

# Perth And Kinross Council

4 September 2024

## PERTH CITY CENTRE DEVELOPMENT & DESIGN FRAMEWORK CONSULTATION DRAFT

Report by Strategic Lead – Economy, Development & Planning  
(Report No. 24/241)

### 1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report seeks Council approval to commence public consultation over the autumn on a range of development proposals and design principles that will help drive forward the vision for Perth as one of Europe's great small cities. This vision is articulated in *Perth 2040: Our agenda for Change* produced by the former Perth City Development Board and endorsed by the Council in December 2019 (report 19/360 refers).
- 1.2 Following consultation, a revised City Centre Development & Design Framework will be brought back to Council in December for consideration prior to it being developed and delivered over the coming years, as and when financial resources allow. It is important that the Council has a range of "shovel ready" projects ready to be delivered as and when funding, especially external funding, becomes available.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Council:
  - **Approves** the draft City Centre Development & Design Framework (Appendix 1) for consultation and engagement with the public and stakeholders including the business community.
  - **Notes** the findings of a study commissioned to inform the Framework by assessing customer and occupier demand in Perth city centre (Appendix 2).
  - **Remits** officers to design and implement a consultation and engagement programme over the autumn.
  - **Agrees** the Strategic Lead – Economy, Development & Planning will bring back a revised version of the Framework, incorporating suggested changes, for further consideration, along with a delivery programme.

### **3. STRUCTURE OF REPORT**

3.1 This report is structured over the following sections:

- Section 4: Background
- Section 5: Proposals
- Section 6: Next Steps
- Section 7: Conclusion

### **4. BACKGROUND**

4.1 Following the formal restoration of Perth's city status to mark the occasion of the late Queen's Diamond Jubilee a report was presented to the Council in June 2012 (report 12/264 refers) setting out draft actions to capitalise on the social, economic, and cultural opportunities arising from city status. One of these actions was the preparation of a specific economic development plan. Following widespread consultation and engagement, including 2 city summit events for business leaders, the Perth City Plan 2013-2023 was approved by the Council in March 2013 (report 13/216 refers). The Plan was accompanied by an investment and promotion strategy that led to the launch of *Invest in Perth* as the unifying brand and approach to secure and support external investment, both in Perth and across the Council area.

4.2 Central to the consultation response was a desire by the private sector to lead the delivery of the Plan working in close partnership with the Council. This led to the establishment of the Perth City Development Board (PCDB). In 2015 the PCDB took the principles of the initial Plan and set out a sharper vision and actions for the transformation of Perth into one of Europe's great small cities. The updated City Plan 2015-2025 set out in considerably more detail the actions needed to achieve this, building on similar European exemplars such as Exeter, Freiburg, and Karlstad. In 2019 a revised Plan (Perth 2040 – Our Agenda for Change) was produced which retained the vision and ambition but recognised the need to move towards net zero.

4.3 In 2020 with a new Chair in place, the PCDB took a decision to rename itself as the Perth City Leadership Forum (PCLF) and take lead responsibility for the delivery of a smaller number of projects. Six priorities were identified and agreed:

- Shaping a growing city
- Responding to climate change
- Transport and digital connections
- Revitalising the city centre
- Enterprise and prosperity
- Inclusion and social justice

Working groups were established, each led by a private sector leader. Due to the pandemic and capacity issues however, less progress was made than in previous years. Nonetheless, approximately 60% of the actions contained in the Plan have now been wholly or partially delivered. These include:

- Redevelopment project of the former Perth City Hall to become Perth Museum as part of Perth's Cultural Transformation programme.
- Cross Tay Link Road (Destiny Bridge) the completion of which early next year will enable active travel and public realm projects in the city centre.
- Transformation of the former St John's Primary School into Perth Creative Exchange for artists, makers and the community (Scottish Property Awards Regeneration Project of the Year).
- Re-imagination of the derelict St. Pauls Church into a new outdoor public space retaining the character of the building (Scottish Property Awards Highly Commended).
- Regeneration project of Mill Street as part of the creation of a cultural quarter and enhanced public spaces (Academy of Urbanism Street of the Year).
- The Perth Lighting Strategy which has seen key buildings and structures illuminated, the creation of an illuminated art trail and lighting of some previously unlit footpaths all to enhance, create safer routes and support engagement with the city centre in the evenings.

4.4 One area of ongoing concern is the performance of the city centre and its role in supporting private investment, economic growth, and sustainable urban living. Since 2019 several economic shocks have exacerbated the situation, specifically the UK's exit from the European Union, the Covid pandemic, the Ukraine-Russia war, and the consequent cost of living crisis. Perth also faces several challenges that are more pronounced than in the smaller towns across the area:

- Low property value relative to development cost making investment return difficult to achieve.
- The city centre footprint being a legacy of an industrial/commercial past designed for large numbers of mill, distillery, agricultural and office workers.
- A shift towards the experiential economy (e.g. food & drink, culture, play, sport, travel) means fewer retail outlets are needed.
- Reduction in the disposable income of lower income households has driven an uptick in online retail.
- A historically weak visitor product has resulted in very little hotel investment (compared with e.g. Inverness) which in turn makes Perth a less attractive city break destination.
- Limited availability and choice of city centre private housing development attractive to young professionals.

