

**Huntly Town
Strategy**

**Aberdeenshire
Towns
Partnership**

Final report

September 2005

**GEN Consulting/
Douglas Wheeler Associates**

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The GEN Consulting/ Douglas Wheeler Associates (Gen/DWA) team was commissioned in February 2005 by Aberdeenshire Council on behalf of the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership (ATP) and the Marr Area Partnership to develop an **integrated and holistic town strategy** for Huntly. The Gen/DWA team reported to a Steering Group that included representatives from Aberdeenshire Council, Marr Area Partnership, Strathbogie Community Council, Huntly Community Council and Huntly Business Association.

Huntly is an important market town and the town centre is a vital retail, business, community, cultural and service **hub for the town and the surrounding area**. Despite a strong historical background the town has been detrimentally affected by the centralisation of services in larger centres like Aberdeen. In the late 1990s efforts were made within the community to develop the Huntly brand of “the Family Town” through Huntly Ltd, a community business which is now moribund.

The Marr Area Partnership and the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership have recently begun a process of re-engaging the local community to explore the issues facing the town and a Town Co-ordinator was appointed in May. This commission and the Huntly Strategy should be seen as part of this **wider process**.

1.2 Strategic aims

The overall objective is to prepare a **community-backed** strategy which will be aspirational, yet realistic, vision for the future of the town, within the context set by the overall objectives of ATP. The key objectives of the strategy, as set out in the brief are to:

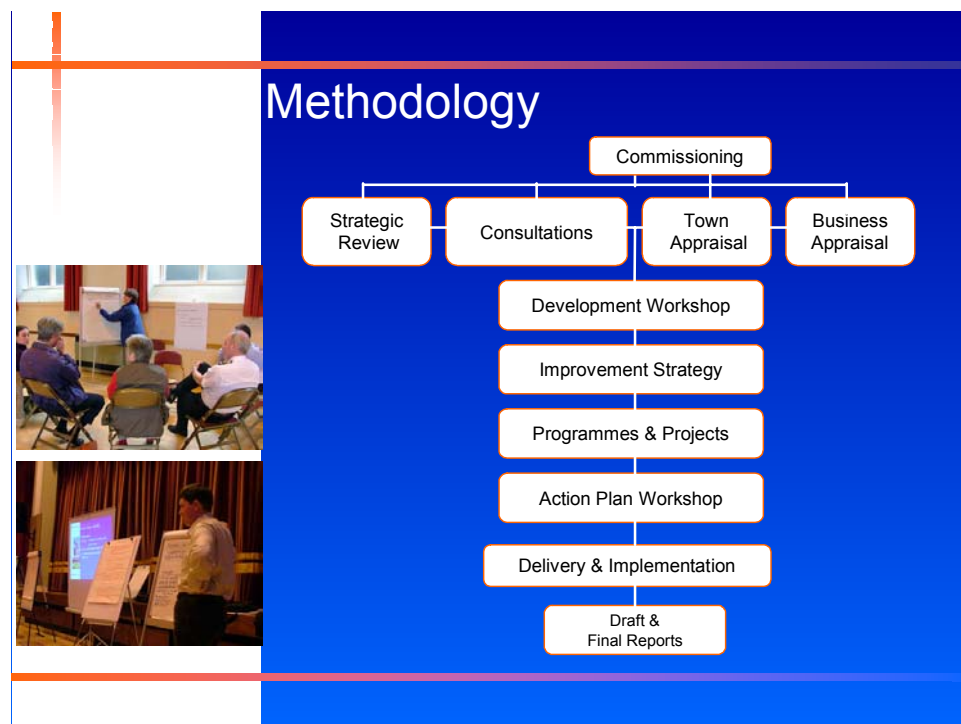
- develop an **agreed strategic vision** for Huntly that re-establishes the town as a vibrant rural service centre and which:
 - is based on a detailed understanding of the town
 - fosters community engagement and involvement
- formulate a **holistic long-term strategy** that fully addresses the town’s foreseeable needs in social, cultural, environmental and economic term

- prepare a **five-year action plan** to help deliver the strategy
- identify appropriate community led and supported **mechanisms for delivering and implementing** the strategy.

1.3 Methodology

The Gen/DWA team approach to the Huntly strategy is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Huntly Strategy



1.4 Community & business involvement

The Huntly Strategy has been developed and shaped from the consultations, research and the **workshops** that were held in the Stewart’s Hall on 14 April and 26 May. Around 120 people attended the Workshops and a Youth Workshop was also held in Gordon Schools. Interviews were undertaken with **local businesses** and a **workshop with local traders** was also carried out. In addition around 400 **community questionnaires** were completed. Overall the aim was to

ensure a high degree of consultation, and engagement with the public, community representatives, interest groups, stakeholders and public agencies. As a result a **consensus on the way forward emerged** and appropriate community supported mechanisms for taking these proposals forward were identified.

1.5 Report structure

The remainder of this Final Report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** describes the changing policy context
- **Chapter 3** summarises the town appraisal and the wider sphere of influence of the town
- **Chapter 4** assesses how well Huntly performs and includes a summary of the business interviews and community questionnaire;
- **Chapter 5** highlights the challenges facing Huntly
- **Chapter 6** presents the future vision for the town and summarises the town regeneration strategy and action plan;
- **Chapter 7** describes the preferred implementation arrangements and next steps.

