

ANGUS COUNCIL

INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE - 26 AUGUST 2008

SUBJECT: CITY OF BRECHIN TOWNSCAPE HERITAGE INITIATIVE - UPDATE

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES

<p>Abstract: This report is the first update on the progress of the City of Brechin Townscape Heritage Initiative.</p>

1 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee:-

1. notes the content of this first report on the progress of the City of Brechin Townscape Heritage Initiative.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The City of Brechin Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) is a five year programme of heritage led regeneration funded by Angus Council, the Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic Scotland. The total budget is just over £2,900,000 and it is run by a dedicated Project Manager who is based in the former Registrar's Office at 32 Panmure Street, Brechin.
- 2.2 The THI aims to regenerate the centre of Brechin by undertaking a number of physical projects and by engaging with the local community. There are a number of "Priority Projects" based upon reusing/repairing prominent historic buildings and finding uses for them. There is a budget for small grants based upon a selection process to ensure maximum value for money. There are also sums for public realm projects, training in traditional building skills and community engagement.

3 PROJECT PROGRESS

- 3.1 **The Project Manager** – the Project Manager, Sarah Kettles, took up her post in March and has proceeded to work on developing and implementing the various Priority Projects. The Project Manager provides the link between grant applicants, the community and the project partners. In order to ensure the maximum community involvement there is a "Project Support Group" (PSG) which meets every few weeks to review project progress and to make recommendations on procedure and THI – related issues. Membership of the PSG is drawn from the Brechin community and there are Council Officers to provide technical advice. Scottish Enterprise is represented on the PSG. One of the first tasks undertaken by the PSG was to comment on those buildings that may attract small scale grants for repair on the basis of a ranked list of buildings selected using a number of criteria. The list has now been agreed. The decision on the award of grants will be taken by a "Partnership Executive" (PE) on the recommendation of the members of the PSG. The membership of the PE is drawn from the PSG and there is elected member representation on both bodies.

- 3.2 **Priority Projects** – the Priority Projects are a group of buildings running from 29-47 High Street, a building at 68-72 High Street known as “The Merchant’s House”, the extension to the Brechin Town House Museum and the former St. Columba’s Church at the junction of Panmure Street and South Esk Street. There are ongoing discussions with the owners of The Merchant’s House and an Architect has now been appointed to take the project forward. Historic Scotland, who will provide some funding towards this project, have arranged for an Architect’s report to be carried out. The report is in draft form for comment by Council officers. There are ongoing discussions with the owners of some of the buildings running from 29-47 High Street including the owner of 47 High Street. The latter includes a large retail unit on the ground floor. The extension to the Brechin Town House Museum is due to start in early October with the aim of reaching Practical Completion by April 2009. Whilst the Brechin Town House Museum project has still to go through the THI grant application process it is anticipated that work will start as planned. The final Priority Project is the former St. Columba’s Church at the junction of Panmure Street and South Esk Street. This building is currently disused and there are ongoing discussions over re-use.
- 3.3 **Small Grants** – There are ongoing discussions with the proprietors of 1-3 Market Street with a view to inviting an application for the repair of the whole of the exterior of the building. These discussions are fairly advanced and it is understood that one of the proprietors might take the lead role and submit an application for grant assistance on behalf of the other proprietors.
- 3.4 **Public Realm Work** – The Close at 25 High Street is in need of upgrading and it provides the setting for a Category ‘A’ listed building. The Close also links two public places namely the High Street and City Road so it is used by the public. Consideration will be given to which Public Realm Projects should be funded through discussion with the members of the PSG.
- 3.5 **Training** – There is a sum of money set aside for training in traditional building skills, principally masonry training. An exploratory meeting has been held with Angus College to explore the possibility of utilising the existing apprentice training infrastructure and possibly buying in specialist training from an external provider but channelled through educational institute. Enhancing traditional skills training would be particularly welcome because the initiative would benefit not only Brechin-there would also be benefits across the whole building industry in Angus. A considerable amount of building work is on pre-1914 buildings. This would enhance the ability of local contractors to tender for work within and outside of the Angus area.
- 3.6 **Public Involvement** – There has been some discussion over taking members of the PSG to see the completed project at “Gardyne’s Land” in Dundee. This Category ‘A’ listed building was rescued by Tayside Building Preservation Trust and has now been converted to a successful backpackers’ hostel. The lessons learned at Gardyne’s Land could be applicable in the context of at least one of the Priority Projects in Brechin so there is merit in looking at how the project was implemented and how the use was put in place.
- 3.7 **Publicity** – The Project Manager has prepared a number of advisory documents for potential grant applicants and these will be circulated locally to each address in the THI area. The THI Project Manager has also delivered a number of presentations to

local groups and there are proposals to set up a series of regular lectures on a range of heritage-related matters in association with the Brechin Civic Society and Friends of the Townhouse Museum.

4 ISSUES

- 4.1 The major issue will be to persuade the owners of Priority Projects to participate in the THI. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the substantial grants that are available will give the property owners confidence and will make those projects, that would be otherwise uneconomically viable.
- 4.2 There are some ongoing issues over the deteriorating condition of a number of buildings in the THI area. Contact has been made with the owners of the former St. Columba's Baptist Church and it is hoped that emergency repairs will soon be carried out. The owners of 83-87 High Street (not a Priority Project) have recently secured the building and removed vegetation at the request of Council officers. There are ongoing discussions with the owners of 83-87 High Street regarding re-use of the building. There are concerns over the condition of 1-3 Swan Street and the owners of the retail unit on the ground floor have written to the Head of Planning & Transport requesting that something be done to resolve the matter.
- 4.3 The problem of deteriorating buildings may eventually require the use of statutory powers to prevent the buildings deteriorating further. To that end a survey of buildings in the centre of the THI area has been carried out. Contact will now be made with the owners of those buildings that are considered to be at risk or where minor repairs would prevent further decay. It may be possible to develop a maintenance scheme to inspect properties using high level access equipment. Any defects that are identified will then be brought to the attention of owners. This was done in one of the other THI's in Scotland and involved inspecting at high level from a Mobile Working Platform. It will be up to the owners to take steps to rectify any defects although some of the buildings may be eligible for grant assistance.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising directly as a result of the recommendations contained in this report.

6 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no human rights implications arising from the contents of this Committee report.

7 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The issues dealt with in this Report have been the subject of consideration from an equalities perspective (as required by legislation). An equalities impact assessment is not required.

8 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services, Head of Finance, Head of Law & Administration and the Head of Property have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

9 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The THI is at an early stage although considerable progress has been made in entering into negotiations with owners of Priority Projects and making owners of buildings within the THI area aware that there is a scheme of small grants. The key to the success of the THI is going to be persuading owners of Priority Projects to participate in the THI and tackling buildings at risk using statutory powers where necessary. It is hoped that the availability of significant grant funding will provide an incentive. The progress of the THI will now be reported to this Committee on a quarterly basis.

NOTE

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.

P&T/PM/KW
31 July 2008

Eric S. Lowson
Director of Infrastructure Services