



IMPROVING HUNTLY'S RETAIL SECTOR Final Report



 **Huntly Handmade**



May 2011

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objectives

The overall objectives of the Huntly Retail Sector study are to:

- Identify what can be done to regenerate the Huntly retail sector, including looking at what has worked elsewhere;
- Identify how HDT and others, including local businesses and the community, can support that process;
- Identify possible funding sources to help make it all happen.

Summary Conclusions

The Huntly retail sector and the town centre retail core is facing significant challenges including **competition from larger shopping centres** such as Aberdeen and Inverurie and **smaller centres** like Banff and Keith as well as Tesco and Asda **edge-of-town superstores** and the **internet**. At the same time the **quality of the Huntly Conservation Area is being seriously eroded** by the increase in vacant ground and upper floor properties, boarded up and dilapidated property, inappropriate interventions and by poorly carried out repairs and the lack of regular maintenance of property.

In the longer term the **major expansion of Huntly** with around 630 new houses between 2007-2023 could increase the population by 1,500 (33%) and clearly there are longer term opportunities for the Huntly retail sector to service this market. The pressing challenge is to continue to boost **enterprise and business start up** and at the same time encourage existing established Huntly retail businesses to continue to **innovate and invest** in improvements, training and marketing. Huntly town centre also needs to be promoted as an attractive location for inward investing retail and service businesses.

The fundamental conclusion is that **immediate actions are required now** if the town centre is to remain as *'the heart of the town and wider rural community'*. As a response a **clear vision, strategy and action plan** has been identified.

A Coordinated Proactive Response to Immediate Challenges

A new vision for Huntly Retail Sector is based on the conclusions from regeneration policy context, town centre performance, best practice, market research, business interviews and the outcomes from Consultations/Drop In. The vision and the Action Plan consist of the three programmes and eleven projects are highlighted below.

Vision 2016 & Driving Principles

'The Huntly retail sector is thriving, with a strong and flourishing cluster of independent retail and service business and well maintained property contributing to the town's distinctive character. This includes a good choice of shops stocked with locally sourced quality products and an impressive range of family friendly cafes/bistros/restaurants for a small friendly town.

Huntly town centre actively encourages local enterprise and independent business in a compact pedestrian friendly place that promotes walking and cycling. This is a family friendly place for meeting, shopping, living and events. The Huntly Hub really is a showcase for Huntly Hand Made and is now exceptionally well used by locals and visitors.'

Strategy & Action Plan

To achieve this vision an Action Plan that consists of three programmes and eleven projects has been established. The three programmes are:

Investing in a More Attractive Place

In summary the projects are:

Project	Objectives
1. Conservation of Built Heritage: Management & Maintenance: Proactive Advice	<p>To encourage the conservation of buildings and economic regeneration through imaginative and appropriate re-use or new use.</p> <p>To remove some of the negative connotations sometimes associated with owning and maintaining historic buildings and to develop a stronger culture and awareness of the value of well maintained historic buildings.</p> <p>To enhance and preserve the historic fabric of the Conservation Area, providing protection from unsympathetic alterations or developments in the future.</p>
2. Shop Fronts and Window Display Improvements: Design Advice & Grants	Upgrade the quality of shop fronts and fascias based on re-introducing traditional elements at ground floor level and ensuring that the design of individual shop fronts considers the frontage as a whole. Achieve the active support of independent businesses. Aim to increase footfall/spending within the town centre.
3. Art Project Targeting Empty Shop Fronts	To transform the appearance of vacant/boarded up shop fronts with bright/interesting custom designed art in collaboration with for example Deveron Arts. Could include a visual interpretation of the kind of shop people would want to see: 'Shopjacket'. Similar projects have been used in Paisley & Whitley Bay.
4. Target Vacant Space: Ground & Upper Floors: Demonstration Town Centre Living Project	To provide housing in vacant or underused floorspace at both ground floor level and above shops and commercial premises.

Promoting Independent Retail & Service Business

In summary the projects are:

Project	Objectives
1. Retail Business Start Up Initiative / Youth Enterprise Competition	A competition-based initiative with Gordon Schools/Banff Buchan College/National Skills Academy Retail. Establish a local Young Enterprise competition to identify 3/4 of the best retail business ideas. Give the start up retail businesses the opportunity to open in a vacant town centre unit/Hub. This would include provision of business mentoring support.
2. Huntly Hub: Enterprise Arcade: Huntly Hand Made	Establish an 'enterprise arcade' to provide ready-to-move-into retail space as part of the Huntly Hub in the town centre. The aim would be to offer 'incubator' retail opportunities to a 3/4 businesses for up to a twelve-month period as an opportunity for start up retailers to test-trade their business idea in a supportive environment.

Project	Objectives
3. Independent Retail/Service Business Development Advice	Initiate locally delivered targeted retail business development support to independent retailers including assessing potential for increased online sales. This would include one-to-one 'shop doctor' consultations with business development/ mentoring support and coaching/training advice from a retail consultant to target 10/12 independent retailers. Huntly has to be more outward looking and actively promote its existing assets including the independent retailers in the centre. Actively use the 'Room to Roam' logo in marketing.
4. Huntly Rewards	Further development of Huntly Rewards: assess economic impact; more businesses to join: more aggressive marketing: new marketing campaign in the wider rural area
5. Model Lease: To Encourage Use Of Vacant Town Centre Property	Need to persuade owners of vacant shops to be more flexible on leases and rents to encourage retailers/users to bring the space back into use. A simple model lease could be drafted and the principles of a modest turnover rent established.

Delivering the Action Plan

In summary the projects are:

Project	Objectives
1. Reorganise Existing Organisational Structures & Establish One Effective Organisation	To champion the Huntly retail sector, the town centre and to progress this vision, strategy & action plan. Clarifying roles & responsibilities of the existing bodies is essential. Opportunity to reorganise HBA, HADTAG, HETI. Launch one very proactive, effective, well supported and resourced delivery organisation
2. Investing Collectively: Leadership & Finding the Resources: Explore Establishing a BID	Establish the best way to invest collectively. Explore establishing a BID in Huntly town centre. The BID would deliver a sustainable financial model the town centre. Businesses would vote to invest collectively in local improvements.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In early December 2010 Huntly Development Trust (HDT) commissioned a consultant team led by Douglas Wheeler Associates Ltd (DWA) to develop and **assess the feasibility of four projects** that could have potential to deliver significant economic and community benefits for Huntly and offer income-generating opportunities for HDT. The objective is to undertake further feasibility work so that HDT and other stakeholders can take an informed decision on how best to take the projects forward.

The four projects are:

- Development of the Huntly retail sector;
- Creating a new Huntly Hub in the town centre;
- Creating a regional cycling development centre;
- Provision of flexible workshop space for local trades businesses.

This Final Report focuses on the Retail Sector Strategy.

Background: HDT & Retail Sector

HDT's first business plan (2009) introduces HDT as a community enterprise working for the benefit of Huntly and District¹. Its aim² is:

"to work with others to build a resilient, inclusive, enterprising community capable of dealing with ongoing change." HDT's main activities are development and management of projects to make Huntly and District a better place to live work and visit. HDT's key activities are:

- Maintenance, regeneration and improvement of the community's physical, economic, social and cultural infrastructure, and assisting people who are at a disadvantage because of their social and economic circumstances;
- Advancement of education and training, arts, culture, heritage, sports, recreation and environmental improvement.



Huntly's town centre retail core is facing significant challenges including competition from larger shopping centres such as Aberdeen, Inverurie and Elgin as well as Tesco and Asda edge-of-town superstores and the internet. The number of empty shops has increased in recent years and some shops that do become vacant can sometimes be filled by estate agents, accountants or charity shops. Some local independent traders are facing up to the challenges and have in the past upgraded their premises through a property enhancement scheme and eighteen are involved in Scotland's first Town Loyalty Smartcard Scheme (Huntly Rewards) rewarding customers for shopping locally.

¹ As defined by the postcode sector AB54

² From HDT's Memorandum and Articles of Association

HDT and the community have identified that more action is required if Huntly is to rebuild a more interesting shopping experience in the town centre.

Brief & Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

- Identify what can be done to regenerate the Huntly retail sector, including looking at what has worked elsewhere;
- Identify how HDT and others, including local businesses and the community, can support that process;
- Identify possible funding sources to help make it all happen.



DWA Approach

The work on the Retail Sector Strategy and the three other projects has been progressed in parallel over the last three months as illustrated in the Programme below.

Figure 1.1: DWA Tasks

Retail Sector Strategy:									
3.1	Town Performance & Health Check								
3.2	Business Interviews								
3.3	Market Research								
3.4	Best Practice								
3.5	Strategy Development & Workshop								
3.6	Strategy & Action Plan								
	Review and Comments by HDT								
6.0	Final Reports & Presentation								

Final Report: Structure

The Huntly Hub Feasibility Study: Final Report is presented in six chapters namely:

- Regeneration: Policy Context & Strategy Fit
- Huntly: Town Centre Performance: Health Check & Best Practice
- Market Research: Business Interviews: Consultations
- Huntly Retail Sector: Fundamental Challenges & Towards A Strategy
- Strategy & Action Plan
- Conclusions: Recommendation & Next Steps

2.0 REGENERATION: POLICY CONTEXT & STRATEGY FIT

This chapter summarises how the emerging Retail Sector Strategy fits with national, Aberdeenshire and local economic regeneration policy initiatives. Demonstrating this kind of strategic fit forms an important part of the business case and can help influence potential partners, funders and private sector investors.

Scottish Government

The Scottish Government (SG) has a single purpose: to create a more successful country where all of Scotland can flourish through increasing sustainable economic growth. The **Government Economic Strategy** (2007) sets out the approach to delivering the Purpose to ensure that all of the Government's resources and policies are focused on its achievement. Scotland's **town centres and local high streets** are a key contributor to the national economy and in supporting the achievement of this Purpose. **Scottish Planning Policy** defines town centres as: *'city, town and district centres, irrespective of size, that provide a diverse and sustainable mix of activities and land uses which create an identity that signals their function and wider role.'* The SG policies confirm that town centres are a vital source of services, employment and leisure activity for their local populations, acting as the heart of local communities.

SG's **Tourism Framework for Change**, which aims to increase the value of tourism in Scotland by 50% in 2015 as compared to 2006. Sitting within the Framework for Change, The North East of Scotland Tourism Partnership's **Tourism Strategy and Action Plan for Growth** seeks to build tourism on the history, culture, environment and hospitality of the local people and communities.

Aberdeenshire

Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan (2009): The approved Structure Plan sets a clear direction for the future development of the North East for the next 25 years. It promotes a spatial strategy and all parts of the structure plan area fall within either a strategic growth area or a local growth and diversification area. Some areas are also identified as regeneration priority areas. There are also general objectives identified and in summary, these include; promoting economic growth; promoting sustainable economic development which will reduce carbon dioxide production, adapt to the effects of climate change, and limit the amount of non-renewable resources used; encouraging population growth; maintaining and improving the region's built, natural and cultural assets; promoting sustainable communities; and improving accessibility in developments. The structure plan provides a strategic context for the Local Development Plan. (see below)

The **Laurencekirk-Huntly road and rail corridor** is designated as a growth area in the approved Structure Plan and a focus for economic development for this part of North East Scotland.

The **Aberdeenshire Local Plan** (2007) states that larger settlements must be protected, maintained and enhanced as they are preferred locations for retail, leisure, community and business functions. Huntly is West Aberdeenshire's largest settlement. The town centre was designated a Conservation Area in 1987. Policy Env 17 seeks to protect Conservation Areas against development that would have a detrimental impact on their special character and setting by the refusal of planning permissions. New development must be of the highest quality and respect and enhance the architectural and visual qualities that give rise to the conservation area designation.

The proposed **Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2010** sets out the ground rules for the development of land under the land use planning acts. Its main purpose is to set out statements of the policies that will be used for assessing planning applications. In its proposals it also confirms the principle of development on sites across Aberdeenshire. The Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan will apply from the date the Council accept it (probably autumn 2011) until 2023. It will provide firm guidance for the period up to 2016.

The Local Development Plan is consistent with the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan. The Plan includes a proposal for a **major expansion of Huntly** and a significant land allocation is

made for 145 units in the period 2007-2016 and 485 units between 2017 - 2023. The key planning objectives for Huntly are:

- Meet the demand for housing in the Strategic Growth Area;
- Sustain existing services;
- Provide opportunities for employment;
- **Protect and enhance the role of the town as a sub-regional service centre;**
- Protect and enhance the attractiveness of the town.

Aberdeenshire Council's most recent 2009 **Town Centre Healthcheck** ranks Huntly town centre seventh out of the nine town centres considered within the 2009 study and has one of the highest vacancy rates within the study.

Aberdeenshire Council **Economic Development Strategy 2007-2011** includes the aspiration that *'the Aberdeenshire economy by 2011 will be an economy that is prosperous, equitable and sustainable through increasing productivity, diversification and inclusion'*. The strategy included a commitment to completing the action plans for the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership. In the post ATP phase. A new draft Economic Development strategy will be published for consultation in early summer 2011.

The Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership in Marr has developed its own Community Action Plan 2009-2012. Objectives in the Plan reflect the five themes identified in the Community Plan for Aberdeenshire which are:

- *Community Wellbeing*: Working together to enhance the quality of everyday life by improving health and social care, housing and community safety;
- *Jobs and the Economy*: Working together to improve the economy of Aberdeenshire and the employment prospects of the people;
- *Lifelong Learning*: Working and learning together to develop opportunities and build stronger communities;
- *Sustainable Environment* : Working together to achieve sustainability by reducing resource use, protecting the environment, combating climate change and conserving and enhancing biodiversity;
- *Developing Partnership*: Working together to make the partnership as efficient and effective as possible.

The Marr Area Local Community Plan 2008-12 also includes a commitment to 'Deliver the Huntly Development Trust Business Plan' and identifies the need to investigate demand for and develop additional starter employment units in Huntly, and explore opportunities to support social enterprises so that they can become financially self-sufficient.

Aberdeenshire Council has adopted a renewed **Sustainability Charter** for the years 2008 - 2012. The Council committed itself to: "... work to ensure all our actions are sustainable and meet the needs of the current generation of Aberdeenshire's people without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The Council adopted a **Renewable Energy Strategy** in support of its commitment to help the area become carbon neutral in the medium term.

Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Future (ACSEF) Economic **Manifesto "Building on Energy"**, seeks to build a robust resilient economy, develop skilled people and deliver a great quality of life.

Aberdeenshire Rural Development Strategy seeks to revitalise communities and develop a progressive rural economy

Huntly

Huntly Development Trust: HDT is working to the community's vision for Huntly. (see chapter 1) HDT is supported by the Scottish Government, the European Community Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme (2007-2013), Aberdeenshire Council, SNH and Forestry Commission Scotland

Huntly Business Association: The arrival of the Asda and Tesco supermarkets in 2006 re-galvanised the Huntly Traders Association, which quickly became the Huntly Business Association. HBA has become an important voice of the business community over the last few years. Huntly Ethical Trading Initiative was established in 2010 and have quickly achieved 'fair trade' status.