4.5 If Perth is to continue its journey towards being one of Europe's great small cities, more requires to be done over the next 10+ years to realise the economic potential of the city, its residents, and its businesses.

## 5. PROPOSALS

- 5.1 The draft Perth City Centre Development and Design Framework (Appendix 1) has been prepared with expert support to build upon existing planning guidance and economic development strategies and plans, including the Perth City Plan. Its objective is to stimulate discussion about the future of Perth city centre, to encourage investment and to shape development. The document proposes a series of designated investment areas, or quarters, where there is potential to effect change, underpinned by a series of streetscape enhancements and property improvements.
- 5.2 It is important to note that the Framework has no statutory status nor is funding in place to deliver it. It has been produced to stimulate discussion and debate around accelerating the delivery of the Perth City Plan vision for Perth and to act as a pitch for external funding as and when it becomes available.
- 5.3 Following agreement and approval of the final version of the Framework, elements of it will translate into land use policy in the Perth and Kinross Local Development Plan 3. Other elements will be capable of implementation without the need for any policy changes. Furthermore, project delivery will be dependent on the availability of financial resource from the Council, partners, and external funders.
- 5.4 A separate but linked piece of work was also commissioned to look at this important sector in Perth. This study is attached at Appendix 2. The specific focus of this work is an assessment of customer and occupier demand and leading to identification of proposals for vacant retail premises.
- 5.5 Both these pieces of work build on consultation and engagement feedback from the Big Place Conversation which identified concerns about the look and feel of the city centre, particularly a sense of neglect by private property owners and the impact of vacant premises on perceptions of Perth as a vibrant place.
- 5.6 Turning to the Development & Design Framework first, it proposes some opportunities within the historic core of the city to continue streetscape and public realm enhancement in support of attracting and retaining occupiers:
  - West Mill Street
  - Old High Street
  - Railway Station
  - Tay Street (with a new pedestrian bridge)
  - King Edward Street
  - George Street
  - City centre gardens
  - Public transport routes (e.g. South Street)

5.7 It also identifies some property improvement and redevelopment opportunities such as:

- St John's Shopping Centre
- Debenhams, King Edward Street
- Beales/McEwans, St John Street
- Matalan car park, Victoria Street
- New Look/Next upper floors, High Street
- Fergusson Gallery
- Gap sites

5.8 The Framework then turns to some larger scale, potentially longer term, projects spread over several development quarters. In summary these are:

- Mill Quarter. Redeveloping the Thimble row car park either for housing in line with the current Planning Brief, or subject to Council agreement, for a new swimming pool and gym/fitness centre driving up city centre footfall and supporting more evening expenditure in the city centre.
- Culture Quarter. Building upon what has been achieved by renovating the Lower City Mills as a new visitor attraction and commercial space, relocating the bus stances, removing the now vacant toilet block, re-exposing the Lade to create a new linear park and completing the vennel improvements.
- Station Quarter. In partnership with Network Rail, a radical reimagination of the station to re-expose the original building, designed by Victorian architect Sir William Tite, to create a new public square in front. A multi-modal transport hub would be developed, and the existing bus station site potentially redeveloped for housing and enterprise. Network Rail will shortly commence track and signal engineering works in preparation for future electrification and this work will ultimately reduce the number of platforms. Enhancements to the route between the Station and the city centre are also proposed and potentially a connection to the current Leisure Pool and Dewar's site which could become a new residential village if the leisure facilities are relocated.
- Harbour Quarter. A reimagination of the Harbour requiring some long-term leases to be bought out to create space for leisure-based uses such as water-based activities, micro & small businesses, and community facilities. A new bridge would connect the Harbour to Moncrieffe Island. On a larger scale a similar transformation has been achieved in other places around Europe including Copenhagen where the new quarter is connected to the city centre by dedicated electric bike lanes.

- University Quarter. UHI Perth and the Council have a shared aspiration to make better use of the existing campus for a wider range of learning opportunities and to also relocate some teaching to the city centre, for example creative industries. The project initially focuses on improving access between UHI Perth and the city centre, allowing the journey to become part of the experience and making the campus itself connect better with the surrounding residential areas.

5.9 The complementary piece of work around retail (Appendix 2) concludes that the vacancies on secondary streets will be reoccupied over time or drift towards other non-retail uses. However, it states the high-profile vacancies will need a pro-active approach by premises owners supported by the Council and recommends a dedicated “occupier team” to target new tenants. The study recommends that this team comprises owners, property agents and Council officers, and that the approach needs to be like that taken to secure inward investors i.e. bespoke sales and marketing prospectuses. Specific strategies are proposed in the report for:

- Former Debenhams store
- South St John’s Place
- Former Beales store
- High Street
- St John’s Centre
- South/Methven Streets

5.10 To support these efforts further investment in improved public realm is recommended and therefore reflected in the Development & Design Framework. The consultants also make a plea for Perth’s stakeholders to shout louder about the opportunities the city offers – celebrating strengths.

