
HAWICK ACTION PLAN – UPDATE

Report by Corporate Transformation & Services Director

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

10 November 2016

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the Initial Hawick Action Plan, which was approved by Council in June 2016, and outlines the priority actions that should be taken forward in 2017.**
- 1.2 The Initial Hawick Action Plan is structured around three key themes which were identified and agreed by the key stakeholders for the town. The first strategic theme focuses on making Hawick a 'Great Place for Working and Investing'. The second theme focuses on making Hawick a 'Great Place for Living and Learning' and the third theme focuses on making Hawick a 'Great Destination to Visit', aiming to make Hawick a great place to visit and stay.
- 1.3 The work is being led by a partnership of Scottish Borders Council, Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise and Skills Development Scotland. Since the previous update in June 2016, Council officers have been working to take forward some of the actions in the Plan in conjunction with key stakeholders, local businesses and other local organisations in Hawick.
- 1.4 A number of key actions have been progressed and importantly, additional funding support has been offered by the Scottish Government in relation to regeneration support for the town and the Hawick Flood Protection Scheme.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 I recommend that Scottish Borders Council:**
 - (a) Notes the progress made in implementing the Initial Hawick Action Plan over the last 6 months, as set out in Appendix 1;**
 - (b) Agrees that the Council should support further work with businesses and stakeholders in Hawick in 2017/18 as outlined in Appendix 1; and**
 - (c) Asks the Corporate Transformation and Services Director to present a progress report on the Action Plan to the Council at its meeting scheduled for 30 March 2017.**

3 INITIAL HAWICK ACTION PLAN

3.1 The Action Plan is structured around three key themes which were identified and agreed by the key stakeholders. The themes are:

Theme 1: 'Great Place for Working and Investing'

1.1 Hawick is a 'Connected Place' ready to do business in the modern economy.

1.2 Create an Environment to Encourage Economic Growth

1.3 Create an Innovative Flood Protection Scheme

Theme 2: 'Great Place for Living & Learning'

2.1 Provide a suitable environment to retain school leavers and to attract new workers into the area.

Theme 3: 'Great Destination to Visit'

3.1 Make Hawick a great place to visit and stay

3.2 The Initial Hawick Action Plan was approved by Council in June 2016. Since then Council officers have been working to take forward some of the actions in the Plan in conjunction with other key stakeholders, local businesses and other local organisations in Hawick.

4 IMPLEMENTING THE ACTION PLAN

4.1 An update of the Action Plan with key areas of progress completed and priority actions identified is set out in Appendix 1. Some of the key areas of progress are highlighted below.

4.2 **Theme 1: 'Great Place for Working and Investing'**

- **Superfast Broadband** - Service Mapping has been completed and with the 'unbundling' of the BT exchange, a new service provider, Commsworld, is also now providing services. They are proactively contacting local businesses offering new services.
- **Borders Railway Extension Feasibility Scoping Study** - Partnership agreement and funding package is in place to progress the scoping of the feasibility study for the extension of the Borders Railway from Tweedbank to Carlisle.
- **A7 Trunk Road** - The Scottish Government's Programme for Government highlighted the A7 as one of a number of routes that would be reviewed. The Government will examine the case for improvements to the A1, A7, and A68 with a study to identify Borders transport requirements reporting by the end of 2017.
- **Town Centre Regeneration Approach** - The Council has approved a Town Centre Resilience Index and Regeneration Approach to prioritise regeneration activity across the Scottish Borders. Hawick is confirmed as one of the priority towns.
- **Retail Gap Analysis Study for Hawick** (and Galashiels) Town Centres undertaken by Ryden Consultants was complete in September 2016. The report made a number of recommendations and identified potential target operators for the town.
- **Property Assessment** - A meeting progressed in September with

the Council's Planning, Heritage and Property experts to discuss options for key empty buildings and property in the town.

- **Scottish Government Funding for Regeneration** – Funding of £3.625m has been offered from the Scottish Government to support regeneration activity for capital related projects in the town.
- Following input from the Council and Scottish Enterprise, an **Inward Investment business** has bought the Teviotdale Mill property and plans to set up a new knitwear operation. This will start in Spring 2017.
- **Hawick Flood Protection Scheme** - The first part of funding for the Hawick Flood Protection Scheme was confirmed by the Scottish Government in August 2016. The Government has provided an initial £1.342million to the project as a general capital grant in 2016/17. A public exhibition was hosted in Hawick Town Hall and a riverside walk was organised to give members of the public the opportunity to make their views known on the scheme. Over 700 people attended the exhibition.