Huntly and District Tourism Strategy Action Plan (2009 - 2014): Was Updated October 2010 and developed by Huntly and District Tourism Action Group in consultation with key partners to accelerate the promotion of the area.

The Huntly Sustainability Plan (HuSP) (2011) has been prepared to map out how Huntly can be more sustainable and describe what role the Huntly Development Trust (HDT) and others can play to make this happen.



Regeneration Policy Fit: Conclusions

The brief review of around seventeen economic development policy documents provides a strong and supportive foundation for the emerging Retail Sector Strategy. Scottish Government policies confirm that town centres are a vital source of services, employment and leisure activity for their local populations, acting as the heart of local communities.

Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan (2009) identifies that the **Laurencekirk-Huntly road and rail corridor** is designated as a growth area. This Local Development Plan includes a proposal for a **major expansion of Huntly**. The Marr Area Local Community Plan 2008-12 also includes a commitment to 'Deliver the HDT Business Plan' and identifies the need to investigate demand for and develop additional starter employment units in Huntly. The HDT 2009-10 Business Plan, Huntly and District Tourism Strategy Action Plan (2009 - 2014) and The Huntly Sustainability Plan all acknowledge the importance of the town centre. **HBA** has become an important voice of the business community over the last few years

3.0 HUNTLY: TOWN CENTRE PERFORMANCE: HEALTH CHECK & BEST PRACTICE

This chapter reviews broad property market and retail trends, especially as relevant to North East Scotland and Huntly and summarises the comprehensive health check that was undertaken. The chapter also reviews relevant lessons for Huntly from three towns that have been identified as good practice cases in retail/town centre regeneration.

Property Market Overview

In the UK, the 2008 financial crisis affected the property markets in waves. Initially, commercial property investment values plummeted and housing market activity fell away, as purchasers of both were unable to access funding from banks. This led to early failures among residential developers, who tend to build-and-sell to generate income and are thus vulnerable to weak markets. Commercial developers with income-producing properties (shops, offices, etc.) can be more robust, but as the recession deepened these also struggled and some with particularly high bank borrowings folded in late 2009 and 2010.

Occupier demand for property did not collapse during the recession and markets have remained subdued but active. Some sectors such as affordable housing and hotels have taken advantage of the weak commercial and residential sectors to actually expand during the recession.

Scotland exited recession in 2010. The property market recovery is however extremely risk-averse and is focused upon large and deep markets with growth potential - essentially the main cities. Occupier demand is also increasingly hierarchical. Similarly, public sector funding seeking “leverage” favours larger centres where there is active: but not quite viable - private sector interest.

Retailers are generally facing a difficult time ‘walking up the down escalator’. Recent data underlines the scale of the challenge where retail sales in Britain dropped by 0.8% in February 2011 from January. Looking forward the retail environment is likely to be dominated by the challenges of global inflation, public sector cuts and limited growth in consumer credit. Aberdeen however continues to enjoy retail activity due to the positive economic background provided by a strong oil price and this has positive spillover impacts on towns like Inverurie.

These overall conditions mean that market prospects for many small to medium towns like Huntly - as far as such a generalisation can be made - remain comparatively weak. This weakness applies across the occupier, development and investment sectors and to residential as well as commercial property. For Huntly active management of the town centre and targeted investment rather than major physical regeneration are likely to be the most productive focus of resources.

Huntly: Retail Offer

Huntly’s current population is around 4,400. Most people (46.3%) work in Huntly itself with 13% of Huntly’s residents commuting to Aberdeen for comparison only in Inverurie there are 33.6% of the residents commuting to Aberdeen and 25.4% working in the town itself.

Table 3.1 Huntly: Retail Units Trends

Retail Type	2003	2005	2007	2011
Comparison	38	35	32	32
Convenience	14	15	16	10

Source: H Krause & DWA

Table 3.1 above shows the trend in terms of the decline in the number of both comparison and convenience retail units in Huntly town centre from 2003. In 2006, Tesco and ASDA supermarkets opened on the edge of town presenting a significant challenge to traditional businesses in the

town centre. As a response, local farmers established a popular monthly farmers and producers market in the town Square. Since 2007, this group has also been heavily involved in developing, with other food businesses, the Huntly Hairst Festival, which celebrates the abundant quality of food produced locally. The arrival of the supermarkets also re-galvanised the Huntly Traders Association, which quickly became the Huntly Business Association.



A detailed analysis was undertaken of Huntly town centre using the Local Plan definition of the town centre. (See Appendix 1) Table 3.2 below uses the analysis to show a summary comparison of the current retail position in Huntly, Inverurie and Keith.

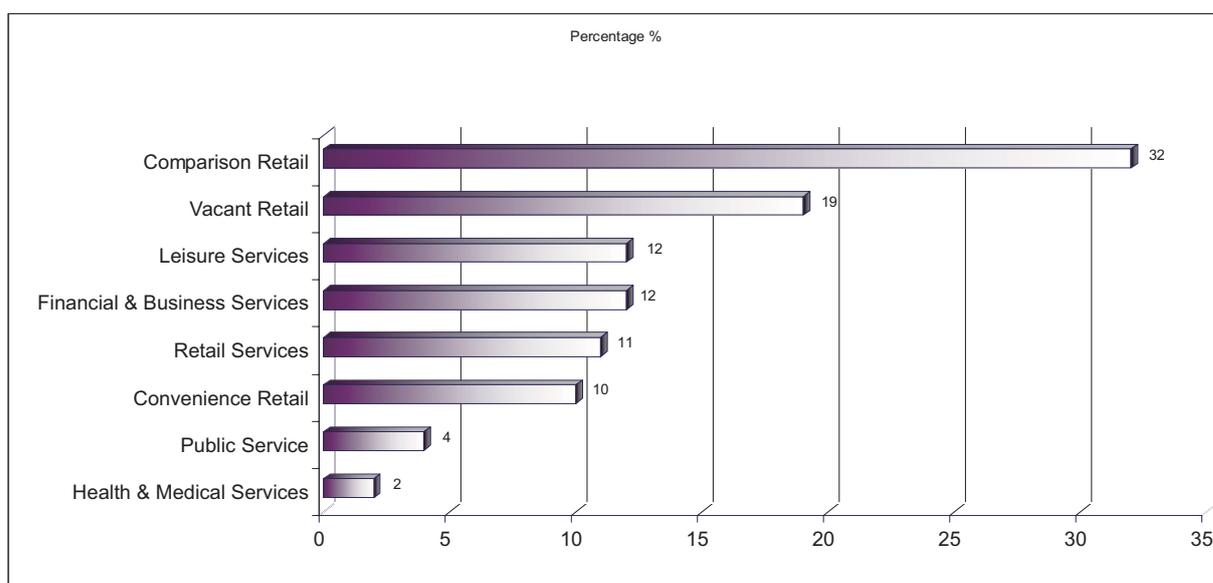


Table 3.2: Huntly Retail Offer: Analysis & Comparison

GOAD Class & Sub-Class	Huntly	%	Inverurie	%	Keith	%
Comparison Retail	32	31%	12	11%	24	26%
Convenience Retail	10	10%	58	51%	11	12%
Retail Services	11	11%	37	33%	12	13%
Leisure Services	12	12%	-		19	20%
Financial & Business Services	12	11%	-		11	12%
Health & Medical Services	2	2%	-		-	
Public Service	4	4%	-		2	2%
Religious Service	-		-		2	2%
General Office Use	-		-		7	8%
Vacant Retail	19	19%	6	5%	6	9%
Totals	102		113		94	
National Multiple Retailers	14	14%	-		5	5%
Charity Shops	4	4%	-		2	6% ?

Sources: Moray Council: Town Centre Health Check: 2010
Aberdeenshire Council: 2009
DWA: 2011

Figure 3.3: Huntly Town Centre: Retail Types (%)



Inverurie (population 11,000) has significantly more convenience retail and retail services. Focussing on Keith and Huntly which have similar populations and both serve a wider rural area. Table 3.2 shows that:

- Huntly has a higher proportion of comparison (hardware, electrical good) shops (31% against 26%)
- Both have a similar number of convenience (butcher, baker) shops (10% against 12%)
- Both have a similar number of retail services (11% & 13%)
- Huntly has significantly more vacant retail units (19% against 9%)

The decline in the number of comparison and convenience shops and the high proportion of vacant retail units shows that Huntly's town centre retail core is facing particularly significant challenges. These include competition from larger shopping centres such as Aberdeen and Inverurie as well as Tesco and Asda edge-of-town superstores and the internet. In Huntly the Post Office and banks/building societies regularly attract people to the town centre.

Town Centre Health Check

Huntly town centre is focussed on The Square with Gordon Street and Duke Street being the main shopping streets. The town centre contains a significant number (19/19%) of vacant units, mostly concentrated in the Square, Gordon Street and Duke Street/Bogie Street. This is well above the Scottish average of 5% for small centres (*Source: The Local Data Company Mid Year 2010 Report*). In summary the **strengths of Huntly town centre are still the independent retail offer** namely:

- 2 bakers
- 1 butcher/2 shops (one ownership)
- 1 pharmacy/2 shops (one ownership)
- 32 comparison retail: mostly independent including rare whiskies, comprehensive hardware & unusual gifts
- 3 hotels

In Huntly 18 independent retailers are involved in Scotland's first Town Loyalty Smartcard Scheme rewarding customers for shopping locally.

In the three months up to October 2010; Huntly Rewards: 'The Local Way to Shop & Save' reported that:

- 1,170 cardholders used their cards

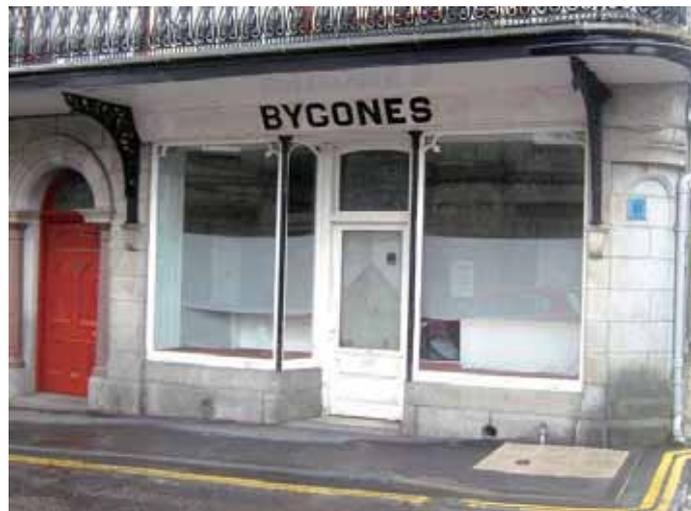
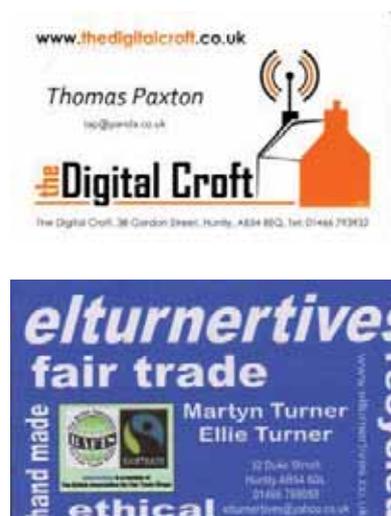


- Cardholder spending average of £4,889 per month
- Total cardholder spend at least £ 207,492 since launch
- Typical cardholder spent: total of £177 since the launch
- Average spend was £17.82 on each visit

The primary market research (see chapter 4) shows that the initiative has still really only penetrated local Huntly market and clearly still has significant potential. **The economic impact of Huntly Rewards needs to be assessed.** At this point a strong case needs to be made for Huntly Rewards to continue based on the limited penetration, the existing investment to date and the identified economic impact.

The two supermarkets on the edge of town provide free and easily accessible parking, and entice the consumer with a vast array of choice on the shelves, from basic grocery goods to more exotic foods, and a host of non food items such as clothing, electrical goods, and books - all at seemingly competitive prices. The absence of any significant choice in the town centre retail offer and the need to continue to improve the food and drink offer are an obvious justification for **promoting new retail enterprises.** A combination of new and varied retail enterprise, a higher level customer experience building on the existing friendly service, and more use of new media in sales and promotion of the Huntly retail offer will be essential in the future.

At the same time, the very high proportion of vacant ground floor shops often with vacant upper floors and the generally poor quality of maintenance of property in the town centre gives a poor first impression. In Gordon Street and Duke Street for example some shop fronts are in the poor condition and adversely affect both locals and visitors' perceptions of Huntly town centre. The wider potential of the Huntly Conservation Area is not being realised.



Three Case Studies

Appendix 2 summarises the four best practice case studies in town centre retail regeneration that have been reviewed as part of the process of developing the Huntly retail sector strategy and action plan. The relevant conclusions from the four are summarised below.

Peebles, Scottish Borders: Relevant Conclusions for Huntly

- Peebles has an attractive historic town centre with a regular series of annual festivals
- Recognition: Ranked **Top Independent Retailing Town in Scotland**, and second in the UK, for its range of independent shops and 'home town' identity but businesses have not been complacent
- Strong and proactive Peebles Traders Association with wide membership to avoid reliance on a small number of people
- Progress has been based on range of independent businesses getting actively involved to collectively agree a way ahead

- Funding has now been secured for a BID Officer; progress being made towards ballot in June this year
- Recent re-branding of Peebles has been successful: Positively Peebles & Hidden Treasures Initiative in conjunction with high profile marketing initiatives, new promotional material and ongoing visitor market research
- Strict enforcement of planning policy in Peebles to retain Class 1 shops along prime retail frontages. In contrast, in Huntly The Square and Duke Street have quite a few banks and estate agents at ground floor level - i.e. Class 2 financial, professional and other services
- Different sectors working together e.g. retail and accommodation; recently potential identified to target and attract users of a nearby mountain biking centre into the town.

Alnwick, Northumberland: Relevant Conclusions for Huntly

- Look to maximise cultural and heritage links and possibly promoting a multi-purpose performance venue to promote the local brand/identity and attractions, aimed at increasing visitors, length of visit, footfall and spend
- Alnwick was included in One North East's 'market town & rural service centres' initiative and was the focus of a 'retail distinctiveness project'
- The importance of proactive car park management in the town centre to address issues of local usage and perceptions of accessibility to the town centre
- Opportunities for creating facilities/shared use of buildings that address a combination of tourism and local community needs
- Use of joint promotions and events between Alnwick the town and Alnwick Castle.

