 7.2 It is proposed that a temporary project officer (anticipated cost £54k, drawn from fees associated with the above projects) is appointed for one year to progress the delivery of the regeneration fund projects. Opportunities for training and employment arising from project works will be maximised where achievable in the timescale.

## **Legal**

- 7.3 There are no legal implications arising from the report recommendations.

## **Risk**

- 7.4 There are no risk implications arising from the report's recommendations at this point. A risk matrix will be established for the delivery of the Town Centre Capital Fund programme.

## **Equalities**

- 7.5 No equality and poverty impact assessments are required.

## **Sustainability/Environmental Impact**

- 7.6 Environmental impact of the proposed works will be assessed as appropriate through the planning process.

## **7.7 Policy**

Delivery of the TCCF projects will contribute towards achievement of the Council's corporate objectives and its Falkirk Economic Strategy *Growth: Investment: Inclusion*. The proposals align with the 'Investing for Inclusive Growth' strand of the Council of the Future business plan.

## **8 Conclusions**

- 8.1 Town centre regeneration is a key priority of the Council. The new *Revitalising Falkirk* town centre partnership will play an important role in taking forward the plans to reinvigorate the fortunes of Falkirk town centre. Further updates on the work of this partnership will come forward to the Executive.
- 8.2 The award of £1,976,000 in support of the Council's town centre regeneration strategy is appreciated. The package of projects recommended for approval will make a tangible impact on local centres at this time and will aid the efforts of the Council and its partners to secure further regeneration. Further reports will be issued on the progress of this work.

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### **Appendices**

None

### **List of Background Papers:**

The following papers were relied on in the preparation of this report in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973:

- None