2 Policy context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the strategic context within which the Huntly Strategy will rest. The review begins with an overview of several key national strategies and policies which set the context for the study. These include:

- the impact of the re-organisation of European Structural Funds
- reform of EU agricultural policy
- Smart Successful Scotland
- A New Strategy for Scottish Tourism

In addition there are several key local strategy documents, each of which is summarised below. These include:

- the strategic objectives of the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership (ATP);
- Aberdeenshire Council's Marr Area Plan, 2004-07; and
- The Marr Area Partnership Community Economic Development Plan.

2.2 European and national policy context

2.2.1 Reform of European Structural Funding

Following the accession of 15 new Member countries, mostly from Eastern Europe in May 2004, European Structural Funds have been going through a major strategic restructuring, due to be finalised by late 2005. While the details of the structural funding programmes have yet to be finalised early indications from the European Commission's proposals indicate the Funds will be concentrated in three main programme areas.

- Convergence
- Regional competitiveness and employment
- Interregional and cross-border co-operation

Convergence

The convergence budgets are likely to be targeted exclusively at the new accession countries and those parts of other Member States where GDP is below 75% of the EU average (in a similar fashion to the old Objective One Programme). This theme will account for the largest part of the Structural Funds, and is expected to account for around 4/5ths of the entire Structural Funds budget. It is unlikely that any part of Scotland will be eligible for support under this programme area.

Regional Competitiveness and Employment

The Regional Competitiveness and Employment (RCE) programme area maps broadly onto the old objective 2 and objective 3 programme areas, however there have been a number of significant changes in area eligibility criteria and the types of projects that will be funded under this theme.

Importantly there is no requirement for Member states to focus RCE budgets on a geographical basis as was the case under the old Objective 2 programmes. In theory at least central London has as much access to RCE budgets as declining former industrial areas, or peripheral rural areas. This issue will be addressed by individual national governments, although the UK government has yet to confirm whether geographical targeting will be a feature of the distribution of structural funds in the UK.

The RCE programme area also has a significantly different focus from the old Objective two programmes. These changes are characterised by an increasing emphasis on promoting higher added value economic activities such as promoting company innovation, collaboration between industry and higher education and enhancing entrepreneurship, and less emphasis on projects with a social inclusion focus. The key emerging themes include

- Competitiveness
- Innovation
- Connecting SME's and the Knowledge base
- Entrepreneurship and New Financial Instruments

- Capital projects supporting sustainable development and transport
- Implementing Lifelong Learning

Inter-regional co-operation

The Inter-regional cooperation programme area will aim to finance cooperation at three levels:

- cross-border cooperation through joint programmes
- cooperation between trans-national zones (i.e. regions sharing distinct characteristics which cover parts of more than one country)
- networks for cooperation and the exchange of ideas throughout the union

Approximately 4% of funds will be allocated to this purpose. Regions lying along land borders (and in some cases sea borders) will be eligible for support. All parts of the EU will be eligible for financing of European cooperation and exchange networks.

Specific Territorial Characteristics

Finance will be available for rural areas to diversify their local economies. This will be complimentary to the new European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

Some Criticisms of the Reforms

Several criticisms have been made of the reforms:

- the funds do concentrate on lagging areas, but fail to recognise the differences between rich and more 'average' regions
- there is a worry that funding will be cut significantly for Scotland's voluntary and community sectors, despite the fact that many neighbourhoods in richer member states continue to experience poverty
- some local authorities have commented that the current approach overlooks their responsibility to tackle disparities *within* regions.

- a number of respondents to the UK consultations on the reforms felt that there was a danger of the social justice agenda being played down, with the main focus being on promoting economic growth
- in some quarters, there is a strong feeling that the poorest areas of the UK should not lose out on funding because of EU enlargement, as such areas lacked the resources to support the development of newer member states
- stakeholders from rural areas have expressed concern that too much emphasis has been placed on the urban agenda

Implications

These changes may have some important implications for Huntly and the ability of the Strategy to attract European Structural Funds support:

- there is likely to be less money available than was the case under the old Objective 2 programmes, and the competition for this funding is likely to be stronger
- it could be argued that the focus of the RCE theme may favour urban areas more than rural areas, given the focus on knowledge transfer, innovation and higher education/industry partnerships
- attracting European Funding to support activities in rural areas may need to rely more on developing linkages and joint projects between urban and rural areas, or focusing on inter-regional collaboration projects.

2.2.2 European Agricultural Policy

The Common Agricultural Policy is currently being reformed. Since the early 1990s, financial payments made to farmers under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) have been 'coupled' with numbers of livestock or area of arable land farmed (i.e. farmers who had more cattle, sheep etc. received more money). This system was criticised for 3 main reasons:

- it was thought by many to burden farmers with excessive levels of bureaucracy
- it encouraged over-production of low quality commodities

- it encouraged non-sustainable farming practices.

These criticisms are further enforced by the fact that the system often failed to ensure reasonable farm incomes. As a response to these issues, the system is changing. The level of payment will no longer be affected by livestock numbers or land area of crops. Levels of bureaucracy will be reduced. The aim of these reforms is to allow farmers and crofters a greater level of freedom to respond to demand for their produce rather than produce as much as possible. Farmers will now be required to meet standards in environmental protection and animal husbandry.

There is some concern that the ‘de-coupling’ of the relationship between subsidies and production could lead to a fall in production, which may be damaging to some local economies. In order to avoid such problems, Scottish farmers will therefore be able to benefit from partial de-coupling, where some of the old coupled grants are retained.