Ulverston, Cumbria: Relevant Conclusions for Huntly

- A strong local public-private sector partnership is in place
- Branding of Ulverston as 'The Festival Town' and promoting regular markets
- A well considered annual programme of events to attract local and tourist custom
- The Market Hall is seen as an important element in Ulverston's overall visitor offer
- Combined offer of retailing, environment and tourism facilities focused on quality theme
- Strength of local and independent business involvement (for festivals and Traders' Association)
- Rail station has been refurbished with more efforts to coordinate rail and bus timetables to improve the town's public transport provision
- Passport 2 Pedalling aim to promote cycling with routes that provide for the complete novice to the seasoned cyclist, family and friends, individuals and groups.

Barga, Tuscany: Relevant Conclusions for Huntly

- Focus on contemporary culture and a very sophisticated blend of town/small city and country
- Opportunities to promote Huntly as more lively arts town with a very high quality contemporary offer and a less well known gateway to the Cairngorm National Park
- Promote events based the celebration of local food products: Assess Huntly food producers/manufacturers/cafes/restaurants/pubs/hotels interest in Cittaslow: the Slow Food organisation
- The town benefits from a strong public/private partnership that operates as a kind of 'destination management group'.

Property Market: Retail Offer: Town Centre Health Check & Case Studies: Conclusions

The property market overview highlights that for a small town like Huntly active management and targeted investment rather than major physical regeneration are likely to be the most productive focus of resources. New activity and growth are more likely to emerge from local, independent and civic/ community sources rather than "inward investment" by major developers/national retailers. Huntly needs to continue to rebuild a more interesting

independent retail offer in the town centre and clearly the retail mix in Huntly needs to be improved upon, to prevent further leakage to for example Inverurie and the continuing decline. The Loyalty Smartcard Scheme has only really penetrated the local Huntly market and wider and more aggressive promotion will be essential.

The number of vacant ground floor shops and upper floor property is a major concern, as is the lack of regular maintenance of property. This gives a very poor first impression of the town and the Huntly Conservation area.

4.0 MARKET RESEARCH: BUSINESS INTERVIEWS: CONSULTATIONS

This chapter summarises the primary market research and business interviews that were undertaken. The chapter also includes a summary of the Exhibition/Drop In event that was held in the Stewart's Hall in February 2011.

Primary Market Research

In January 2011 IBP carried out 200 street interviews in Huntly town centre and 200 telephone interviews were carried out with people who live in the wider Huntly district. The comprehensive results of the primary market research run to more than 700 pages. This is a significant resource for town centre business and interested partners and should be made widely available before the research becomes dated.

The profile of visitors to the town centre was relatively local although it was noted that 30% of visitors for the on-street survey were from the surrounding area (but not Huntly itself) and 14% were visitors to the area. The profile of visitors was elderly (46% of the overall sample and 39% of those in the in-street survey were retired). A brief sample of the results from the combined street and telephone interviews is summarised below.

Figure 4.1: What is the main reason for you to be in Huntly today (%): On Street?

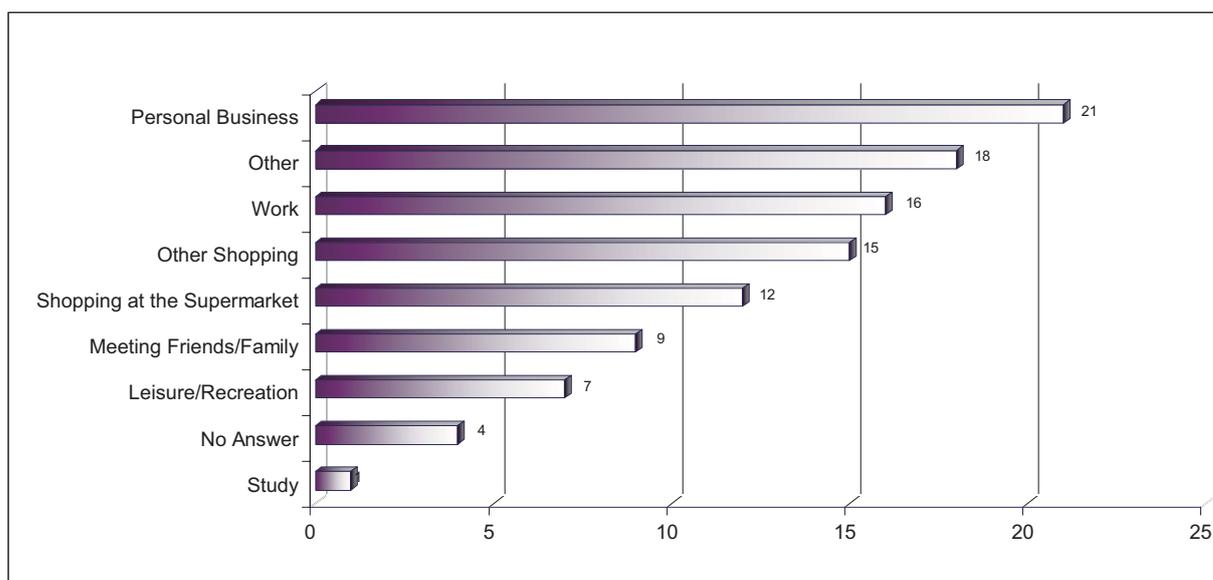


Table 4.1: Location of Bank Branch: Combined

Location	%	Count
Huntly	42%	155
Somewhere in rural Aberdeenshire	2%	6
Aberdeen	3%	13
Inverness	0%	1
Other towns such as Elgin, Inverurie, Keith, Turriff	45%	166
Other	8%	30
Not answered	1%	2

Location	%	Count
Base	100%	373

Figure 4.1 and Table 4.1 shows that Huntly town centre is still very important in providing local bank services with 21 % of respondents giving ‘personal business’ as the main reason for the visit. Huntly town centre has four bank branches and the Post Office and so still is a very important services centre for the wider rural area. Only a relatively small minority of people questioned in the in-street survey were there for shopping (at least in the traditional sense for physical goods); more often, they were there to access services or passing through. Looking forward this is a concern and needs to be reversed. When they are there for traditional shopping it is primarily for mainstream shopping like household food and consumables rather than anything more specialist.

Figure 4.2: Main Shopping Source Gifts (%): Telephone

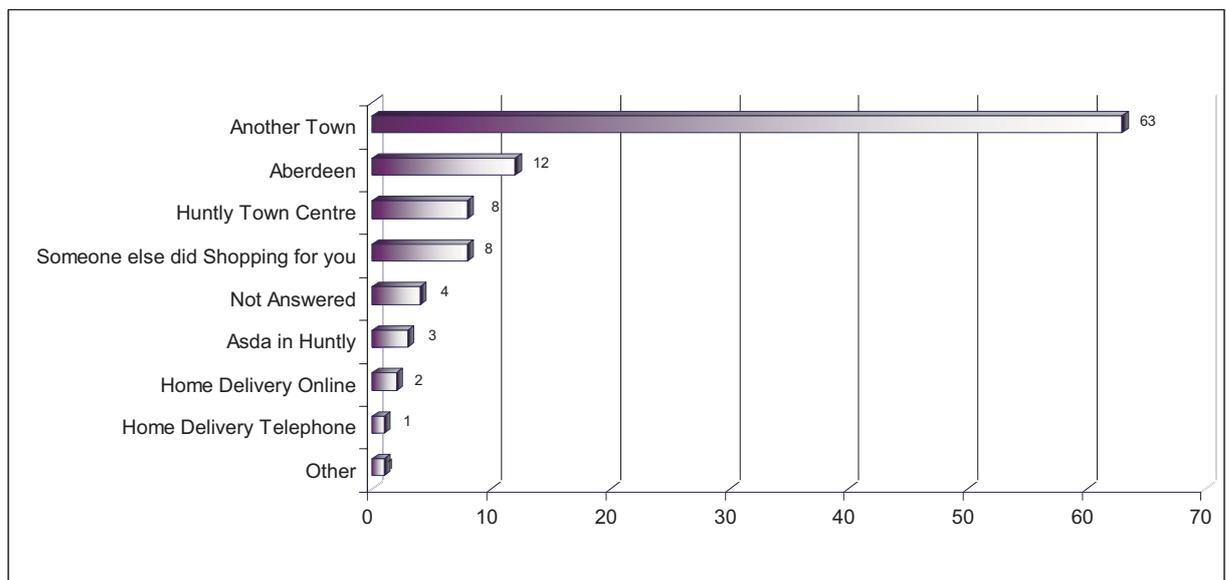


Figure 4.2 shows that only 8% of respondents identify Huntly town centre as the main source for shopping for gifts and that 63% identify another town including Banff, Inverurie, and Keith.

Table 4.2: Location of Last Meal in Bar or Restaurant: Combined

Location	%	Count
Huntly	25%	95
Somewhere in rural Aberdeenshire	8%	29
Aberdeen	8%	31
Inverness	1%	3
Other towns such as Elgin, Inverurie, Keith, Turriff	38%	143
Other	10%	36
Not answered	10%	36
Base	100%	373

Table 4.3: Location of Last Coffee, Tea or Snack: Combined

Location	%	Count
Huntly	34%	127
Somewhere in rural Aberdeenshire	3%	13
Aberdeen	5%	20
Inverness	0%	1
Other towns such as Elgin, Inverurie, Keith, Turriff	35%	130
Other	8%	28
Not answered	14%	54
Base	100%	373

Tables 4.2 and 4.3 show that Huntly attracts a higher proportion of ‘coffee/tea/snack’ visits than meals in a bar/restaurant. In both Tables the proportion answering other towns is higher than Huntly and in the ‘last meal in bar/restaurant’ the difference is a significant 13%. Overall the conclusion is that more people are likely to use Huntly for coffee/teas/snacks (34%) but less so for meals (25%) and the town centre needs to significantly improve on its food/drink offer to capture more market share.

Table 4.4: Perception of Huntly As A Destination: Most Important Issues: Combined

Issues	%	Count
Friendly customer service	60%	238
Safe and secure environment	30%	118
Good access by car	28%	112
Good range of shopping	25%	101
Competitive prices	23%	93
Safe and convenient parking	23%	91
Access to large supermarkets	19%	74
Pleasant places to eat and drink	18%	70
Attractive environment to shop in	16%	65
Good public transport	15%	59
Stylish and distinctive shops	11%	43
Good opening hours	7%	28
Regular events	5%	21
Not answered	6%	22
Base	100%	400

Table 4.4 shows in terms of perception of Huntly as a destination ‘friendly customer service was considered to be the most important issue’ and generally customer service, secure environment, access issues and parking are rated positively however some of the other ratings like pleasant places to eat and drink and stylish and distinctive shop are more lukewarm.

Figure 4.3 shows that 57% of the combined respondents agreed that Huntly town centre is in decline and clearly tackling and changing this perception will be crucial. Figure 4.4 shows that 50% of the combined respondents agreed that they were proud of Huntly and this positive perception needs to be built on.

Figure 4.3: Town Centre of Huntly in Decline (%)

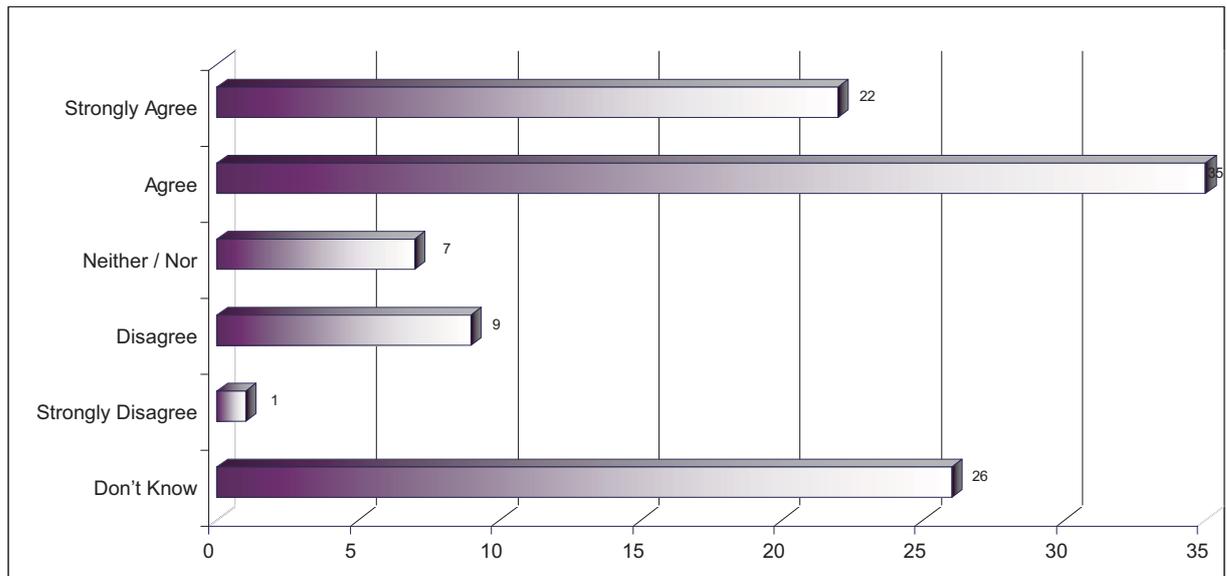


Figure 4.4: Proud of Huntly (%)

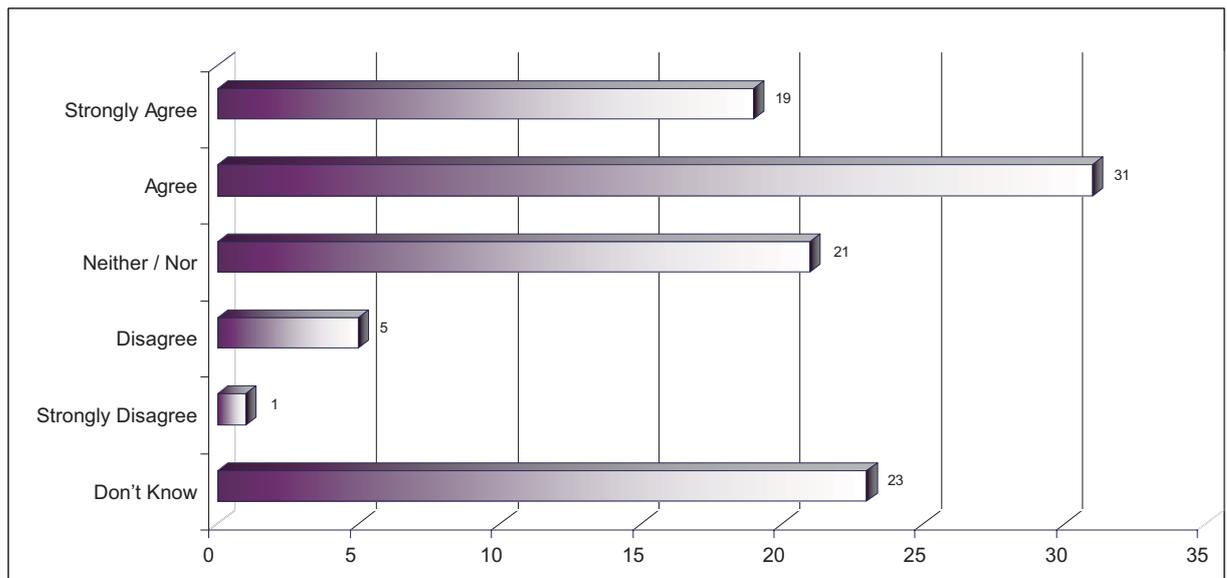


Table 4.5: Possible Initiatives - Highest Priority

Issues	%	Count
Encourage new retail businesses to start up	67%	268
Advice and support to existing independent retail businesses	49%	197
Improve public spaces	18%	72
Promote a showcase for Huntly's local products and heritage	17%	67
Improve the quality and range of events	16%	63
Establish a home delivery service for town centre businesses	15%	61
Promote the built heritage / buildings / local history	14%	56
Promote the civic and community facilities in the town	11%	44

Issues	%	Count
Further promotion of Fairtrade	10%	39
Pedestrianise part of the town centre	8%	30
Become a carbon neutral town	6%	23
Promote the Huntly brand 'Room to Roam'	5%	19
Continue and develop Huntly Rewards loyalty card scheme	4%	15
Establish a car club	3%	12
Not answered	17%	68
Base	100%	400

Table 4.5 shows that 67% of the combined respondents gave highest priority to encouraging new retail businesses to start up and second was offering advice and support to existing independent businesses. It seems that the respondents seem to be looking for an improved range and diversity of shops and that is why they prioritise support for established shops and new retail start ups. There is also some support for initiatives that might be considered to enhance the vibrancy of the town centre in some way (improve public spaces, events, community facilities etc.).