4.3 **Theme 2: 'Great Place for Living & Learning'**

- **Young Enterprise Scotland** is being relaunched in the Borders to encourage school pupils to look at business as an opportunity when they leave school.
- **Digital Boost** - Business Gateway is delivering Digital Boost workshops and has had 190 people attending these so far in 2016 (Borders wide).
- **Centre for Business Development** - Borders College has opened a Centre for Business Development in its Hawick campus. This will allow its commercially focused training arm to address the needs of businesses and ensure relevant training is offered. This was officially launched on 28 October 2016.

4.4 **Theme 3: 'Great Destination to Visit'**

- **Tourism Marketing** - A tourism focused workshop was held in September 2016, facilitated by Brightlight Marketing. The meeting was very positive with a number of the attendees keen to be involved in the work of a future steering group. A number of key actions were identified to progress.
- **Hotel Accommodation** - Two hotels have re-opened in the town in 2016 – Mansfield House Hotel (12 rooms) and Balcary House (10 rooms).
- **Scottish Borders High Street Loan Fund** – the Council has approved a Scottish Borders High Street Loan Fund focused on Hawick for 2017/18. This is a new pilot initiative to encourage property owners to convert larger premises into smaller units.
- **Theme Town** - An initial workshop has been held with local businesses, investigating the potential for a themed town opportunity.
- **Townscape Heritage Proposal:** An initial proposal has been identified to progress a potential Hawick 'Townscape Heritage' project for the town centre focusing on "Redefining & Rejuvenating Hawick High Street". This could be a 5 year programme with potential funding from Heritage Lottery Funding and other sources.

5 PRIORITIES WITHIN THE ACTION PLAN FOR 2017/18

The following priorities are identified for 2017/18:

5.1 Theme 1: 'Great Place for Working and Investing'

- **Superfast Broadband** - Review service provision/ coverage - Contact businesses to gauge awareness/ uptake of Superfast Broadband. Identify 'notspots' to be addressed with service providers, including Commsworld.
- **Enterprise Areas** - A review paper on Enterprise Areas has been drafted by Council officers for initial discussion with stakeholders.
- **WiFi** - Customer Research - Research is required to better understand who will use WiFi in the town and when. Business Engagement – a promotional exercise is required to encourage private businesses e.g. cafes, hotels, restaurants, to make WiFi accessible/ available for their customers.
- **Town Centre Regeneration Approach** – the Council will progress a rolling three year Town Centre Action Plan which will be approved annually.
- **Scottish Government Funding for Regeneration** - £3.625m has been offered to support regeneration activity for capital related projects in the town. A team of SBC officers is looking at potential projects that meet the criteria and that can be carried out within the timescales.
- **Hawick Flood Protection Scheme** - There is ongoing communication with the Flood Protection project managers to ensure there are benefits for businesses.

5.2 Theme 2: 'Great Place for Living & Learning'

- **Career Pathways** - Further discussion is required to determine the appropriate promotion of career pathways for young people ie – should the focus be on retaining young people in the town/region when they leave school; or on encouraging them to learn new skills outside of the town/region and bring these back when they are older? This should also form a key part of an Inward Investment marketing message.
- **Business Skills Requirement** - Through the Employer Offer Group, work is being done to encourage partners to work together to identify the digital skills needs of local businesses and to ensure that Borders College is making appropriate courses available.

5.3 Theme 3: 'Great Destination to Visit'

- **Tourism Marketing** - Agree priorities and progress actions identified at the workshop in particular:
 - Develop a tourism group of key operators
 - Cross-sell other Hawick businesses
 - Develop a marketing strategy and plan for the town
 - Develop an events calendar for the town
 - Look at 2017 as a launch pad with new developments - relaunch of Wilton Lodge Park; and the opening of the new Distillery.

- **Visitor Accommodation** - Further assessment required as to current capacity and the demand/ type for visitor accommodation required.
- **Theme Town** - Further meetings will be scheduled to progress this option with other town centre businesses encouraged to attend.
- **Retail Workshops** - Future Hawick are holding two retail workshops in November 2016. The aim is to provide information to ease trade and provide options for attracting more customers. Various actions have been suggested by the private sector and the workshop aims to agree how these can be prioritised/ delivered.
- **Scottish Borders High Street Loan Support Fund for Hawick** – The Council will deliver the High Street Loan Support Fund for Hawick in 2017/18 as a pilot complemented by Business Grant support.
- **Aldi Development/ Developer Contribution** - £18K has been secured to progress improved signage, pedestrian links or a Shop Front Improvement scheme to encourage footfall onto the High Street.
- **Townscape Heritage** - SBC to identify the feasibility of a 'Townscape Heritage' proposal for Hawick High Street.