The Single Farm Payment Scheme is also being introduced. This scheme will base the subsidy received by a Farm on the average payments received by that farm under the previous system. In cases of hardship and for new entrants to farming, extra finance will be made available from a national reserve of funds.

Funds can be transferred from direct agricultural support to help farmers in endeavours which will result in diversification of activity or will help to enhance the natural environment.

2.2.3 Smart Successful Scotland

Smart, Successful Scotland is Scotland’s economic development strategy. It is used by Scottish Enterprise to set its strategic direction. The document can be summarised as follows:

SSS vision:

‘ Our vision is of a nation working together to achieve a Smart, Successful Scotland. Of business organisations, individual businesses, universities, colleges and trade unions being guided by and being essential contributors to A Smart, Successful Scotland. Of local authorities continuing their support for A Smart, Successful Scotland through Local Economic Forums and their own delivery of services. Of a range of other public sector bodies playing their full and active part’.

The 3 key organising themes of the strategy:

- growing businesses: Innovative companies growing in scale
- skills and learning: Developing skills to make best use of our human capital and to prepare for tomorrow's labour market
- global connections: World class locations, part of Europe and connected to the global economy.

The challenge for the Enterprise Networks, and others supporting business development, is to act as a catalyst to make things happen better, smarter and faster than they otherwise would. The focus must be on where the Networks can add most value and so contribute to sustainable economic growth through higher levels of activity and improved productivity.

The Enterprise Networks have a specific contribution to make. To identify and ensure achievement of this, the Executive will:

- set the overall direction in SSS and the lifelong learning strategy
- discuss and agree Corporate Plans drawn up by the Networks
- work with the Enterprise Networks to measure progress towards desired outcomes
- work with the Enterprise Networks to evaluate the contribution of Network outputs to outcomes
- work with the Enterprise Networks on specific policy developments

It is for the networks to develop and deliver projects and programmes

Partnership Working – Scotland benefits from a range of organisations who can contribute to, and who need to work together to achieve economic and community development. These include:

- Business organisations
- HE & FE establishments

- Communities Scotland

Local Authorities – LA's are key players in all aspects of economic development, including development planning, and invest heavily in infrastructure, education and place development, as well as providing direct support services to business. LEFs provide an existing and effective mechanism for LECs and Councils to work together and with other organisations to provide improved local business services. The Forums are the mechanism for delivering the local economic development dimension of Community Planning.

The spatial dimension – realising the potential of all [Scotland's] places – the objective is economic growth, which, by exploiting opportunities contributes to regional development and reduced disparities.

Cross-cutting themes:

- Sustainable development (Green jobs strategy)
- Closing the Opportunity Gap

Progress in creating a SSS needs to be reviewed. The Joint Performance Team (JPT) ensures rigorous reviews of economic performance and publishes data in *Measuring Scotland's progress towards a SSS*.

This blueprint for enterprise in Scotland details how public agencies will create the conditions for business growth and innovation, underpinned by a skilled productive workforce.

2.2.4 A new Strategy for Scottish Tourism

The document sets out the Scottish Executive's vision for the nation's tourism industry. It identifies the need for Scotland to develop a modern tourist industry that has the following characteristics:

- in touch with its customers
- is skilled and enterprising and has embraced the culture of lifelong learning
- provides the quality of services visitors to Scotland demand.

The document notes that if the industry develops the above three traits, it will become a key industry at the heart of the Scottish economy. It also reviews the performance of Scottish tourism over the past 3 decades and identifies that

- the major growth area in Scottish tourism has been visitors from overseas
- the UK market remains Scotlands most important source of visitors, and visitor numbers and spending by this market has remained roughly static
- for the UK tourist market, short breaks are the growth area of the future
- the UK market also represents the biggest opportunity for off-season growth
- business tourism has been a major growth area in recent years, and this trend is expected to continue

The strategy recommends the following courses of action:

- *using knowledge effectively.* Tourism businesses need to know where customers will come from, what perceptions they have of Scotland and son on. The internet and other new communications advances offer real opportunities in this respect.
- *marketing Scotland.* Scotland has world class tourism assets (such as its scenery, culture and heritage), which should be used to create a positive image of the country amongst potential visitors.
- *raising quality within the industry.* This will take place through various actions, such as a greater quality assurance effort.
- *increasing the industry' commitment to lifelong learning* in order to improve skills and raise service quality in the industry.
- *ensure that the public support structure for the industry is kept up to date* in order to match changes within the industry and in technology related to it.

2.3 Regional and local policy context

2.3.1 ATP's strategic objectives

ATP's strategic objectives are set out on the Partnership's website. These objectives over-arch the existing individual town strategies. They include the following key goals, which focus on developing the areas economic fabric through action relating to businesses and the workforce, making the town a more attractive place and developing more inclusive communities:

- developing a diverse base of competitive businesses which will provide quality jobs for local people;
- making local towns such as Huntly attractive places to live, work and visit;
- develop a skilled, educated and enterprising local workforce;
- establish a modern, connected and flexible business infrastructure;
- enhance viability and vitality of local town centres including that in Huntly; and
- help to make local towns sustainable and inclusive communities.

2.3.2 Aberdeenshire Council's Marr Area Plan 2004-07

The plan notes three areas of importance which are intended to act as guiding principles regarding the area plan:

- the development of a bottom-up approach to community planning;
- management of community aspirations in the face of reducing or static council budgets; and
- working together with partners to find the best solutions to complex community issues.