5.11 The final section of the study provides some identified gaps and opportunities in Perth’s current offer, and these are also reflected in the proposals contained in the Development & Design Framework and in the recently proposed Levelling Up Fund projects around crafts, food, and drink.

## **6. NEXT STEPS**

6.1 A period consultation and engagement is required to ensure a wide range of views are expressed and voices heard. This will commence during September and run through until the end of the year. A variety of consultation and engagement methods are proposed:

### Stage 1

- Online public responses via the Council’s consultation hub
- Specific engagement with land and property owners in the proposed development quarters

- Engagement with the wider business community in partnership with the Perth and Kinross Business Partnership
- Public exhibition and opportunity for individuals to engage with the project team.

## Stage 2

- Facilitated focus groups with businesses and residents.
- 6.2 A further report will then be brought back the Council for consideration in the spring of next year accompanied by an indicative delivery programme.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The Perth City Centre Development & Design Framework, supported by recommendations from retail experts, provides an ambitious set of proposals to build upon the significant investment already made in Perth over the past 20 years. However, these are the views of urbanists, analysts, and designers not residents, businesses, and visitors. It is now important that consultation and engagement gets underway to explore what is liked, what can be improved, and what should be set aside. The report therefore recommends approval of the draft Framework as the basis for this consultation and engagement.

## Authors

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## Approved

Name	Designation	Date
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## APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Draft Perth City Centre Development & Design Framework.
- Appendix 2: Perth City Centre – Customer and Occupier Demand Study

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You can also send us a text message on 07824 498145.

All Council Services can offer a telephone translation facility.



## 1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

<b>Strategic Implications</b>	<b>Yes</b>
Local Outcomes Improvement Plan	<b>No</b>
Corporate Plan	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Resource Implications</b>	
Financial	<b>No</b>
Workforce	<b>None</b>
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	<b>None</b>
<b>Assessments</b>	
Equality Impact Assessment	<b>None</b>
Strategic Environmental Assessment	<b>None</b>
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	<b>None</b>
Legal and Governance	<b>None</b>
Risk	<b>None</b>
<b>Consultation</b>	
Internal	<b>Yes</b>
External	<b>No</b>
<b>Communication</b>	
Communications Plan	<b>Yes</b>

### 1. Strategic Implications

#### Local Outcomes Improvement Plan

- 1.1 This report and the attached appendix have no direct impact on the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan, although ultimately the implementation of the Framework will.

#### Corporate Plan

- 1.2 This report and the attached appendix impact on the following priorities withing the Council's Corporate Plan by enabling:

- Developing a resilient stronger and greener economy.

### 2. Resource Implications

#### Financial

- 2.1 There are no financial implications stemming from this report.

#### Workforce

2.2 There are no workforce implications stemming from this report.

#### Asset Management (land, property, IT)

2.3 There are no direct asset management implications stemming from the report or its appendix, although its future implementation may result in the reutilisation of surplus or empty property.

### **3. Assessments**

3.1 The report has been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment process (EqIA) with the following outcome:

- (i) Assessed as **not relevant** for the purposes of EqIA. Equalities Impact Assessments will be prepared for any future implementation plans and projects.

#### Strategic Environmental Assessment

3.2 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 places a duty on the Council to identify and assess the environmental consequences of its proposals.

3.3 The report has been considered under the Act and, no action is required as the Act does not apply to the matters presented in this report. The Committee is not being requested to approve, adopt or agree to an action beyond public consultation.

#### Sustainability

3.4 Under the provisions of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 the Council has to discharge its duties in a way which contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. Under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 the Council also has a duty relating to climate change and, in exercising its functions must act:

- in the way best calculated to delivery of the Act's emissions reduction targets;
- in the way best calculated to deliver any statutory adaptation programmes; and
- in a way that it considers most sustainable.

3.5 The recommendation from this report does not directly support the Council's discharging of its duties in relation to the Act.

#### Legal and Governance

3.6 There are no legal and governance implications to this report.

### Risk

- 3.7 There is no identified risk stemming from this report.

## **4. Consultation**

### Internal

- 4.1 The report recommends consulting on the contents of the attached appendix and internal consultees will be briefed as part of this process.

### External

- 4.2 External stakeholders and organisations will be consulted.

## **5. Communication**

- 5.1 A Communications Plan will be prepared to support the recommended consultation.

## **2. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 2.1 Appendix 1: Draft Perth City Centre Development & Design Framework.  
Appendix 2: Perth City Centre – Customer and Occupier Demand Study