The Rewards Card seems to have really only penetrated the local Huntly market itself (36% local penetration) with less penetration of the surrounding areas. 69% of respondents did not answer the question as to why they don't have a Reward Card and this implies the Rewards Card and needs to be marketed more aggressively.

From the market research the main retail and service types that people are looking to see in Huntly town centre include: men's clothes, women's clothes: targeted at a variety of age groups; shoes; drapery and family restaurant.

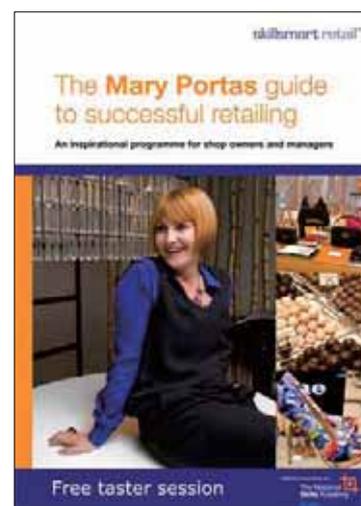
A short sample of comments from the open ended questions is summarised below:

Positive Comments: Huntly town centre has:

- Friendly good community spirit;
- Friendly people;
- Square: good DIY shops. Easy access;
- Parking, pleasant people good quality
- Good ironmongers;
- Very friendly, offer a good variety of things to do;
- Nice staff, nice clean square;
- Friendly clean wee town.

Negative Comments: Huntly town centre needs:

- Better variety of shops;
- Never visited;
- Better parking, better clothes shops;
- Better promotion and advertising of what it has to offer;
- Better range of shops;
- Better choice of clothes shops;
- Better choice of shops.



Retail Business Interviews

As part of the consultation process, interviews were undertaken in January with a selection of 14 local retailer/service business in the town centre to provide a 'snapshot' of retail and service provision in Huntly town centre. The interviews highlighted:

- All 14 were independent providing 32 FT and 34 PT jobs;
- 7 operating for more than 20 years: 4 for 6 years or less;
- 11 say more than 50% customers are regulars and mostly locals;
- Customer spend varies widely: 2 said £<10; 4 said £>50;
- 4 % said turnover down and 6 said turnover had gone up;
- 3 said turnover had remained static; 1 n/a;
- Only 7 open for a minimum of 6 days for 7 hours each day;
- 5 were members of Huntly Rewards: 7 members of Huntly Business Association;
- 9 (64%) of the businesses intend to grow.

The interviews confirmed that Huntly town centre still has a strong base of independent and well established businesses. The business now provide a **local convenience retail and service function** for a predominantly local catchment but one that extends more widely into Strathbogie/Donside either because of the nature of the business (saw sales/servicing) or because of strategic location on A96. The Post Office and banks are important in creating footfall in the town centre.

There may be an opportunity to relaunch Huntly Business Association so as to widen and deepen membership. A number of the suggested 'short/medium term actions' to improve Huntly are identified below and were highlighted during the business interviews. The main actions suggested around three emerging themes are:

Investing in a More Attractive Place

- Tackle poor shop fronts;
- Improve property maintenance;
- Pop Up Art: Empty Shops.

Promoting Independent Retail & Service Business

- Tailored business development;
- Retail start up initiative;
- Explore opportunity to promote new quality small business units and offering vacant units to start up and youth enterprise on competitive terms;
- Radio advertising campaign, focusing on a few selected businesses each week (rolling programme);
- Huntly Hub: 'shop within a shop'.

Delivering the Action Plan

- HBA refresh and to be more proactive role;
- Explore Business Improvement District

Consultation Event and Exhibition

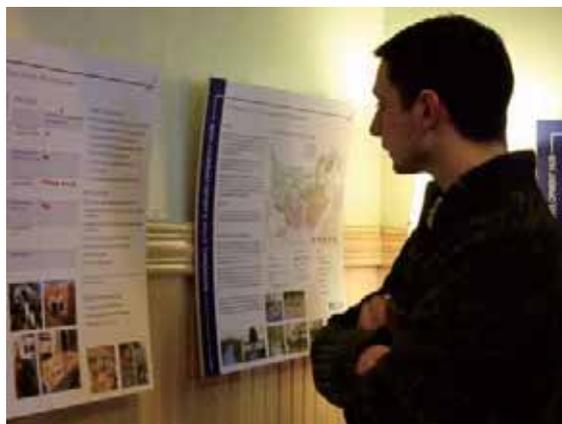
A 'Drop In' event and exhibition was held on the morning of Saturday 12 February at the Stewart's Hall, Gordon Street, Huntly to consult the wider community on the emerging proposals and 145 people visited the exhibition and 32 questionnaires were completed.

The analysis of the completed questionnaires that were relevant to the Retail Sector Strategy and Action Plan highlighted strong community support for encouraging new retail businesses to establish in the town centre and to tackle the poor first impression of the town centre/Square with vacant shops and boarded up property. A summary of the comments based on the three emerging themes is outlined below.



Investing in a More Attractive Place

- Identify a location to rent small space for crafts/local products to create a focus for out of town visitors that minimises overheads
- Art project: artistically paint the boarded up shops (4) Use Deveron Arts
- An art project which is heritage focussed - e.g. a museum shop
- Shop run as a social enterprise e.g. greengrocer with old equipment and less packaging
- A good coffee shop displaying art/crafts by local artists
- Empty shops are not a good advertisement for the economic growth of the town, gives a poor first impression as if no-one is interested in Huntly's future development (2)
- Art in empty shop fronts will create the feeling that people in the town care and will inspire others to get involved
- Important to update art projects to avoid risk of looking shabby after a while
- Town centre needs to be attractive otherwise visitors will not linger long when they visit (3)
- Once you have captured people there is more chance they will return and recommend the town to others, making it a more attractive place for people to think of setting up businesses
- Generate something in the empty shops, not outside them
- Property maintenance is most important (3) - more pressure should be put on owners to keep shop fronts tidy
- Need shop design advice and grants
- Really important to have smart well-kept shops and window displays that encourage people to want to come and shop (5)
- Where will the funding come from?
- Plant trees along the edge of the pavements
- Utilise existing premises before developing new ones
- Vacant properties could be used for craft workshops
- Could Deveron Arts use local talent for displays?
- Have the owners of empty properties been asked what their plans are? - Incentives to develop/use/let?
- Some staff in some shops could be more welcoming and friendly. Retraining required
- Improved signage needed i.e. Castle Café
- Too much of the visual impact at present is: a) shabby; b)'cheap' and out of character. Bogie St, Duke St and Deveron St need visual improvement. The Square ought to show 'quality' frontages.



Promoting Independent Retail & Service Business

- There is a need for investment within the town centre to encourage new shop holders and cafes

- Retail business start-up initiative and development advice might help prevent businesses starting then closing after a few months (3)
- Huntly Rewards a great idea, but I never use my points
- Incubator space utilising local groups, volunteers and resources which are socially accountable
- Workspace for local artists and craftspeople and an indoor quality market held regularly which would encourage tourists
- Huntly Hub would give new businesses support to start up and create an opportunity for local enterprise which is much needed (4)
- More variety of shops needed with an appeal to younger people under forty
- More clothes and shoe shops required (2) for middle aged/older people
- Better to marry up empty shops to incubator retail rather than make it a role for the Hub
- Good idea to develop cluster of high quality individual retail outlets with a unique offer
- Bring new blood/innovation/range to the retail sector
- Try to grow small local businesses into the shops
- Encourage wider use by allowing Huntly Rewards to be spent in any shop in Huntly
- Joint publicity of local businesses and perhaps a joint delivery system: using volunteers
- Must invest in the youth of today for tomorrow's future success
- Smaller premises would be popular to enable people to test their products
- Retail business start up initiative: but not just targeted at youth
- Just provide small/medium business premises: not just focused on retail and youth
- Good example in Austria: annual competition to promote locally designed or crafted items kick started a town's economy, involving local joiners, architects etc. Funds needed for a cash prize; perhaps one year rent free in a unit?

Delivering the Action Plan

- Huntly needs to retain its individuality and variety - avoid becoming a 'brand' as every other town
- Huntly is a wonderful town and we need it to be for the next generation
- A holistic view is required to make the best of what we have
- Champion the town centre but HBA in a more proactive role not necessarily a good thing
- Leadership: Need more consultation - interaction with local groups and people on say a monthly basis to provide more socially interactive projects (e.g. like less able community members providing crafts and tourist niche market in Huntly)
- This is exactly what we need! Promoting Huntly as a great place to find nice products/gifts/special items - but we need the strategy to make that happen.
- Promote Huntly as the perfect place for a day out. Need fliers all over Scotland and on the ferries e.g from the Netherlands
- Advertise Huntly - few people have been here or stop on a journey; needs to be a day visit destination for north-east residents (2)
- Creative marketing - live the motto 'Room to Roam'
- Lower rates so the bookshop on Gordon Street could move to the former Square Deal shop (2)
- Working collectively seems the best way to face extra competition: self-generated finance needed in time
- Identify target groups and special needs of Huntly's population
- Support for HBA - all partners to work together
- A combination of all of three themes is essential (2)

The questionnaire asked which three projects out of the nine listed would make most difference to Huntly's retail offer and why. Votes are summarised in Table 4.7 below:

Table 4.7: Drop In Event Voting Results

Project number		Number of votes
A Investing In A More Attractive Place		
1	Shop front and window display improvements: design advice & grants	9
2	Property maintenance: advice & assistance	8
3	Art project targeting empty shop fronts	9
B Promoting Independent Retail & Service Business		
4	Tailored business development advice: independent 'shop doctor' consultations	4
5	Retail business start up initiative / youth enterprise competition	13
6	Huntly Hub: incubator space for start up retail businesses	13
7	Further development of Huntly Rewards: more businesses to join: new marketing campaign	3
C Delivering the Action Plan		
8	Championing Huntly town and town centre: Clarify roles & responsibilities	5
9	Huntly Business Association: Even more proactive role	2
10	Leadership & finding the resources: Establish the best way to invest collectively	6

Retail business start up initiative and Huntly Hub scored highest, followed by the three 'Investing in a more attractive place' projects namely shop front and window display improvements, art project to target empty shop fronts and property maintenance.



Other comments:

- All four projects are important if Huntly is to regain its position as a good shopping centre
- Well done HDT: great thoughts and plans for the future of Huntly
- The Square needs major improvement. It is a Victorian Conservation Area. Why not give the shops in the Square grants to improve the condition of the buildings and have all the shopfronts the same with Victorian style signage?
- Looking forward for all this to happen and happy to help
- Retail study highlights number of empty properties but response to Hub indicates a wish for flexible retail space/starter units. Need to persuade vacant shop owners to be more flexible on leases and rents to solve both problems.
- HDT provides a good opportunity to have a mechanism to move things forward
- 'Room to Roam' should be used more in terms of both marketing and conceptual base for developing projects. Where is the Room to Roam sign on the A96?

There was also space on the exhibition panels to vote using a sticker on the panel and the most popular use was providing small, start up/incubator retail space.

Market Research: Business Interviews & Consultation: Conclusions

The primary market research was comprehensive and based on 200 street interviews in Huntly town centre and 200 telephone interviews were carried out with people who live in the wider Huntly district. Only a relatively small minority of people questioned in the in-street survey were there for shopping (at least in the traditional sense for physical goods); more often, they were there to access services or passing through. When people are visiting for traditional shopping it is primarily for mainstream shopping like household food and consumables rather than anything more specialist. 57% of the combined respondents agreed that Huntly town centre is in decline and clearly tackling and changing this perception will be crucial. 50% of the combined respondents agreed that they were proud of Huntly and this positive perception needs to be built on. 67% of the combined respondents gave highest priority to encouraging new retail businesses to start up. Second priority was to offer advice and support to existing independent businesses.

The business interviews confirmed that Huntly town centre still has a strong base of independent and well established businesses. The business interviews and the Drop In event helped to identify and test a series of actions based on three emerging themes namely:

- ***Investing In A More Attractive Place;***
- ***Promoting Independent Retail & Service Business;***
- ***Delivering the Action Plan***

The next chapter summarises the fundamental challenges facing the Huntly retail sector and helps to shape the emerging Strategy and Action Plan.

5.0 HUNTLY RETAIL SECTOR: FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGES & TOWARDS A STRATEGY

This chapter of the Final Report provides a synthesis of the challenges and opportunities facing Huntly's retail sector based on the review of regeneration policy context, town centre performance, best practice case studies, market research, business interviews and the outcomes from Consultations/Drop In Event. As a result four fundamental challenges that the Huntly retail sector faces have emerged and the response to these challenges has helped to shape the Retail Sector Strategy and Action Plan.

In 2005 the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership identified a vision for Huntly in 2020 and this included:

'Huntly will have a dynamic, diverse and user-friendly town centre that has kept its distinctive local character and is the heart of the town and wider rural community'

With this vision in mind and six years on, the research has highlighted the following four very pressing challenges that face the retail sector in Huntly town centre.