Bearing these over-arching principles in mind, the plan identified 5 strategic themes, against which progress in economic and community development can be measured. These focused on social inclusion, the labour market, learning, the economy, environmental sustainability and the provision of quality services:

1. **Community well being:** the council aims to promote socially inclusive policies that help to foster a community that supports its more vulnerable citizens and encourages overall community well being.
2. **Jobs and the economy:** Aberdeenshire Council intends to foster sustainable economic growth, which is stable and maintains a low level of unemployment. The broadening and bolstering of the local economic base is also a stated aim.
3. **Learning:** the local authority will encourage lifelong learning through an inclusive approach that will embrace the whole community.
4. **A sustainable environment:** No action taken in the local area should compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs.
5. **Quality services:** the council aims to deliver excellent public services, which will have a positive impact on citizens' quality of life.

2.3.3 Marr Area Partnership Community Economic Development Plan

The Marr Area Partnership Community Economic Development Plan (MCEDP) focuses on the Marr area, within which Huntly is a major settlement. The key themes of the MAP focus upon local economic development, the workforce, the environment and community development. They were outlined as follows:

- cooperating with a range of partners in order to promote a diverse local economic base;
- involve local communities in planning for their futures;
- fostering cooperation between different communities in the local area;
- promote sustainable development within the local area;
- encourage the development of local training initiatives; and
- taking an inclusive approach to more isolated rural individuals and communities by encouraging greater access to facilities

With specific regard to Huntly, the MCEDP noted the need for the town to develop a much stronger base of community involvement in order to plan for its

long term future. It was felt that this would be essential if Huntly were to address the problems it currently faces.

3 Town appraisal and sphere of influence

3.1 Introduction

Huntly is a market and commuter town which serves a relatively extensive catchment area extending around the town and particularly towards the south and west. The town attracts visitors throughout the year with its main attractions including Huntly Castle, the Nordic Ski Centre and the Deans factory and shop. The town has grown only moderately over recent decades with three modern estates situated on the periphery of the town. There is increasing pressure for more housing to be provided. The historic parts of the town remain largely intact and unlike many other Scottish towns, there are few examples of unsympathetic infill development or poor alterations. The town centre has a distinctive and attractive character, focussed on the impressive Square and a relatively cohesive townscape, for the most part based on the town's characteristic grid layout. The town enjoys an attractive setting enclosed by farmland, rivers, mature woodland and rounded hills.

3.2 Sphere of Influence

Huntly has an ideal strategic location on the A96 with the advantages of a rail station and convenient access to Aberdeen Airport. The town serves a wide rural catchment area, which extends to the north-east beyond Forgue, and to Rhynie and Cabrach to the south-west. The catchment area is indicated in Figure 3.1

An appraisal of the physical and environmental qualities of Huntly is discussed in more detail below. Figures 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 show photographs of Approaches and Circulation, Character Areas (non-housing) and Housing. Figure 3.5 summarises the townscape analysis.

3.3 Approaches/Circulation

The A96 bypass ensures that the town avoids unnecessary through traffic. The three main approaches into the town all lead directly from the bypass, constructed in the 1970s, which skirts the border of the south and west of the town.

From Inverness and the north, the approach into the town centre is via Deveron Road which is flanked by open fields, Huntly cemetery and mature trees before leading through traditional Victorian housing and traditional vernacular

housing. This approach provides a positive first impression of the town and should be maintained as the town continues to grow.

The principal approach into the town is off the roundabout on the bypass which provides a direct route into the town via George V Avenue and Gordon Street. At the roundabout there is a lack of any distinct townscape features; it is only beyond the open recreational space of Market Muir that the traditional tightly-knit stone buildings exhibit a strong sense of place. The Stewart's Hall spire is a key landmark on the approach towards The Square.

From Aberdeen and the south the road into the town via Huntly Station does not have a 'town centre' sign because it is a less direct route due to the current traffic circulation system. Traffic beyond Bogie Street is directed away from Duke Street which leads directly to The Square, either southwards along Gladstone Road, or northwards through the compact network of residential streets.

There is no public access or egress between The Castle Hotel and the town. The Avenue, which leads directly to The Castle is little wider than a single track and has a distinctive recreational character.

The first two routes lead directly to the Square, the heart of the town, giving a clear orientation to the visitor and a clear sense of place.

Huntly Square

The Square is the physical and historic focus of the town and the main circulation system draws traffic directly to it. Within the Square itself traffic movement operates on a 'split roundabout' system with the east-west cross route restricted to one-way traffic. In conjunction with on-street parking, circulation is consequently slowed down which achieves an acceptable balance between pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

Parking

Car parks to serve the town centre are close at hand and are clearly signposted from the approaches. On-street parking in and adjacent to the square is metered as is parking at the compact Nelson Street car park. The other, and largest town centre car park at East Park is free of charge providing a clear parking/cost hierarchy. Aberdeenshire Council is currently undertaking a traffic management study which will make recommendations to improve traffic circulation, parking and signage in and around the town.

Interpretation/Signage

Signs on the bypass describe Huntly as ‘The Family Town’. ‘Brown’ tourist signs on the bypass and within the town direct visitors to the Nordic Ski Centre, Huntly Castle and the Castle Hotel. In addition, Huntly Castle is part of the wider ‘Castle Trail’ and an interpretation sign is located on The Avenue, the main route leading from The Square to The Castle. However, overall there is a lack of interpretation signs providing information on key buildings, landmarks and other locations of interest.