Project Management and Delivery

- 5.4 The Council is taking a positive role in helping to develop the Action Plan and securing the commitment and engagement of its Community Planning Partnership partners and the Scottish Government. The actions outlined above have been taken forward by the Council and its partners, with some input from local businesses.
- 5.5 It is crucial that local businesses and other organisations in Hawick are practically involved in the delivery of the Action Plan. Some local business people have already proactively become involved in the Action Plan work and Future Hawick has also formally requested involvement in the implementation of the Action Plan. Further work on business engagement and involvement will be undertaken, to build on the positive response already seen.

Resources and New Scottish Government Funding

- 5.6 The actions in the Initial Hawick Action Plan require to be properly resourced by a range of organisations if they are to be effectively delivered. Some of the actions have been delivered within existing Scottish Borders Council schemes and budgets and staff resource are already in place. A £25,000 allocation of funding from the Economic Development service for 2016/17 has been identified to progress actions as highlighted above.
- 5.7 Additional funding has been offered by the Scottish Government for two major programmes in the town: £3.625 million has been confirmed to progress Town Regeneration activity in 2016/17 and an initial £1.342 million has been provided to the Hawick Flood Protection Scheme as a capital grant in 2016/17. These major programmes will be prioritised to ensure they are effectively and successfully delivered to maximise the economic opportunities for the town.

- 5.8 The Scottish Government funding must be committed by March 2017. Given the short timescale for delivery and given the challenge in relation to the number of empty properties in the town and town centre, the Town Regeneration funding of £3.625 million and its delivery will require to be prioritised. Officers are working with Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Government to develop proposals and anticipate a report coming to Council in December 2016.
- 5.9 It is important to note that there are limitations to how the Scottish Government funding may be used. The key factor is that this funding is public sector capital funding, so it needs to be targeted at physical development that boosts the economy and creates an asset that will be publicly owned (but that may be able to be sold at market value in future if that is deemed to be appropriate). This gives a clear framework for the project development that officers are pursuing at present. However, it also means that some of the ideas being generated by local partners will not fit with this particular funding opportunity.

6 IMPLICATIONS

Financial

- 6.1 For the Town Regeneration Funding offered by the Scottish Government, Council officers will progress more detailed plans once the prioritisation of properties has been completed and agreed. The £25,000 allocation of funding from the Economic Development service for 2016/17 has supported other activities to move forward. This activity will be complemented with the new Town Centre Regeneration Approach as approved by Executive Committee on 4 October 2016.

Risk and Mitigations

- 6.2 There is a reputational risk to the Council if it does not support the Initial Hawick Action Plan and help to implement the actions set out in the plan. This risk is mitigated by the positive role that the Council is taking in helping to develop the Action Plan and securing the commitment and engagement of its Community Planning Partnership (CPP) partners and the Scottish Government. The CPP's Economy and Low Carbon Theme Group will monitor progress in relation to delivery of the Action Plan. There is also a risk to the successful implementation of the Action Plan if local businesses and the community do not engage in the projects and provide positive support for the initiative. This will be mitigated by engaging businesses in workshop activity and enabling local organisations such as Future Hawick to positively support the Plan.

Equalities

- 6.3 It is anticipated that an Equalities Impact Assessment would be required in relation to the individual projects as they are developed in order to ensure that there are no adverse impacts due to race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation or religious/belief arising.

Acting Sustainably

- 6.4 The Initial Hawick Action Plan aims to make the economy of the town more sustainable by improving its connectivity, its business infrastructure, the level of local skills and the tourism offering. If it helps to secure additional economic activity and growth it will have contributed to the sustainability of the local economy and community.

Carbon Management

6.5 Some of the actions contained in the Initial Hawick Action Plan could have a positive impact on carbon emissions, particularly those actions that lead to the development or redevelopment of ageing or vacant industrial properties.

Rural Proofing

6.6 The Initial Hawick Action Plan focuses on the town of Hawick but it is acknowledged that some of the actions, especially relating to digital connectivity could have a positive impact on the rural areas surrounding the town.

Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

6.7 There are no changes to be made to the Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation arising from this report.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 The Chief Financial Officer, the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Chief Officer HR and the Clerk to the Council have been consulted and their comments have been incorporated into the report.

Approved by

Rob Dickson
Corporate Transformation
and Services Director

Signature

Author(s)

Name	Designation and Contact Number
Bryan McGrath	Chief Officer Economic Development, Chief Executives – Tel 01835 826525

Background Papers: None

Previous Minute Reference: Scottish Borders Council, 29 June 2016

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Bryan McGrath can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

Contact us at Bryan McGrath, Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells, Melrose, TD6 0SA Tel: 01835 826525, email bmcgrath@scotborders.gov.uk