Huntly Retail Sector Prospects: Looking Forward: Proactive Future

The overall picture that emerges is that Huntly's town centre retail core is facing significant competition from larger shopping centres such as Aberdeen and Inverurie and smaller centres like Banff and Keith as well as Tesco and Asda edge-of-town superstores and the internet. At the same time Huntly's traditional market town status for a wider rural catchment has been eroded as households and individual shopping patterns and loyalties have changed. As a consequence the number of empty shops has increased in recent years and some shops that do become vacant can sometimes be filled by estate agents, accountants or charity shops.

An important finding from the primary market research was that only a relatively small minority of people questioned in the in-street survey were there for shopping (at least in the traditional sense for physical goods). More often, people were visiting the town centre to access services or passing through. Clearly the decline in the attraction of the Huntly retail offer has to be addressed. Some local independent traders are facing up to the challenges for example they have in the past upgraded their premises through a property enhancement scheme and eighteen are involved in Huntly Rewards rewarding customers for shopping locally. The Rewards Card however seems to have really only penetrated the local Huntly market itself (36%) with less penetration of the surrounding areas.

The property market overview highlights that for Huntly active management of the town centre and targeted investment rather than major physical regeneration are likely to be the most productive focus of resources. New activity and growth are more likely to emerge from adopting a proactive strategy and action plan that involves local, independent businesses and civic/community and third sector agencies rather than "inward investment" by major developers/national retailers.

Looking forward the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan (2009) identifies that the Laurencekirk-Huntly road and rail corridor is designated as a **growth area**. The Local Development Plan includes a proposal for a major expansion of Huntly with around **630 new houses between 2007-2023**. This could increase the population by **1,500 (33%)** and clearly there are longer term opportunities for the Huntly retail sector to service this market.

The fundamental challenge in 2011 is to identify how the Huntly retail sector can regain its competitive edge and further improve its distinctive comparison retail and service offer in a way that complements other local centres. Huntly **needs a proactive strategy and action plan** to get back to a position where it is punching above its weight against competing centres. Huntly town centre certainly cannot be complacent in the current economic climate.

Arresting the Decline: Invest in the Town Centre Conservation Area

The town centre was designated a Conservation Area in 1987 and Policy Env 17 of the current Local Plan seeks to protect Conservation Areas against development that would have a detrimental impact on their special character. Despite this the quality of the Conservation Area is being seriously eroded by the increase in vacant ground and upper floor properties, boarded up and dilapidated property, inappropriate interventions and by poorly carried out repairs and the lack of regular maintenance of property. The result is a town centre that is becoming increasingly unattractive and uninviting and giving a poor first impression. The primary market research showed that 57% of the combined respondents agreed that Huntly town centre is in decline.

This view is reinforced by evidence from the consultations, primary market research and the Drop In event. More **investment in the buildings and townscape** of Huntly town centre is required to dramatically raise the 'place quality' of the **Conservation Area** and tackle the vacant buildings and underused upper floors. The economic future of Huntly town centre is dependent on using its existing strengths in particular the built heritage of the Conservation Area. Huntly's economic regeneration will be driven by some new investment in facilities and activities but most significantly property improvements. High quality design and investment in quality upgrading are fundamental. Priority opportunities include tackling vacant space: ground and upper floors particularly in the Square, Duke Street and Bogie Street and improving shop fronts.



Promoting Independent Retail & Service Business: Small Start Up & Incubator Retail Spaces

The decline in the quantity and particularly the quality of the Huntly retail offer needs to be tackled. The primary market research highlighted that only a relatively small minority of people questioned in the in-street survey were there for shopping. One response is to encourage new start up retailers as 'fresh blood' so as to promote a wider, more varied and distinctive retail offer. 67% of the combined respondents in the primary market research gave highest priority to encouraging new retail businesses to start up. The retail business start up initiative and the proposed Huntly Hub scored highest in the responses at the 'Drop In' event.

The challenge here is to continue to boost enterprise and business start up and at the same time encourage existing established Huntly retail businesses to continue to innovate and invest in improvements, training and marketing. Huntly needs to improve its current retailing offering so as to specialise and diversify, **promoting and encouraging niche retail opportunities**. Some of these retail (and supply) opportunities are briefly examined in the next chapter. The proposed shop within a shop or 'enterprise arcade' would provide ready-to-move-into retail space as part of the Huntly Hub in the town centre. The aim would be to offer 'incubator' retail opportunities to a 3/4 businesses for up to a twelve-month period as an opportunity for start up retailers to test-trade their business idea in a supportive environment.

Championing the Huntly Retail Offer: Delivering the Action Plan

Huntly Traders Association, which became the Huntly Business Association in 2006 and has become an important voice of the business community over the last few years. In 2006, Huntly and District Tourism Action Group (HADTAG) emerged as a spin-off of HBA and instantly made its mark by winning recognition for its efforts at the 2007 Northern Lights Tourism Awards. In 2010 a Huntly Ethical Trading Initiative was formed. Now in early 2011 all three organisations are facing significant resource and funding challenges in an ‘era of austerity’ for public sector funding. At the same time and partly because Huntly is a small town the organisations are experiencing a loss of momentum and ‘a reliance on the few same old faces’.

In this context, like all councils across the country, Aberdeenshire Council is facing significant reductions in budget and is considering the best ways to maintain delivery of essential services. Council officers have developed a programme of budget reductions based on the council’s strategic priorities and particularly focussing on economic development, early intervention and demographic forecasts. This has very significant implications for agencies like HDT who have driven local economic regeneration initiatives like Huntly Rewards and have historically provided people (time and skills) support to HBA and HADTAG. HDT is funded by Aberdeenshire Council, LEADER and Scottish Natural Heritage, and enjoys in-kind support from Forestry Commission Scotland. HDT has been charged by its funders with becoming a self-financing organisation in the near future and so HDT are actively exploring income-generating opportunities.

In this new era it might be time for a review of the three organisations (HBA, HADTAG, HET) and to look to a radical reorganisation into one re-energised and much more effective organisation with more new members committed to implementing this strategy and action plan.

The Retail Sector Strategy and Action Plan is summarised in the next chapter.



6.0 HUNTLY RETAIL SECTOR: STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN: IMPLEMENTATION & WAY FORWARD

A new vision for Huntly Retail Sector has been identified based on the conclusions from regeneration policy context, town centre performance, best practice, market research, business interviews and the outcomes from Consultations/Drop In. The vision is highlighted below and the remainder of the chapter summarises the Strategy and Action Plan and next steps. The Action Plan consists of the three programmes and eleven projects.

Vision 2016 & Driving Principles

‘The Huntly retail sector is thriving, with a strong and flourishing cluster of independent retail and service business and well maintained property contributing to the town’s distinctive character. This includes a good choice of shops stocked with locally sourced quality products and an impressive range of family friendly cafes/bistros/restaurants for a small friendly town.

Huntly town centre actively encourages local enterprise and independent business in a compact pedestrian friendly place that promotes walking and cycling. This is a family friendly place for meeting, shopping, living and events. The Huntly Hub really is a showcase for Huntly Hand Made and is now exceptionally well used by locals and visitors.’

Strategy & Action Plan

To achieve this vision an Action Plan that consists of three programmes and eleven projects has been established. The three programmes are:

- Investing In A More Attractive Place;
- Promoting Independent Retail & Service Business;
- Delivering the Action Plan.

The next sections of this chapter present the details of the Action Plan programmes and projects.

Programme 1: Investing in a More Attractive Place

In order to reverse the decline of the retail offer in the town centre, Huntly clearly is in need of further ‘place making’ investment focussed on the Huntly Conservation Area. The retail and wider town centre offer is set within a deteriorating physical environment and the priority should be to focus on safeguarding and improving the character of the conservation area. Any upgrading of the town centre needs to be matched by investment in ensuring that the Huntly town centre “product” has the attributes to win back local market share. Providing distinctive and quality goods and services and an experience which meets 21st century needs and aspirations will be essential.

Therefore there is a need for investment and improvements that focus on the distinctive character of Huntly town centre and looks to attract more residents and visitors to use the town centre. Other small towns like Stromness, Wick, Bo’ness, Newmilns and Wigtown have used Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Townscape Heritage Initiative projects (THI) to drive improvements. THI’s are often implemented in parallel with Historic Scotland funded Conservation Area Regeneration Schemes (CARS).

THI's use HLF grants to help communities to regenerate Conservation Areas displaying particular social and economic need. THI encourages partnerships of local organisations to carry out repairs and other works to a number of historic buildings, structures or spaces within these defined areas that are often contained within town centres. THI schemes are expected to deliver the following outcomes:

- Preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of conservation areas affected by high levels of deprivation and in need of regeneration;
- Bringing historic buildings back into appropriate and sustainable use;
- Safeguarding the character of conservation areas through: increasing training opportunities in heritage skills; increasing community participation; and improving approaches to conservation management and maintenance.

Other projects that aim to make Huntly town centre a more attractive place include further improving shop fronts and collaborating with Deveron Arts to promote an arts project targeted at 'boarded up' shop fronts. Deveron Arts have recently secured Creative Scotland funding for the next two years and now have an appointed 'arts visitor'.

Priority Projects:

The priority projects in the Action Plan under this theme are:

Project	Principles & Justification	Funding & Agencies	Priority	Next Steps
1. Conservation of Built Heritage: Management & Maintenance: Proactive Advice	<p>To encourage the conservation of buildings and economic regeneration through imaginative and appropriate re-use or new use.</p> <p>To remove some of the negative connotations sometimes associated with owning and maintaining historic buildings and to develop a stronger culture and awareness of the value of well maintained historic buildings.</p> <p>To enhance and preserve the historic fabric of the Conservation Area, providing protection from unsympathetic alterations or developments in the future.</p>	AC Historic Scotland HLF	High	<p>Provide building owners with appropriate technical advice on building maintenance and conservation possibly based on the 'Kilmarnock Conservation Area Maintenance Guide'.</p> <p>AC to review conservation area boundaries and prepare and implement a Conservation Area Management Plan</p> <p>With AC investigate the possibility of preparing a Townscape Heritage Initiative/CARS bid.</p>
2. Shop Fronts and Window Display Improvements: Design Advice & Grants	Upgrade the quality of shop fronts and fascias based on re-introducing traditional elements at ground floor level and ensuring that the design of individual shop fronts considers the frontage as a whole. Achieve the active support of independent businesses. Aim to increase footfall/spending within the town centre.	AC Historic Scotland	Medium	<p>Approve an appropriate scheme with clear design advice.</p> <p>Initiate a shop fronts and fascias improvement scheme, including elements such as canopies and shutters.</p>
3. Art Project Targeting Empty Shop Fronts	To transform the appearance of vacant/boarded up shop fronts with bright/interesting custom designed art. Could include a visual interpretation of the kind of shop people would want to see:	Deveron Arts Owners	High	<p>Deveron Arts to produce a brief & costing for four pilot projects</p> <p>Look for local/regional sponsorship for materials</p>

Project	Principles & Justification	Funding & Agencies	Priority	Next Steps
	'Shopjacket'. Similar projects have been used in Paisley & Whitley Bay.			
4. Target Vacant Space: Ground & Upper Floors: Demonstration Town Centre Living Project	To provide housing in vacant or underused floorspace at both ground floor level and above shops and commercial premises.	AC Owners Private Sector	Medium	Promote a design feasibility to identify a 'pilot' and promote the initiative with building owners



Programme 2: Promoting Independent Retail & Service Business

One response to encourage new start up retailers as 'fresh blood' so as to promote a wider, more varied and distinctive retail offer could be based on the '**Retail Rocks**' initiative.

Retail Rocks is an innovative new public/private sector partnership model which has been developed with the support of the Scottish Government using TCRF and COSLA. Retail Rocks is a competition-based programme which engages with the local community by giving the start up retail businesses the opportunity to open in vacant town centre units. Critical to the success of the new businesses is the provision of business mentoring and the model already has commitment from key high street retailers and specialists in retail to provide in-kind support.

It is designed to revitalise town centre retailing and communities by encouraging, enabling and supporting sustainable retail entrepreneurship; breaking down existing socio-economic and demographic barriers; re-educating traditional, negative mind-sets; providing a catalyst for widespread regeneration; and creating the confidence for further investment. The initiative is already targeting vacant retail units in Torry/Aberdeen and Kilmarnock with the aim of transforming them into vibrant retail businesses providing amenity and specialist retailing to help develop a new customer base for the town centres.

Huntly Farmers' market has recently run a similar type of competition with Gordon Schools Young Enterprise scheme.

The proposed shop within a shop or 'enterprise arcade' would provide ready-to-move-into retail space as part of the Huntly Hub in the town centre. The aim would be to offer 'incubator' retail opportunities to a 3/4 businesses for up to a twelve-month period as an opportunity for start up retailers to test-trade their business idea in a supportive environment. Space would be available on very affordable terms, business mentoring and a business-coaching package could also be made available to help the business develop and grow.



The Hub could house a ‘**Handmade in Huntly**’ themed incubator with a focus on local material with the aim of producing quality, niche market products (spinning, weaving, knitting, etc.) This could include a combination of a workshop/making, providing (short) courses and shop/selling, where visitors were encourage to see products being made as well as buying the products. Overall the focus on quality crafts would generate additional economic activity and complement the existing retailers rather than focussing on local food products where there is likely to be more competition and therefore displacement.

Scottish Borders Council's **One-to-One Retail Business Support** project also aims to deliver targeted retail business development support to independent retailers. The package of support mainly comprises of the provision of the one-to-one business development/mentoring support and coaching/training advice from a retail consultant to target 40-50 independent retailers, along with a smaller provision of 'one-to-many' events that are open to all. The one-to-one business audits are flexible, responding to the needs of the individual retail business, and take the form of onsite meetings with the retailer and consultant, to go through a business evaluation diagnostic and action plan (which will be provided back to the business within 48 hours by the consultant), with follow up contact/visits made as appropriate. Technical assistance on merchandising and marketing, staff training, identification of financial support programs, tackling trade waste and recycling and regulatory issues would also be available. Along similar lines Skills Development Scotland /Aberdeenshire Council through the National Skills Academy Retail are offering free taster sessions of the ‘**Mary Portas guide to successful retailing**’.