3.4 Character Areas

Huntly comprises several distinct ‘character zones’ deriving from a combination of physical qualities, historic factors and the predominant uses in the area. (Figure 3.6) The key character areas as follows:

Commercial Core

Huntly town centre core exhibits distinct character contrasts. This is exemplified by the formal grandness of the square and surrounding streets of large grey stone buildings in contrast to the smaller scale meandering layout of the early town and grid layouts comprising rows of cottages and two storey buildings.

The commercial heart of the town centre is comprised of three distinct zones:

(i) The Square

The Square is the traditional market square focus of the town. The predominantly three-storey traditional buildings which tightly and formally enclose the square provides a strong and unique character. In summary it comprises:

- Mixed activity – civic uses, hotels, banks and retailers
- A lack of vibrant ground floor uses and frontages
- Quality streetscape enhancement with themed street furniture and hard-wearing natural materials in need of ongoing maintenance

(ii) *Gordon Street (Northern end)*

This trafficked street comprising mainly independent retailers and a mix of other commercial uses presents a vibrant feel. Stewart's Hall is an important social focus and its vertical tower is a key landmark in the town. This area includes a small cluster of vacant/derelict buildings including the former Playhouse cinema.

(iii) *Duke Street (Western end)*

Commercial activity along the street is split into two distinct zones. The primary zone closest to The Square comprises a narrow street form with a range of independent retailers providing interest and activity along the street. The narrow shared-surfaced part of the street results in slow traffic speeds and a safe pedestrian environment.

The secondary zone is separated by a row of vacant shop fronts currently being refurbished. The re-use of these units for retail use will help to reconnect the two zones.

The Avenue

The Avenue is a formal tree-lined approach towards Huntly Castle. The route is punctuated by the vertical War Memorial obelisk at its southern end and the prominent Simpson Building which frames access through its arch northwards towards The Castle.

Gordon Schools

To the west of The Avenue is a cluster of large scale educational buildings of undistinguished appearance. Outdoor recreational pitches extend northwards to the Huntly Nordic and Outdoor Centre, forming part of the recreational envelope that surrounds the north and east of the town.

Industry

The majority of large-scale industrial activity in the town is accommodated within Huntly Industrial Estate on the south western edge of the town. The Estate is relatively well screened from the bypass through a combination of formal and informal planting including hedgerows thus avoiding a negative first impression of the town. The vibrant primary colours of the Fire Station and Deans factory buildings dominate views from Gordon Street/Market Muir. A

practical advantage of the industrial park is its location on the periphery of the town thereby avoiding potential vehicular conflict.

Housing

The chronology of housing can be clearly identified in specific pockets within the town.

(i) Traditional Vernacular Morphology

The oldest residential areas within the town are the few remaining organic streets and the grid layout emanating from The Square.

(ii) Prestigious Traditional Victorian Housing

These areas comprise detached and semi-detached Victorian properties with generous gardens.

(iii) Inter-war Housing

The areas consist of semi-detached and short terraces of housing set around formal open spaces.

(iv) 1960s/1970s Architecture

These housing areas are located outwith the grid area towards the edge of the built-up area. They comprise a mix of bungalows, terraces and two five-storey flats.

(v) Recent Housing Estates

Three housing estates on the periphery of the town have provided rather undistinguished new housing in the town.

River Valley

The River Valley along the River Bogie provides a distinct eastern edge to the built-up area of the town. Its sloping sides allow views across from each side; the eastern side being predominantly wooded and the western 'town' side more open with occasional level areas close to the water. With the exception of the bypass, Bogie Bridge provides the main crossing point; the cluster of buildings at

the bridge include Huntly Station, residential and commercial uses. A more low-key crossing point is Bleachfield Bridge.

3.5 Views, Landmarks & Visual Quality

The street layout bounded by King Street, East Park Street, Gladstone Road and Bleachfield Street is predominantly geometric, which allows many clear axial views. Key vertical landmarks within the town include the clock tower of Stewarts Hall on Gordon St, St Margaret’s Church on West Park Street and the former Scott Hospital (Institute). These landmarks help to make the town visually permeable and help people to navigate easily around the town.

Few of the historical buildings in the town are floodlit at night. Although the Stewart’s Hall spire is lit, surprisingly The Castle is no longer.

Shopfronts and their fascia signs are generally in keeping with the buildings which they occupy. Where commercial signs are mounted at an upper level perpendicular to the building frontage this provides visual interest to the street scene and should be encouraged. Similarly, hand painted or individually mounted lettering creates a more unique street character. There is evidence that some window displays could be improved and made more attractive to improve the general street scene.

With the exception of vacant sites and premises which tend to create a negative (and often temporary) street-front impression, there are a few examples of poor frontages which detract from the quality of the townscape. These include the garage on Gordon Street and the entrances into East Park car park. Overall, however, the core of the town has a strong aesthetic character.

The majority of the town centre as defined in the Local Plan is designated as a **Conservation Area**. Land further east towards the River Bogie and northwards beyond the Simpson Building also has Conservation Area status.

3.6 Vacancies and Underused Sites

Town Centre Sites

The visual analysis of has indicated that there are only a few vacant and underused sites in the town centre. These are limited to: vacant land and premises at Westpark Street (includes former BT offices), the unsurfaced informal car park off Deveron Street and land to the rear of the public toilets on Castle Street.

