

ANGUS COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – 26 NOVEMBER 2024

BRECHIN RECOVERY AND REGENERATION – NEXT STEPS

REPORT BY SHARON FAULKNER, DIRECTOR OF HR, OD, DIGITAL ENABLEMENT, IT & BUSINESS SUPPORT

1. ABSTRACT

- 1.1 This report provides a high-level overview of the next steps to progress a shortlist of options for the future of Brechin and the Brechin River Street Area (BRSA). Regular progress updates will be reported to future meetings of this Committee. The report sets out some of the current challenges in preparing a detailed project and engagement programme and therefore seeks agreement to form an elected member and officer steering group to provide oversight of the next steps.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICIES

- 2.1 Work in relation to the recovery and regeneration of Brechin aligns to the following priorities in the Angus Council Plan 2023-2028 (2024 update).

Caring for our Economy

- Support businesses to grow and invest in Angus.

Caring for our Place

- Take action to mitigate against climate change by delivering our Transition to Net Zero Action Plan: 2022 to 2030.
- Coordinate activity and develop a vision for our places, through relevant plans and strategies.
- Engage with communities to support their ambitions to deliver on local aspirations through a place framework.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Committee:-

- (i) notes the next stage of work required to develop the shortlist of options and that the Director of HR, OD, Digital Enablement, IT and Business Support in their role as Chair of Brechin Recovery Committee reports regular progress updates to future meetings of this Committee; and
- (ii) agrees the formation of an elected member and officer Steering Group, to provide oversight of the options appraisal process and approach to engagement, and the appointment of the Convener of the Communities Committee and the three Brechin and Edzell Ward Members to the Steering Group and officer representatives as outlined in Paragraph 6.6.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Angus Council at its recent meeting on 7 November 2024 considered a report which set out the activity undertaken to date following the impacts of Storm Babet to the Brechin River Street Area (BRSA) in October 2023. Exceptional levels of rainfall resulted in water flows in the River South Esk overtopping the Brechin Flood Protection Scheme and devastating damage and flooding in the area ([Report 331/24 refers](#)).

- 4.2 That report also provided a summary of two technical reports which had been commissioned by the Council to help inform possible protection or resilience measures for any future flood events, as well as help inform decisions on the various recovery options for the area.
- 4.3 The first of these reports, the Flood Protection Options Appraisal, assessed the condition of the flood protection scheme, using hydrological modelling to estimate the flow rate of the River South Esk through Brechin during Storm Babet, to determine the current level of protection provided by the flood protection scheme taking account of updated rainfall data and flooding events and to identify and provide cost benefit analysis on a range of engineering-focused options to enhance flood protection. From a technical perspective, five of the short-listed options have the potential to deliver a positive cost benefit ratio.
- 4.4 The purpose of the second of the technical reports, the Angus Council BRSA Housing Options Report, was to appraise the future approach to the 135 Council owned properties within the BRSA, of which 70 are currently unoccupied. A comparative assessment looked at the factors of maximising housing need, operational delivery, financial implications for the housing revenue account (HRA) over a period of 30 years and outcomes for tenants in the area. Three indicative options of reinstatement, remodelling and relocation were selected to support an initial analysis. From this exercise a relocation option was recommended both from a financial perspective on the HRA and in terms of the other assessment criteria.
- 4.5 Additional work was also undertaken by the Housing Service back in February 2024 to reassess the outputs of the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment (HNDA) to take account of more recent data relating to the existing need element used in the assessment, other material changes since 2021 and immediate displacement of households directly impacted by Storm Babet. This [HNDA Refresh \(2024\)](#) provided an up to date picture to inform the Local Housing Strategy 2023-28.
- 4.6 Information sessions to provide an overview of the technical reports and allow an opportunity for the community to put questions to officers were held on 21 November and 23 November 2024. As these sessions follow the preparation of reports, a verbal update will be provided to Committee.

5. CURRENT POSITION

- 5.1 Whilst these reports set out various options, in isolation they do not provide sufficient detail to progress with decisions at this current time. The implications of/and options for private homeowners, private tenants, housing association properties and businesses, all of whom form the BRSA community, have not been tested or developed.
- 5.2 Equally the interdependencies between the technical reports have not been assessed: for example, the cost benefit analysis for flood protection options is likely to significantly alter if there is any amendment to the number of properties within the area.
- 5.3 Further work is also required to fully assess the recommended options within the technical reports and variations between those, identify any options that would benefit from being explored further and key considerations or concerns worth investigating.
- 5.4 Although the flooding itself impacted around the BRSA, its scale and the level of damage to property has meant these impacts have been felt right across this small town and the ongoing community spirit and support is significant. Ultimately the future of this area therefore needs to be addressed at a town wide scale. Historical maps from the mid 1700's show built development along River Street as a founding principle of the growth of Brechin. Any more radical approach for the area should therefore be considered as a landmark re-framing of the area rather than any abandonment of what was a founding element of Brechin's identity. Parallel work will therefore also progress to not just develop a vision and ambition for BRSA but for the whole town. This is exactly the approach agreed by the Council when they approved the Framework Approach to Place Based Working on 20 June 2024 (Report 202/24 refers).
- 5.5 Learning from other areas impacted by significant events advises that recovery cannot be rushed and those impacted should not have a passive role in their own recovery and any measure to rebuild from a flood event needs to be viewed in the context of the whole town to regenerate and thrive¹. Working alongside the community to understand the complexities and shape the direction and parameters is therefore an important element.