Priority Projects:

The priority projects in the Action Plan under this theme are:

Project	Principles & Justification	Funding & Agencies	Priority	Next Steps
1. Retail Business Start Up Initiative / Youth Enterprise Competition	A competition-based initiative with Gordon Schools/Banff Buchan College/National Skills Academy Retail. Establish a local Young Enterprise competition to identify 3/4 of the best retail business ideas. Give the start up retail businesses the opportunity to open in a vacant town centre unit/Hub. This would include provision of business mentoring support.	Gordon Schools Banff Buchan College National Skills Academy Retail PSYBT	High	Approach agencies to get broad agreement in principle Establish rules/target property. Approach owner. Launch competition

Project	Principles & Justification	Funding & Agencies	Priority	Next Steps
2. Huntly Hub: Enterprise Arcade: Huntly Hand Made	Establish an 'enterprise arcade' to provide ready-to-move-into retail space as part of the Huntly Hub in the town centre. The aim would be to offer 'incubator' retail opportunities to a 3/4 businesses for up to a twelve-month period as an opportunity for start up retailers to test-trade their business idea in a supportive environment.	HDT HBA AC PSYBT	Medium	Set out in Huntly Hub Feasibility Study
3. Independent Retail/Service Business Development Advice	Initiate locally delivered targeted retail business development support to independent retailers including assessing potential for increased online sales. This would include one-to-one 'shop doctor' consultations with business development/ mentoring support and coaching/training advice from a retail consultant to target 10/12 independent retailers. Huntly has to be more outward looking and actively promote its existing assets including the independent retailers in the centre. Actively use the 'Room to Roam' logo in marketing.	AC National Skills Academy Retail HBA or successor	High	HBA or successor to agree priorities & identify appropriate delivery arrangements.
4. Huntly Rewards	Further development of Huntly Rewards: assess economic impact; more businesses to join: more aggressive marketing: new marketing campaign in the wider rural area Essential to make the case to continue Huntly Rewards based on hard evidence.	Savvy/AC HBA or successor Marketing Group	High	Clear short term marketing and promotion actions to be agreed
5. Model Lease: To Encourage Use Of Vacant Town Centre Property	Need to persuade owners of vacant shops to be more flexible on leases and rents to encourage retailers/users to bring the space back into use. A simple model lease could be drafted and the principles of a modest turnover rent established.	HBA or successor	Medium	Agree principles Local solicitor to draft model agreement 2/3 owners to pilot

Programme 3: Delivering the Action Plan

Effective leadership and a tangible commitment to implementing the Retail Sector Strategy and delivering the Action Plan will be essential. This includes giving priority: time and financial resources to ensure the delivery of priority projects at a challenging time for public sector funding. In practical terms the Retail Sector Strategy and Action Plan sets out what is believed to be achievable given the resources that are likely to be available in Huntly in the short and medium term.

Now in early 2011 Huntly Business Association, Huntly and District Tourism Action Group and Huntly Ethical Trading are facing significant resource and funding challenges in an 'era of austerity' for public sector funding. At the same time Huntly Business Association, Huntly and District Tourism Action Group are experiencing a loss of momentum and 'a reliance on the few same old faces'. It may be timely to look to a **radical reorganisation with the support of Aberdeenshire Council and HDT** to bring together and establish one much more effective organisation with more new members committed to implementing this strategy and action plan.

One way of quickly energising the new organisation could be to explore establishing a Business Improvement District (BID) in Huntly town centre. The BID would deliver a sustainable financial model to a defined geographical area: the town centre. Here businesses would vote to invest collectively in local improvements in addition to those delivered by statutory authorities. They are often, although not exclusively, a partnership arrangement through which the local business community and the statutory authorities can take forward projects which will benefit the local economy.

A BID is not a substitute for central or local government investment, but an additional investment to strengthen the local economy and give local businesses a unified voice, helping to provide an arena for businesses and local authorities to increase their understanding of each other's priorities.

BIDs are developed, managed and paid for by the business sector by means of a compulsory BID levy which the businesses within the proposed BID area must vote in favour of before the BID can be established. Each business liable to contribute to the BID will be able to vote on whether or not the BID goes ahead. Before agreeing to fund the additional investment the businesses within the proposed BID area would determine the priority issues based on this Strategy and Action Plan and decide how their money will be spent and how much they are prepared to pay. The BID Business Plan that is prepared should include performance guarantees, a management structure and a delivery mechanism.

In addition to central support, the Scottish Government is offering a development grant of up to £20K to business groups and associations, community councils and Development Trusts working in partnership and with their local authority to develop Improvement Districts across Scotland.

The three programmes would put in place a clear forward looking strategy and action plan that would deliver the conditions to make Huntly town centre a more attractive location to attract 'footloose' retail and service business looking to locate in east Aberdeenshire/west Moray. The availability of property and model leases could all form part of Huntly's marketing package.

Priority Projects:

The priority projects in the Action Plan under this theme are:

Project	Principles & Justification	Funding & Agencies	Priority	Next Steps
1. Reorganise Existing Organisational Structures & Establish One Effective Organisation	<p>Champion the Huntly retail sector, the town centre and to progress this vision, strategy & action plan. Clarifying roles & responsibilities of the existing bodies is essential.</p> <p>Opportunity to reorganise HBA, HADTAG, HETI.</p> <p>Launch one very proactive, effective, well supported and resourced organisation</p>	HBA, HADTAG, HETI, HDT AC	High	<p>Organisations to agree recommendation & new principles</p> <p>Establish small management group</p> <p>Secure funding & sponsorship</p>
2. Investing Collectively: Leadership & Finding the Resources: Explore Establishing a BID	<p>Establish the best way to invest collectively.</p> <p>Explore establishing a BID in Huntly town centre. The BID would deliver a sustainable financial model the town centre.</p>	HBA, HADTAG, HETI, HDT AC BIDs Scotland	High	Organisations to agree to explore BID

	Businesses would vote to invest collectively in local improvements.			
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Glossary

HDT: Huntly Development Trust

HBA: Huntly Business Association

HADTAG: Huntly and District Tourism Action Group

HETI: Huntly Ethical Trading Initiative

AC: Aberdeenshire Council

HLF: Heritage Lottery Fund

HS: Historic Scotland

PSYBT: Prince’s Scottish Youth Business Trust

7.0 CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATION & NEXT STEPS

Conclusions: A Coordinated Proactive Response to Immediate Challenges

The Huntly retail sector and the town centre retail core is facing significant challenges including competition from larger shopping centres such as Aberdeen and Inverurie and smaller centres like Banff and Keith as well as Tesco and Asda edge-of-town superstores and the internet. At the same time the quality of the Huntly Conservation Area is being seriously eroded by the increase in vacant ground and upper floor properties, boarded up and dilapidated property, inappropriate interventions and by poorly carried out repairs and the lack of regular maintenance of property.

In the longer term the major expansion of Huntly with around 630 new houses between 2007-2023 could increase the population by 1,500 (33%) and clearly there are longer term opportunities for the Huntly retail sector to service this market. The pressing challenge is to continue to boost enterprise and business start up and at the same time encourage existing established Huntly retail businesses to continue to innovate and invest in improvements, training and marketing. Huntly town centre also needs to be promoted as an attractive location for inward investing retail and service businesses.

The fundamental conclusion is that **immediate actions are required now** if the town centre is to remain as *'the heart of the town and wider rural community'*. As a response Douglas Wheeler Associates Ltd has identified a **clear vision, strategy and action plan**. The action plan consists of three programmes and eleven projects. The three programmes are:

- Investing In A More Attractive Place;
- Promoting Independent Retail & Service Business;
- Delivering the Action Plan.



Recommendation

HDT and in due course HBA, HADTAG, HETI are invited to approve the Huntly Retail Sector Strategy and Action Plan vision, three strategic programmes and eleven projects as the basis for future investment decisions on the Huntly Retail Sector over the next six years.

Implementation Strategy & Next Steps

The immediate next steps are:

1. HDT Board to formally approve the Huntly Retail Sector Strategy and Action Plan vision and three strategic programmes as a basis for consultation with partners and stakeholders.
May/June 2011

2. In due course with HDT and Aberdeenshire Council facilitation: HBA, HADTAG, HETI Boards to formally approve Huntly Retail Sector Strategy and Action Plan vision and three strategic programmes as the basis for future investment decisions on the Huntly Retail Sector over the next six years. *June/July 2011*
3. HBA, HADTAG, HETI and HDT with the support of Aberdeenshire Council to publish an illustrated executive summary/promotional brochure and arrange a launch event. *August 2011*

DWA/HDT Retail Sector /Final/240511

APPENDIX 1

ANALYSIS OF HUNTLY TOWN CENTRE: GOAD CLASSES (March 2011)

1 Business Name	2 GOAD Class	3 GOAD Sub-Class	4 Primary Activity	5 Independent National or Vacant
TV Services Superstore	Retail	Comparison	Electrical & Other Durable Goods	Ind
Cruickshank's Furniture	Retail	Comparison	Furniture, Hardware & Household Goods	Ind
Robertson Décor/Paints	Retail	Comparison	DIY & Home Improvement	Ind
Largue Pharmacy (two units)	Retail	Comparison	Chemist	Ind
Stuart Barnett	Retail	Comparison	Electrical & Other Durable Goods	Ind
Whiskies of Scotland	Retail	Comparison	Other Comparison Goods	Ind
Hazel's Hats Millinery	Retail	Comparison	Ladies Wear & Accessories	Ind
Huntly Mobility Centre	Retail	Comparison	Other Comparison Goods	Ind
Bargain Box	Retail	Comparison	Charity Shop	Ind
Nickel & Dime	Retail	Comparison	Crafts, Gifts, China & Wool	Ind
Graham Webster Photographic	Retail	Comparison	Photographic	Ind
Blythswood Care	Retail	Comparison	Charity Shop	N
Huntly Fabrics	Retail	Comparison	Textiles & Soft Furnishings	Ind
Strathbogie Flooring	Retail	Comparison	Carpets & Flooring	Ind
Orb's Bookshop	Retail	Comparison	Second Hand Goods & Books	Ind
Cancer Support	Retail	Comparison	Charity Shop	N
Red Cross	Retail	Comparison	Charity Shop	N
Peter Watt & Sons	Retail	Comparison	Hardware & Household Goods	Ind
Duke Street Pharmacy	Retail	Comparison	Chemist	Ind
Eltornatives/Fair Trade Gifts	Retail	Comparison	Crafts, Gifts, China & Wool	Ind
Staircase Company	Retail	Comparison	Furniture	Ind
Deveron Arts Studio (NB: Outside Local Plan area)	Retail	Comparison	Arts & Art Dealers	Ind
Fred Watt Opticians	Retail	Comparison	Opticians	Ind
Auto Spares of Huntly	Retail	Comparison	Cycles & Accessories	Ind
Huntly Carpet Centre (Carpets Vinyls Rugs Blinds)	Retail	Comparison	DIY & Home Improvement	Ind
Fred Watt Jeweller	Retail	Comparison	Jewellery, Watches & Silver;	Ind
Duncan & Todd Opticians	Retail	Comparison	Opticians	Ind
Furniture Plantation	Retail	Comparison	Furniture	Vacant
Hairy Sporrán	Retail	Comparison	Crafts, Gifts, China & Wool	Vacant
Scottish Hydro Electric	Retail	Comparison	Electrical & Other Durable Goods	N
Duncan Taylor & Co - Scotch Whisky	Retail	Comparison	Other Comparison Goods	Ind
	Retail	Comparison	Florists	Ind
RS McColl Newsagents	Retail	Convenience	Confectionery, Tobacconist, Newsagent	N
The Larder	Retail	Convenience	Delicatessen	Ind
Essons of Huntly (Costcutter)	Retail	Convenience	Convenience Store, Groceries & Frozen Food	Ind
J Rizza & Sons	Retail	Convenience	Delicatessen	Ind
Gordon Rhind/Raeburn	Retail	Convenience	Butcher	Ind
J & I Smith Confectioner	Retail	Convenience	Baker & Confectioner	Ind
Somerfield	Retail	Convenience	Supermarket	N
R.A & J Bruce Newsagent	Retail	Convenience	Confectionery, Tobacconist, Newsagent	Ind
Strathbogie Bakery	Retail	Convenience	Bakers & Confectioners	Ind
Forbes Raeburn & Sons Butcher Poulterer	Retail	Convenience	Butchers	Ind
G & A McDonald Plumbing & Heating	Service	F&BS	Other Business Services	Ind
Clydesdale Bank	Service	F&BS	Retail Bank	N
Peterkins Solicitors	Service	F&BS	Legal Services	Ind
Lloyds TSB	Service	F&BS	Retail Bank	N
RBS: Royal Bank of Scotland	Service	F&BS	Retail Bank	N
Bank of Scotland	Service	F&BS	Retail Bank	N

1	2	3	4	5
Business Name	GOAD Class	GOAD Sub-Class	Primary Activity	Independent National or Vacant
Digital Croft	Service	F&BS	Other Business Services	Ind
Financial Options - Solicitors & Estate Agents	Service	F&BS	Legal Services	Ind
Murdoch McMath & Mitchell Solicitors & Estate Agents	Service	F&BS	Legal Services	Ind
Stewart & Watson Solicitors & Estate Agents	Service	F&BS	Legal Services	Ind
Stewart & Watson Solicitors & Estate Agents	Service	F&BS	Legal Services	Ind
David Brown & Co Chartered Accountants	Service	F&BS	Financial Services	Ind
Eric P Massie - Funeral Services	Service	H&MS	Other Health & Medical Services	Ind
Strathbogie Veterinary Surgery	Service	H&MS	Veterinary Surgery	Ind
Huntly Hotel	Service	Leisure Services	Hotel & Public House	Ind
Gordon Arms Hotel and Cheers Bar	Service	Leisure Services	Hotel & Public House	Ind
Scotscoup	Service	Leisure Services	Betting Office	N
Castle Cafe	Service	Leisure Services	Café	Ind
Crown Bar	Service	Leisure Services	Bar/Public House	Ind
Ex Servicemens Club	Service	Leisure Services	Bar/Public House	Ind
Dragon Garden Chinese Takeaway	Service	Leisure Services	Fast Food & Takeaway	Ind
Chinatown: Take Away	Service	Leisure Services	Fast Food & Takeaway	Ind
Strathdeveron Bar	Service	Leisure Services	Bar/Public House	Ind
Huntly Chip Shop	Service	Leisure Services	Fast Food & Takeaway	Ind
The Merry Kettle Tea Shoppe	Service	Leisure Services	Café	Ind
(No name on fascia)	Service	Leisure Services	Fast Food & Takeaway	Ind
Tourist Information Centre	Service	Public Service	Tourist Information	N Seasonal/ closed
Huntly Library & Museum	Service	Public Service	Library & Museum	Ind
Aberdeenshire Council One Stop Shop	Service	Public Service	Council Offices	N/A
The McBoyle Scout Centre	Service	Public Service	Community Centre	N
Strathbogie Saw Service	Retail	Retail Service	Other Retail Outlets	Ind
Post Office	Retail	Retail Service	Post Office	N
The Huntly Framers	Retail	Retail Service	Other Retail Outlets	Ind
Chaps	Retail	Retail Service	Hairdressers/Barbers	Ind
Just Hair	Retail	Retail Service	Hairdressers/Barbers	Ind
Huntly Motorcycles	Retail	Retail Service	Vehicle Repair & Services	Ind
TD Barbers	Retail	Retail Service	Hairdresser/Barbers	Ind
Solo	Retail	Retail Service	Hairdresser/Barbers	Ind
Top 2 Toe	Retail	Retail Service	Hairdresser/Barbers	Ind
Nails and Beauty Salon	Retail	Retail Service	Health & Beauty	Ind
Hair & Beauty Day Spa	Retail	Retail Service	Hairdresser/Barbers	Ind
The Coffee House	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant
-	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant
Former Square Deal	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant
-	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant
Former Wrights of Huntly	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant
-	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant
Former VG	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant
Huntly Wool & Crafts	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant
Former Edward Mearns	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant
-	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant
The Bed Centre	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant
Former Royal Oak Public House	Vacant	V	Vacant PH	Vacant
Former Furniture Shop	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant
-	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant
Former Pharmacy	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant
Former Jack Cooper Family Bakers	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant For sale
Former printers	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant
-	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant
Former Bygones	Vacant	V	Vacant Shop	Vacant

APPENDIX 2

BEST PRACTICE CASE STUDIES IN TOWN CENTRE RETAIL REGENERATION:

This appendix summarises the four best practice case studies that have been reviewed as part of the process of developing the Huntly retail sector strategy and action plan. The case studies are:

- Peebles: Scottish Borders
- Alnwick: Northumberland
- Ulverston: South Cumbria
- Barga: Tuscany Italy

i. PEEBLES: SCOTTISH BORDERS

Context

Peebles is located 23 miles south of Edinburgh, and is the third largest town in the Borders. It has a dramatic setting at the convergence of the River Tweed and Eddleston Water. Peebles played an important role in the woollen industry until the 1960s and although one woollen mill remains operational in the town, the industrial composition of Peebles has changed; the town is now home to many people who commute to work in Edinburgh as well as being a popular tourist destination, especially in the summer. The population of Peebles was 8,159 in 2001 and is now over 10,000 as a result of residential expansion. See <http://www.peebles.info/>

Retail Offer

Peebles has the distinction of being ranked, in 2005 by the New Economics Foundation, as the **Top Independent Retailing Town in Scotland**, and second in the UK, for its range of independent shops and 'home town' identity, in contrast to the ubiquitous 'clone towns' predominant in other areas.