Peripheral Sites

Three key areas of land are currently underused or unoccupied. These are: the former George V Garden Centre which is a prominent entry point into the town, the Goods Yard and adjoining land and premises off Old Toll Road, and the abandoned Pirriesmill Farm and associated buildings east of the River Bogie. The garden centre site (planning application for an ASDA store yet to be fully determined) will have a crucial role in providing a first impression of the town. Tesco have also recently lodged a planning application for a supermarket development on a site adjacent to the bypass on the west end of the town and again would be a 'gateway development' setting a first impression of the town.

Town Centre Vacant Property

Buildings which currently lie vacant in the town centre are more numerous and are concentrated in Duke Street and Gordon Street. Specifically, they comprise:

- The Square
 - 22 (vacant ground & upper floor)

- Gordon Street
 - Former Playhouse Cinema
 - 45 (vacant ground & upper floor)
 - 37 (vacant ground & upper floor)
 - 38/40 (vacant upper floor)
 - 63 (vacant ground floor)

- Duke Street
 - 9-11 (vacant upper floors)
 - 41 (vacant ground floor)
 - 43 (vacant ground & upper floor)
 - 47 (vacant ground floor)
 - 29-33 (vacant ground floors being renovated)

- Bogie Street
 - 9-11 (vacant ground floor)
 - 24 (vacant ground & upper floor)
 - 36 (derelict building & land)

- Deveron Road
- Former bus depot shed at corner of Meadow Street

3.7 The Square

Ground Floor Vibrancy

There is a lack of vibrancy fronting onto The Square from the ground floor uses. This is due primarily from the preponderance of lengthy single-use frontages and the limited number of active ground-floor uses that provide interesting viewing from the street.

Non- retail uses dominate The Square. Around half of all the national operators in the town are located here. The ground floor premises comprise:

Services: (8) 2 hotels, 3 banks, Post Office, Tourist Information Centre (Closed in winter), Coffee shop (entrance only)

Retail: (4) Convenience, clothing, furniture and electrical stores

Cultural: (1) Library & museum

Vacant unit: (1)

Residential: James Cullen Court

There is some evidence of vacant and underused upper floors in the Square, but does not appear to be a major issue in terms of townscape quality.

In contrast to The Square, both Duke Street and Gordon Street have more concentrated rows of shops (despite there being some vacant premises), and these are mainly independent retailers.

Maintenance of Streetscape Improvements

Huntly Town Square was upgraded around 6 years ago following consultation with local residents. The re-design of the square comprised the realignment of traffic circulation, parking and pavement realignments to create improved circulation and upgrade the aesthetics of the square. The aim of reducing traffic signs and paraphernalia and reducing other unnecessary 'street clutter' has essentially been achieved.

Quality floorscape materials which have been introduced have weathered well. The use of Caithness stone and granite continues to give the square a solid, high

quality feel and only 'chewing gum debris' on the ground spoils the appearance of the materials.

Street furniture introduced into the square is of traditional 'Victorian style' – an updated version similar to the original streetlamps positioned within the square in the late 1800's. The street furniture is themed black with some gold painted detailing. This is supplemented with granite bench seating. Vehicular street signs, parking meters and a bus stop have a less historic and traditional feel, but overall the square has a strong and aesthetically good appearance.

Some elements of the street furniture are showing signs of a lack of maintenance. Many of the bollards have been knocked and lie at odd angles; the bollards have faded and require repainting; some of the pedestrian safety railings have been damaged and require repainting; the litter bins require repainting.

4. How well does Huntly perform?

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a brief outline of Huntly's economic performance and how it is viewed as a place to live, work and visit. The chapter draws on three sources of information:

- a review of economic and social indicators carried out by GEN in conjunction with the Marr Area Partnership
- a series of business interviews carried out by the consultant team
- a community questionnaire completed by over 400 residents, workers and visitors to the town.

4.2 Economic and social indicators

This section highlights the main findings from the economic and social review. The review focuses on the following key themes:

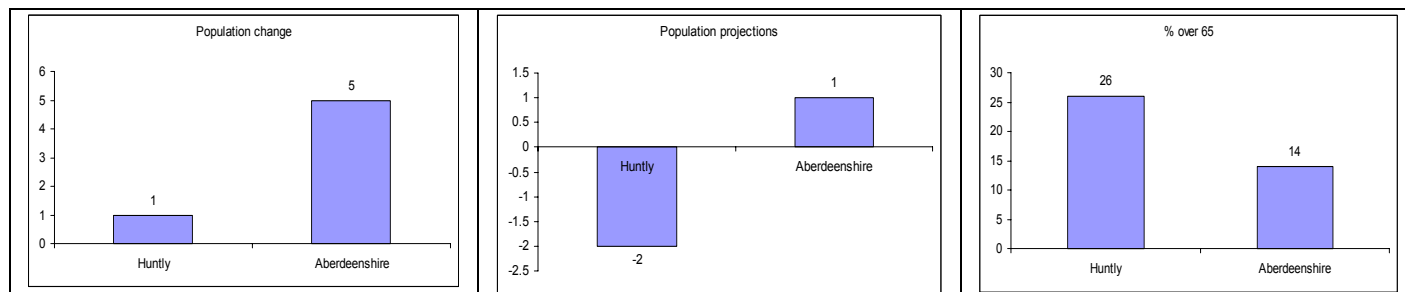
- population
- the local company base and employment profile
- school leavers and exam results
- housing and land availability
- health inequalities.