¹ *The Recovery Myth, Prof L Easthope*

6. PROPOSALS

- 6.1 The next stage of work is to develop and analyse future options for the BRSA and the inter-relationship with the wider town, underpinned by a cost benefit analysis that draws together various technical elements, community inputs and economic analysis. The main objective of this work is to identify the preferred option for the future of the BRSA and Brechin, bringing together the wider community aspirations with the practical aspects of what is deliverable, cost effective and delivers on ambitions for the wider town.
- 6.2 At this stage no options are off the table, but parameters will need to be defined as we progress. Any options with significant financial implications will need careful consideration and the challenges of delivery clearly explored and communicated to all parties. However, this should not stop us from being ambitious.
- 6.3 It is not yet possible for officers to set out a clearly defined work programme. An initial internal workshop session was held on 11 November 2024 which has assisted in identifying the scope of work. Further detail will now be provided through regular progress update reports to this committee.
- 6.4 While we aim to begin engagement in early January, we cannot fully commit to the engagement plan until we have a clearer understanding of the additional expertise required and the timescale for the next stage of work. This also needs to be informed by the community and if and how they want to work. The draft engagement plan will be finalised once these elements are clearer as it is important that engagement is clearly planned, well considered and carefully executed as well as leading to a better outcome for all that encompasses place, community aspirations and resilience in one thoughtful engagement process. Once a shortlist of options is ready, officers will progress sessions and workshops with the community to support the final decision-making process. It is envisaged that a local steering group comprising a small grouping of resident and business representatives will be central to the activity and a separate partnership local governance model will also be developed to provide a more formalised structure for strategic input and to support the wider place activity. This would include for example a representative from the community council. Appendix 1 provides an outline of the indicative governance.
- 6.5 Officers are working closely with the Scottish Community Development Centre who have been engaged, to support delivery locally. This will provide much needed skilled, independent and impartial resource to directly work with and support the community. We understand that residents, businesses and the wider community are eager to be involved, and we want to assure everyone that their voices will be central to this process.
- 6.6 Given the significance and complexity of the work, there are likely to be a number of areas where strategic input on the approach is required. Officers therefore propose that a Steering Group of officers and elected members is formed to provide oversight/sounding board of the options appraisal and engagement activity. It is recommended given their local knowledge and understanding of the community, that the three local ward members, as elected representatives for the Brechin and Edzell area form part of this group along with the Convenor of Communities Committee as Chair. The Strategic Lead for Brechin Recovery (Director of HR, OD, Digital Enablement, IT and Business Support) alongside an officer representative from Housing, Vibrant Communities, Infrastructure and Environment and Chair of the Brechin Operational Group (Service Leader Planning and Sustainable Growth) will also form part of this group. It is anticipated that the group would initially meet on a 6-weekly basis with frequency to be reviewed as the programme is developed.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The two technical reports highlight the potential for significant capital financial implications of the various options. However, this report is not seeking approval of any final options and will ensure financial analysis will form a key part of the options appraisal. As this work progresses there may be a requirement for additional specialist input and where required this would be detailed as part of the update reports to committee and any relevant approvals sought in accordance with the financial regulations.
- 7.2 Work on the development of options and engagement will primarily involve input from existing staff resource from across various Council departments. A dedicated temporary part-time coordinator is in place to support this activity with funding for this being met through the Council's core budget. There are no financial implications arising from the support from the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC).

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 Assessment of the risks will form a key part of the options appraisal work.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report, however the impacts of climate underpin the types of extreme weather events such as those experienced through Storm Babet.

10. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS AND FAIRER SCOTLAND DUTY

- 10.1 A screening assessment has been undertaken and a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required for the following reason:

This report is a follow on from 331/24 for which a Full Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken. The nature of this report is to deal with procedural elements. As and when options are developed a Full EIA will be undertaken at the appropriate time.

11. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND WELLBEING IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 11.1 A Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment has been carried out within the EIA associated with Report 331/24.

12. CONSULTATION

- 12.1 The Chief Executive, the Directors of Vibrant Communities and Sustainable Growth, Infrastructure and Environment, Finance and Legal, Governance and Change have been consulted on the contents of this report.

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

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Appendix 1: Indicative Governance Structure