It is considered that one of the reasons that Peebles achieved this accolade has been due to Scottish Border's Council policy of rigorous enforcement of the prime retail frontage rules over a number of years, and by resisting attempts to breach its integrity. (Policy 124 of Tweedale Local Plan 1996 states that the frontages of High Street and Eastgate are designated as prime retail frontages and uses other than Class 1 shops will not be allowed at ground floor level. Policy ED4 of the Scottish Borders Local Plan Finalised Dec 2005 similarly states that the council will resist the loss of shop uses (Use Class 1) within prime retail frontages as identified on the LP proposals maps. Proposals for other uses at ground floor level on prime retail frontages will be refused unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the development would not result in an unacceptable adverse impact on the vitality and viability of the town centre.)

The main shopping core is focussed along High Street, Old Town and Northgate. The town centre has a high number of owner-occupier businesses and is refreshingly light on national branded stores. In the mix are a handful of good food retailers, shoe shops and clothing outlets. The historic core also has alleyways and medieval closes to discover.

As part of the Beltane Festival in June shops in the town decorate their windows in the town colours of red and white and many compete in the decorated shops competition, competing for the Maharajah's Shield. Peebles Farmers' Market is held on the 2nd Saturday of each month (9.30am-1.30pm) at the Eastgate Car Park; up to 18 local producers attend each month. Although many shops stay open during normal trading hours, a few of the smaller family owned shops keep to the tradition of closing for the local half day holidays on Wednesday's.

Culture & Heritage

As one of Scotland's royal and ancient burghs, Peebles was a major centre for brewing (18th Century) and wool production (19th and 20th centuries) while today it is a market town and with a strong tourism and visitor market with easy access to a range of outdoor activities such as

fishing, golfing, cycling and horse-riding. Destination locations include Glentress Forest with its renowned mountain bike centre and Traquair House close by.

Peebles is an attractive historic town and has a wide spacious High Street. A large part of the town including the entire town centre has Conservation Areas status. Notable constructions include the red sandstone Peebles Hydropathic Hotel (1878-81) - popularly known as the '[Peebles Hydro](#)'; the elaborate Chambers Institution (c.1859); the [Mercat Cross](#) (14th century); and the [Tweed Bridge](#) (15th century). Other local attractions include the ruined Cross Kirk, St Andrews Kirk, Neidpath Castle, Tweedale Museum and Gallery and the Kailzie Gardens.

Peebles is also festival town with a number spectacular annual celebrations taking place. The famous week-long Beltane Festival held in the third week in June is without doubt the town's premier cultural event and showcases local legend, traditions and history. Music takes centre stage with the Peebles Jazz Festival held annually each spring. Now entering its fourteenth year the festival is a firm fixture on the Scottish jazz calendar.

Peebles is also widely being recognised as an arts destination and many visitors make the trip to enjoy the wide range of local contemporary and traditional art available. The 240 seat Eastgate Theatre & Arts Centre designed by architect Richard Murphy opened in 2004 after £2.79million of funding was raised, is a lively hub for arts activities in the Borders. It attracts touring theatre companies, performing visual arts, dance, craft, music and cinema all year round. The renowned Peebles Arts Festival has grown in stature each year and the summer festival helps to bring the town alive. Activities include drama, folk music, crafts, exhibitions, demonstrations, arts/crafts workshops, talks, busking and guided walks. Peebles Arts Festival recently became a Limited Company.

There is a thriving food community within Peebles and the Peebles Food Festival, held in October is now in its fifth year. Recent events have included Kids Ready Steady Cook, the farmers market, demonstrations from some of Scotland's top chefs and the new beer festival. In addition, the Rugby Sevens tournament is keenly contested in April each year.

Transport Accessibility & Car Parking

Parking in the town is free, except on Saturdays charges range from 20p to £1.80 in the three main car parks (295 spaces), namely Edinburgh Road, Greenside and at the swimming pool. With no bus station in the town a particular concern is the clogging up of the car parks by the bus operators using them as makeshift bus depots and potentially forcing tour buses to bypass the area.

Peebles does not have a railway station and will not be served by the Borders rail line.

Business Improvement District (BID)

Positively Peebles is a community-council established project to improve and maintain a successful and vibrant town centre within Peebles. The Positively Peebles project has been progressed by a small working group, led by community council secretary David Pye throughout 2009. The key objective of Positively Peebles has been to develop a Business Improvement District (BID). In March 2010 it was awarded £20,000 of Scottish Government funding and was granted a further £20,000 through LEADER Round 8 funding in September to help progress the project.

Although Peebles was voted top independent retailing town in Scotland in 2004, many in the town feel that the town has become a little tired in recent years as the recession has taken its toll along the High Street. The local view however it is that the town centre can build on its already strong foundations to reinforce the identity of the town as a premier trading environment whilst keeping the local identity that has served the town for decades. It is considered that the BID is a positive solution to improve things and the best model to *deliver more of an impact by working as a collective unit rather than individually.*

In January 2010 a meeting was held at the Eastgate Centre to help move the project forward and numerous interested local business representatives as well as by representatives from local community groups, the community council, Scottish Borders Council, Business Improvement

Districts Scotland, VisitScotland and Scottish Borders Chamber of Commerce and the town centre manager attended.

In late October 2010 Drew Moore, Peebles Rugby Captain was appointed as BID Development Officer by Positively Peebles with the task of formally establishing the first BID in the region. His initial job has been to meet as many local businesses as possible, to gauge opinion on the real issues affecting local traders. A business plan will then be drafted and widely discussed before being finalised. This will detail all of the information needed for a business to decide whether to support the proposals put forward in a ballot in June 2011. It is expected that a successful ballot of businesses will lead to the formation of a BID in Peebles.

It is recognised that tourism is vital for the town, so potential BID projects may include improving signage and undertaking a wide range of marketing and promotional initiatives. A recently produced questionnaire for businesses showed that there is a strong interest in making improvements to the town centre by means of a BID.

Peebles Retailers Association (PRA), 'Community Challenge' & Hidden Treasure Initiative

The Peebles Retailers Association has over 50 members who work together to promote the town as a shopping destination in its own right. The Peebles Retailers Association realised that although they had a strong day visitor market, largely from the Edinburgh area, they needed to look at ways of reaching other markets and attracting more overnight and short break visitors. Community Challenge, part of VisitScotland's Challenge Fund, was set up to help communities understand how to make their tourism offering better, they will pay back time, money & effort invested and will be a hugely beneficial experience.

During 2007 the Peebles Retailers Association carried out an evaluation of their visitors in as part of the Community Challenge. Information was collected about visitors to the town by placing short questionnaires in shops, hotels and cafes. The seven questions found out about the type, length and purpose of people's visit, what they did while in the area, what they liked and so on, building up a picture of the types and interests of visitors so that Peebles can better respond to what their visitors want.

Peebles Retail Association adopted an innovative way to get people to pick up and fill in the forms: The printed version was attached to a very attractive free postcard of Peebles that draws attention when you see it on tables and counters. All people had to do was to tear the perforations to 'liberate' their free postcard, leaving the questionnaire ready to be completed. To encourage people to fill in the form, (which is also still on the peebles.info website,) the retailers offer the incentive of a quarterly prize draw and information-feeds about special events in the town

The report revealed that visitor numbers were up on previous years and that visitors enjoyed the experience of the independent shopping on offer, the local people, the relaxed and friendly atmosphere and the small/quaint town atmosphere. The report also showed that there was a huge amount of untapped potential in the mountain bike and golf market. Accommodation providers were already tapping into the golf market however the report backed up the view of the PRA that they needed to do more to attract the large and growing number of mountain bikers which were by passing the town to go to facilities at Glentress.

It was identified that working with a more diverse range of businesses could help develop the Peebles offering and that there would be advantages for considering joint activities with local groups in the area such as Tweed Valley Tourist Consortia. To enable them to increase their membership, the association renamed itself the Peebles Traders Association. It was felt that new blood would encourage more participation in driving forward activities, concluding that "There should be a greater spread of responsibility and ownership of roles within the committee and wider membership to avoid reliance on a small number of people" *Peebles Retailers Association Evaluation Report 2008*.

In 2007 Peebles launched an ambitious campaign to promote its hidden treasures to potential visitors, aimed at grabbing a slice of the multi-million pound visitor trade from Edinburgh (23 miles away) and Glasgow (40 miles away), as only a trickle of visitors to these cities make the short detour to the relatively unknown visitor destination of Peebles. Peebles Traders Association secured £70,000 funding to launch the Peebles - A Hidden Treasure Initiative. Sponsorship was from local traders with grants from VisitScotland (£30,000 from their Challenge Fund), Scottish

Borders Council and the Peebles Common Good Fund. It also teamed up with a number of hotels in the area to offer value added short breaks.

The PTA undertook a number of marketing initiatives which included a high-quality Peebles Town Guide (50,000 print run), a new-look website, a bus poster advertising drive, promotional postcards and a PR campaign in local and national media. Adverts on 25 Lothian Transport buses promoted Peebles as a uniquely different place to do your Christmas shopping. The belief was that people are tired of the same shopping mall outlets offering the same old range of products and if they make the short trip from Edinburgh they will find Peebles a breath of fresh air. The slogan carried was 'Discover a different shopping experience in Scotland's most independent retailing town.'

Research on the year-long marketing campaigns showed that visitor numbers were up by 15 per cent and that local retailers, hotels, restaurants and inns benefited to the tune of around £692,000. The PTA stated that it has succeeded in driving up business and pulling in an extra 17,400 visitors to the town in 2007.

Relevant Conclusions for Huntly

- Peebles has an attractive historic town centre with a regular series of annual festivals
- Recognition: Ranked **Top Independent Retailing Town in Scotland**, and second in the UK, for its range of independent shops and 'home town' identity but businesses have not been complacent
- Strong and proactive Peebles Traders Association with wide membership to avoid reliance on a small number of people
- Progress has been based on range of independent businesses getting actively involved to collectively agree a way ahead
- Funding has now been secured for a BID Officer; progress being made towards ballot in June this year
- Recent re-branding of Peebles has been successful: Positively Peebles & Hidden Treasures Initiative in conjunction with high profile marketing initiatives, new promotional material and ongoing visitor market research
- Strict enforcement of planning policy in Peebles to retain Class 1 shops along prime retail frontages. In contrast, in Huntly The Square and Duke Street have quite a few banks and estate agents at ground floor level - i.e. Class 2 financial, professional and other services
- Different sectors working together e.g. retail and accommodation; recently potential identified to target and attract users of a nearby mountain biking centre into the town.

ii. ALNWICK: NORTHUMBERLAND

Context: Market Town Initiative

As the largest settlement within the district, Alnwick plays an important role as a centre for a dispersed rural hinterland. It is the focus for a wide range of community activities and facilities serving the town and beyond, and an important administrative centre for the District. The population of the town of Alnwick is estimated to be 7,600 and this amounts to 24% of the population of Alnwick District. See www.visitalnwick.org.uk

Retail Offer

Alnwick town centre is the largest shopping centre in the District - comprising more than 150,000 sq ft of retail floorspace - and contains a broad mix of national multiples and independent traders. The retail mix accommodates the needs of Alnwick residents and tourists, with a number of speciality shops as well as Homebase, Sainsbury's and Argos, all of which help to increase footfall and hence benefit businesses throughout. There are also a number of banks, building societies and other service sector occupiers and a relatively broad mix of cafes, restaurants and pubs, indicating that Alnwick is able to sustain an evening economy. The low level of vacant shop units suggests that the town centre is in a comparatively healthy state.

Alnwick was included in One North East's 'market town & rural service centres' initiative and the focus of a 'retail distinctiveness project'.

The Focus property information database highlights that there are still some requirements for retail space from national multiple traders. It is, however, very difficult to pinpoint the space these retailers could occupy, as modern requirements of retailers like these are for standard shaped units of particular types of dimensions. Most of the retail properties in Alnwick town centre are not of the size or configuration demanded by modern multiple retailers.

Culture & Heritage

Alnwick has a rich cultural heritage. It remains inextricably linked with its castle. This association is being continued through the Alnwick Garden, just a few minutes walk from Alnwick Castle, with a highly ambitious project to create one of the largest contemporary gardens in Europe. The first phase of the £10million scheme is now open and has the potential to transform Alnwick as a major visitor destination. See www.alnwickcastle.com

Alnwick's cultural offer has also been enhanced by the transformation of the former St Mary's Church in Bailiffgate into the Alnwick and District Museum. Funding was secured from the Heritage Lottery, District Council and ERDF with seedcorn finance provided by the Alnwick Round Table and the Duke of Northumberland. The museum has become an important educational resource for the town as well as a visitor attraction. It also provides meeting facilities for local voluntary and community organisations. This is a good example of achieving a balance between providing a service and facility for locals, as well as visitors and tourists - a balance that could be achieved with new facilities in Huntly.