Key messages from the review are highlighted in *italics* under each theme with the detail given in bullet point format.

The consultants have also produced a **town baseline analysis tool**, which provides further detail on a wide range of economic and social indicators. The town baseline tool is held by Aberdeenshire Council and the Marr Area Partnership and there are plans to update the tool as new data and information becomes available.

4.2.1 Population

Figure 4.1: Population, key indicators



Huntly's population has grown slowly over the last ten years, and at a slower rate than Aberdeenshire

- Between 1991 and 2001, Huntly's population increased by 1%, a similar rate to the rest of Scotland. However, the rise in population was not as rapid as in the rest of Aberdeenshire.

The town has a high number of older residents

- The proportion of people aged 65 or over was much higher in Huntly (26%) than in the rest of Aberdeenshire (14%) and Scotland (16%).
- A high share of Huntly residents was in receipt of the state pension. Aberdeenshire council figures note that in 2003, 7% more residents in Huntly East and 3% more in Huntly West were claiming pensions than in the rest of Scotland.

The town's population is expected to continue to fall

- Aberdeenshire Council's population projections anticipated a fall in population of -2% between 2001 and 2006, despite an anticipated rise of 1% in the rest of Aberdeenshire.

4.2.2 Company base

Figure 4.2: Company base, key indicators



The number of businesses in Huntly has fallen over the last four years ¹

- The number of companies in Huntly fell by 1% 1998 and 2002, despite a 2% rise in the rest of Scotland. However, there was a 2% fall throughout Aberdeenshire, suggesting that the contraction was not limited to the town.

Like the rest of Scotland, Huntly is a town of small businesses...

- The size profile of Huntly's workplaces is broadly similar to the national profile, with 80% of workplaces employing 10 people or less.

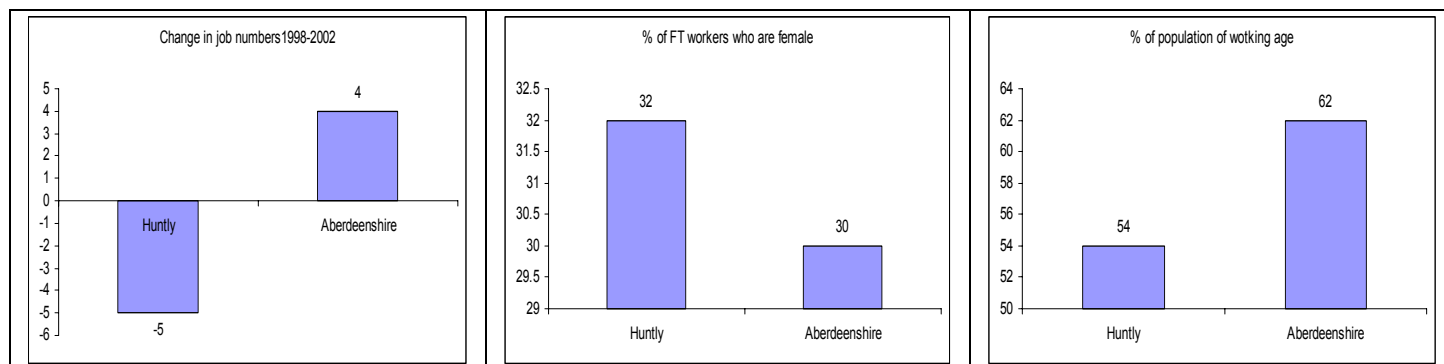
...But Huntly has different types of businesses than elsewhere in Aberdeenshire and Scotland

- A relatively large share (44% compared with 27% in Aberdeenshire and 33% in Scotland) of local companies were in distribution, hotels and restaurants, whilst a low percentage (14% in Huntly compared with 25% in Aberdeenshire and 23% in Scotland) were in banking and finance. Despite this, banking and finance was the second most important sector behind distribution, hotels and restaurants.

¹ For which data is available. At the time of writing Annual Business Inquiry data for Huntly was only available until 2001.

4.2.3 Employment profile

Figure 4.3: Employment, key indicators



The number of jobs in Huntly has fallen over the last four years.

- Huntly experienced a 5% fall in overall job numbers between 1998 and 2002, despite a 4% rise in the rest of Aberdeenshire and a 5% rise throughout Scotland.

Women account for a smaller proportion of the workforce in Huntly than in the rest of Scotland

- Of the town’s full time workforce, 32% was female, lower than the rest of Scotland (38%), but similar to Aberdeenshire (30%).

The public sector is the largest employer in the town, although retail and hospitality and manufacturing are also important employers

- The largest shares of employees working in the town were employed in the public sector (35% compared with 24% in Aberdeenshire and 28% in Scotland), distribution, hotels and restaurants (26%, similar to 26% in Aberdeenshire and 24% in Scotland) and manufacturing (19%, higher than the figures of 15% in Aberdeenshire and 12% throughout Scotland).