The arts play a major role in the cultural life of the town. The Alnwick Music Festival commenced in the late 1970s and has become an event of regional significance supported by an independent organising body. The Alnwick Playhouse is an important local arts facility. It was a cinema until 1979 and was then established as a multi-purpose performance venue in the early 1990s and acts as a centre for the arts, music, drama, dance and film. It attracts 50,000 visitors per annum and has a 'friends' organisation with 2,000 members. Operating as a not-for-profit trust, the Playhouse receives funding from the District Council and Northern Arts. It is essentially regarded as a facility for local people, with a broad range of programming, although it also acts as a tourist attraction during the summer months.

Local Economy

The economy of Alnwick has traditionally been associated with the primary industries (agriculture, mining and fishing). Although agriculture retains some importance in the local economy the decline of the primary industries led to unemployment and out-migration during the 1970s and 1980s. Declining agricultural incomes and employment will continue to impact on the economy of the town. Northumberland Estates is one of the largest local employers although the Estate is engaged in a broad programme of diversification and is less dependent on agriculture than in the past. Alnwick also remains over-dependent on public services. RAF Boulmer and the District Council are important local employers.

Retail Distinctiveness Shop Front Improvement Scheme

Following the production of the Retail Distinctiveness Action Plans for Alnwick, Northumberland Strategic Partnership (NSP) worked with a range of partners to develop a suite of projects for investment in 2007/08. These initial activities aimed to pave the way for further investment in retail distinctiveness in Northumberland's market towns during the period 2008/09 to 2010/11.

In Alnwick the appearance of some buildings had been spoiled by inappropriate shop fronts, which are unsympathetic to the character and appearance of the buildings and their wider surroundings. Consequently the Alnwick and Amble Retail Distinctiveness Action Plans identify improvement and replacement of shop fronts as a priority activity. Shop fronts are the most conspicuous part of a building's façade. They make a big impact on the appearance of a town centre. They contribute to people's first impression of a town and their condition affects a town's image. High quality shop fronts make a town feel more welcoming to locals and visitors, improve its image, contribute towards a stronger sense of identity, and, importantly, encourage a greater number of shopping visits

The shop front improvement scheme aims to improve shop fronts in selected areas as a means of supporting the growth of local businesses, improving the local environment and raising the image of the town centres amongst locals and visitors. Funding for the Scheme was provided by the Regional Development Agency (ONE NorthEast) through Northumberland Strategic Partnership.

In addition to the shop front scheme above, activity in Alnwick in 2007/08 focused on two main activities:

- **The provision of enhanced markets.** The two areas of activity designed to invigorate the market square as the heart of the town's retail area including investigating the feasibility of installing a fixed or retractable canopy/awning covering part or all of the market square and purchase of new market stalls along with a trailer and van to transport stalls to other venues.
- The appointment of consultants to take forward **design improvements and remodelling of landscape and planting areas in the town**, improvements to signage and street furniture and improvements to alleyways which link car parks with the town centre, in particular those that lie between The Alnwick Garden and the town centre

Transport Accessibility & Car Parking

The town centre highway network consists of three principal streets:

- Narrowgate
- Bondgate
- Market Street

There is a local perception that there is insufficient parking within the town centre. In contrast, the County Council consider that adequate parking is available, except during local festivals and special events (at such times existing contingency plans adequately cater for additional parking demand). An initial assessment of parking demand indicates that central parking operates at or above capacity, while peripheral parking is less well used.

The need for improved parking management is recognised by the County Council. Although a pay and display system is in operation within the town centre and waiting restrictions apply, the scheme does not necessarily cover a sufficiently wide geographic area. As a consequence, commuter parking is permitted in locations where shoppers' provision would be more appropriate.

Consideration has been given to widening the pay and display area and waiting restrictions, encouraging commuters to park out with the shopping core. As a result, additional parking opportunities will be created for short stay trips. A review of existing charges and waiting restrictions may also enable turnover per space to be increased further, and thus increasing the overall number of parking opportunities available.

Relevant Conclusions for Huntly

- Look to maximise cultural and heritage links and possibly promoting a multi-purpose performance venue to promote the local brand/identity and attractions, aimed at increasing visitors, length of visit, footfall and spend
- Alnwick was included in One North East's 'market town & rural service centres' initiative and was the focus of a 'retail distinctiveness project'
- The importance of proactive car park management in the town centre to address issues of local useage and perceptions of accessibility to the town centre
- Opportunities for creating facilities/shared use of buildings that address a combination of tourism and local community needs
- Joint promotions and events between Alnwick the town and Alnwick Castle.

iii. ULVERSTON, SOUTH CUMBRIA

Context: Festivals Driving the Vision

Ulverston is characterised by a compact Georgian centre, with Market Street which is a Conservation Area, as its focal point and the town has a population of 12,000. The Ulverston and Low Furness Partnership was formed in 2002 with the aim of improving the street environment, and of making better use of the town's tourism potential through promotion and festivals. There is now a strong programme of festivals, running throughout the year, which serve to attract tourists and locals. There are more than 20 annual festivals; all are organised by volunteers, each with its own organising committee. This includes Printfest: an exhibition of original prints by contemporary artists, the Dickensian Festival at the end of December attracts around 30,000 visitors; the Lantern Procession in September attracts 10,000; and the Carnival attracts 20,000. ([See www.southlakeland.gov.uk/events](http://www.southlakeland.gov.uk/events))

In addition to the programme of festivals, there are also three markets that take place in the town. The Thursday market is the original market, with a Saturday market having been introduced in the 1970s. There is also a farmers' market/food fair that is held monthly on a Saturday. In addition to these, the Market Hall (owned and managed by South Lakeland District Council is open Monday to Saturday (closed on Wednesdays). It comprises 20 stalls of various sizes that are unlocked, curtained units. These are let on a 6 monthly basis, with low tenant turnover.

The Thursday outdoor market comprises approx. 30 stalls, while the Saturday market generally comprises 6 or less stalls. Goods sold at these markets include fruit and vegetables, fish, baked goods, meat, eggs, outdoor wear, clothing, cards and stationery, household goods, footwear and luggage. The monthly farmers' market sells a wide range of locally produced food products, and usually comprises approx. 12 stalls.

Retail Offer

The Ulverston Traders' Association - representing local shopkeepers - has a generally positive view on the markets. The Market Hall is seen as an important element in Ulverston's overall attraction to tourists and visitors. It is viewed as something that attracts customers to Ulverston, rather than as source of competition to local shops. The Traders' Association has a similar positive view of the Thursday outdoor market; however, the Saturday market is seen as disappointing; it is in ongoing decline, which will have a negative impact on the town. The monthly farmers' market/food fair is viewed as successful. The Association also commented on the importance of attracting more tourists and visitors to the town.

After a number of years of relatively poor retailing offer, Ulverston has picked up over the past eight years or so. Traders and retailers have become more responsive to the tastes and demands from visitors and as a result have seen an increase in footfall and profit. Ulverston now provides a shopping experience for visitors, tourists and locals - a variety of specialist shops, a pleasant street environment with car parks close to the town centre, a good choice of tea shops and cafes, and of course the indoor and outdoor markets, which add significantly to the overall appeal and attraction of the town.

Environment

The natural and built environment of the Ulverston area plays a fundamental role in its prosperity, diversity and culture.

Strengths

- Attractive rural area situated just beyond the border of the Lake District National Park
- Largely unspoilt Georgian Conservation Area covering much of Ulverston's central area, with more than 200 listed buildings
- The town forms the start of the Cumbria Way (70 mile trail between Ulverston and Carlisle)

Weaknesses

- Despite its attraction the landscape of the area is not recognised with any special protection or national status
- The area has a network of active and redundant quarries and mineworkings, which scar parts of the surrounding countryside

Local Economy

The town's economy is disproportionately dependent on manufacturing when compared with the rest of the UK and continues to account for 37% of jobs in the Ulverston area. This is being complemented by a growing number of art and craft related businesses, and a renewed tourism industry, with Ulverston becoming known as the 'Festival Town'.

Strengths

- Large, skilled workforce
- A number of unique high tech industries serving global markets
- Salary levels in many local companies are well above average for Cumbria
- Vacancy rates in shops have been increasing recently, but they are still not at the high level of 10 years ago
- The town has a good range of multiple and convenience shops - particularly given its modest catchment area and the increasing influence of Barrow-in-Furness
- Ulverston's successful rebranding and increasing attraction as the Festival Town

Weaknesses

- Growing vulnerability of local manufacturing concerns to foreign and UK competition
- Declining Auction Mart in Ulverston and threats to future viability
- Continued decline of Ulverston's street market - particularly on Saturdays
- Over-dependence on manufacturing industry

Transport and Accessibility & Parking

More than 20% of households in the town do not have access to a car. The station provides access to the West Coast Mainline to the east, and Barrow and West Cumbria to the west. 10 bus services run from or through Ulverston.

Strengths

- A new 'Rural Wheels' Community Transport Initiative developed through the Rural Partnership Programme, which is funded by the Countryside Agency and operated by Cumbria County Council has been introduced to the area, with the aim of improving accessibility for rural villages
- Rail station was refurbished thus improving the town's public transport provision
- Town centre and nearby residential areas are well served by bus links
- There is adequate off-street parking provision in a range of accessible car parks to cater for almost all occasions/reasons for visit

Weaknesses

- The area is remote and peripheral in national terms, and road links via the A590 are of mixed quality
- No bus terminal or transport interchange for people who are dependent on public transport
- Scheduled bus services linking villages with Ulverston are relatively infrequent and expensive
- Limited coach parking in the town
- The area does not yet have a well-developed cycle network

Passport 2 Pedalling

Passport 2 Pedalling is a new initiative inspired by the London Olympic Games and aims to make it easy to get involved in cycling in the Lake District and Cumbria and for everyone to have great fun on two wheels! The initiative includes leaflets with routes to highlight the great cycling

activities for all the family in the Lake District and Cumbria and this includes the route from Ulverston to Penny Bridge. The routes provide for the complete novice or seasoned cyclist, family and friends, individuals and groups, there are great routes across the county for everyone to discover and enjoy. See www.golakes.co.uk

Relevant Conclusions for Huntly

- A strong local public-private sector partnership
- Branding of Ulverston - 'The Festival Town' and promoting regular markets
- A well considered annual programme of events to attract local and tourist custom
- The Market Hall is seen as an important element in Ulverston's overall visitor offer
- Combined offer of retailing, environment and tourism facilities focused on quality theme
- Strength of local and independent business involvement (for festivals and Traders' Association)
- Rail station has been refurbished with more efforts to coordinate rail and bus timetables to improve the town's public transport provision
- Passport 2 Pedalling aim to promote cycling with routes that provide for the complete novice to the seasoned cyclist, family and friends, individuals and groups.

iv. BARGA: TUSCANY ITALY

Context: Strong Public Private Partnership

The small medieval city of Barga has a population of 10,600 and is located on a spur overlooking the mid-Serchio River Valley in the mountainous northwest corner of Tuscany. Barga, in its heyday, was a stronghold of The Medici's Florence and against the often fiercely independent republic of Lucca. This is still evident in its culture, language, art and architecture. Barga is nevertheless on the edge of the wilder countryside of the Garfagnana, "land of wolves and outlaws" otherwise known for vast chestnut forests, wild boar, delicious pecorino cheeses and porcini mushrooms.

Barga is a typical Tuscan hill town that adds to this a rich contemporary cultural life of summer jazz and opera festivals, regular international art exhibitions, outdoor markets, and a theatre founded in 1688, in addition to a town life that is vibrant, diverse and will take any excuse to celebrate. Whether it is the Porcini mushroom season or the chestnut harvest, there is always something going on, 'to remind you that you are, in fact, in the middle of somewhere'. The town benefits from a strong public/private partnership that operates as a kind of 'destination management group'.

Two Faces of Barga: Retail Offer

The city of Barga is home to a sophisticated blend of town and country. It was one of the first cities in the area in which there were internet cafes, and the town has an impressive website: www.barganews.com with features like accommodation, what's on, Barga Churches: virtual tour, guide to Barga, and Vespa and motorbike torchlight procession, previous features have included say hello to the shop keepers like bike repairs/hire, jewellery.

In terms of contemporary culture there is a world class summer Jazz Festival and composition competition, and a year round jazz club. The town has an impressive Theatre, with a full winter season of operas and plays and a summer Opera Festival. The festivities often take place in the central Piazza Giovanni Pascoli Poetry is deeply ingrained in the local culture.

At the same time its agrarian roots go deep and there are ongoing celebrations of local food products. There is an array of chestnut products which lend themselves to festive occasions like the Lecci Festival, the fresh ricotta-filled chestnut-flour crepe tasting, the crepes are cooked over an open flame, or Le Mundine, roasted chestnuts. Chestnut flour for example is readily available in markets and is used in a number of local dishes. Even in supermarkets you still find fresh locally made wood burning-oven baked bread, delicious local pecorino cheeses, porcini mushrooms, and berries from the nearby mountainsides.

Slow Food

Cittaslow, literally slow town, is a movement founded in Italy in 2000. The inspiration of Cittaslow was the Slow Food organization, and its goal was to resist the homogenisation and "Americanization" of cities, where standardised franchise shops dominate. Barga figures in the listing of Slow Food's Slow Cities, as well as having the honour of being named one of the 50 "Most Beautiful Villages of Italy" and in addition has recently been awarded the Orange Flag of the Touring Club Italiano, as a distinguished tourist destination.

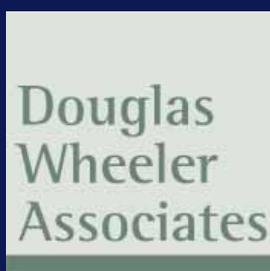
Trekking Walking Biking & Kayaking

Barga is also an ideal base to explore the wider countryside. Around Barga there is a wide choice of trekking opportunities from easy valley walks to mountain peaks, and the wider area of Garfagnana is a hidden gem of Tuscany for trekking, walking and cycling.

In Garfagnana, there is no shortage of mountain biking tracks and trails. The routes for mountain biking range from animal tracks or old mule tracks, to single tracks used for hunting and farming, from jeep tracks and fire trails to single marked walking tracks. This choice allows for all abilities and individuals can adjust the routes accordingly to suit particular needs.

Relevant Conclusions for Huntly

- Focus on contemporary culture and a very sophisticated blend of town/small city and country
- Opportunities to promote Huntly as more lively arts town with a very high quality contemporary offer and a less well known gateway to the Cairngorm National Park
- Promote events based the celebration of local food products: Assess Huntly food producers/manufacturers/cafes/restaurants/pubs/hotels interest in Cittaslow: the Slow Food organisation
- The town benefits from a strong public/private partnership that operates as a kind of 'destination management group'.



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