The number of people in employment as a proportion of the population in Huntly is relatively low. This in part reflects the older age profile of the town

- People of working age accounted for 54% of Huntly’s population, a lower share than in the rest of Aberdeenshire or Scotland (both 62%). Huntly’s

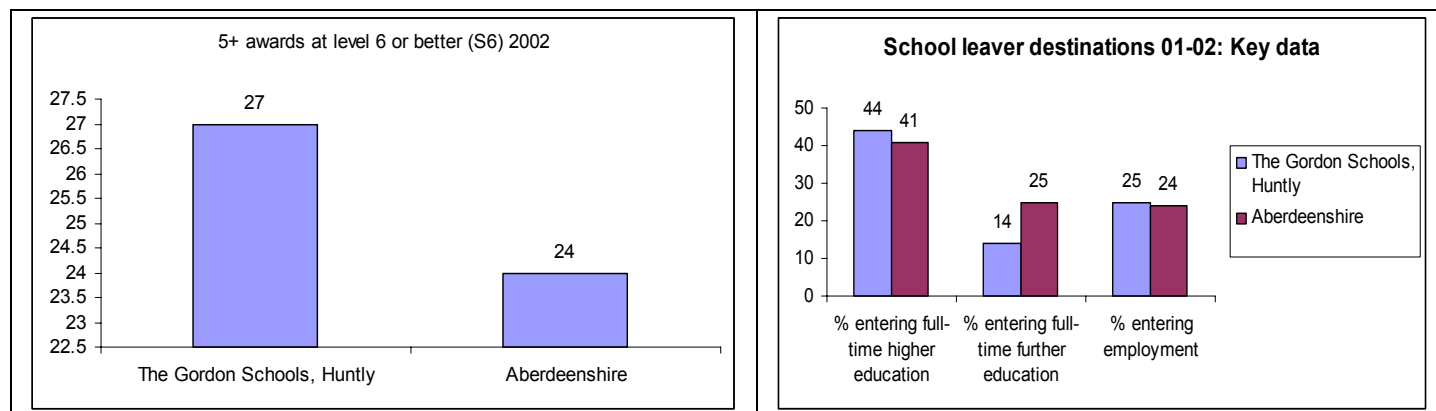
economic activity rate was 65% in 2001, which was lower than in Aberdeenshire (71%) but the same as in the rest of Scotland.

Huntly residents are more likely than in Aberdeenshire and Scotland to hold no formal qualifications

- Of people aged 16-74, 39% of Huntly residents in 2001 had no qualifications. This was higher than in Aberdeenshire (30%) and Scotland (33%). This may be a reflection of the higher proportion of older people in Huntly than in the rest of Aberdeenshire.

4.2.3 School leavers and exam results

Figure 4.4: School performance, key indicators



The Gordon Schools performs strongly both in terms of exam results and students staying on beyond S4

- in terms of school results, levels of exam achievement at The Gordon Schools (Huntly’s local secondary school) were significantly better than the rest of Scotland and were better than in the rest of Aberdeenshire and Scotland for S6.

A high proportion of school leavers from Huntly progress on to Higher Education

- in 2002, a high percentage (44%) of the town’s school leavers moved into full-time higher education compared with 41% in Aberdeenshire and 32% in Scotland.

- a far lower percentage of school leavers in Huntly (14%) entered full-time further education when compared with Aberdeenshire (25%) and Scotland (20%).
- Around 25% of school leavers in Huntly moved into employment, which was similar to the figure of 24% in Aberdeenshire and 23% in Scotland.

4.2.4 Housing and land availability

There have been a significant number of new houses built in Huntly over the last 10 years, although the rate of growth has been much slower than in other settlements close to Aberdeen such as Ellon and Inverurie

- Aberdeenshire Council figures stated that the number of homes in Huntly increased by 190 units (a rise of 10%) between 1991 and 2001, and the construction of a further 58 units in the town has been projected between 2003 and 2006. Deveron Homes have recently acquired two areas allocated for housing in the west end and are proposing more than 100 houses

Levels of Industrial and Commercial development on the town have historically been low

- the level of industrial land uptake has been less than a hectare per year over the period 1998 to 2002. Aberdeenshire Council's Land Audit (2005) notes that a total of 10.3 hectares of undeveloped land has been allocated for industrial, business or employment use, although none of this land is immediately available.

4.2.5 Health inequalities

Information from NHS Grampian highlighted the following key messages regarding health inequalities in the town.

- a higher proportion of the town's population under the age of 65 was claiming attendance allowance than throughout Aberdeenshire.
- a lower percentage of the local population in Huntly East were claiming disability Living Allowance (DLA) than throughout Aberdeenshire in 2003, whilst the share in Huntly West was slightly higher.
- estimated smokers and the level of deaths attributable to smoking was a significant health issue for the town.

- in Huntly in 2001, 20% of the population suffered from a long-term limiting illness, compared with 15% in Aberdeenshire and 20% in Scotland as a whole.
- in 2002, a higher share of families in Huntly were in receipt of Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) than in the rest of Aberdeenshire.
- child benefit uptake was lower in Huntly East than throughout Aberdeenshire, but was similar to the local authority level in Huntly West.
- the Drill Hall is being refurbished as multi agency family centre.

4.3 Business interviews

Interviews were undertaken with ten local businesses. The business interviews confirmed that Huntly town centre operates as a local/district centre with **regular customers using mainly local independent retailers** normally spending less than £25.

The interviews highlighted mixed views on business prospects. There was real concern about the prospects of having to compete with a ‘new supermarket/s’. However four retailers/service businesses said turnover had increased recently. Part of the answer for one was competing on ‘quality product’ as well as price/service and for the other in marketing and targeting a niche market. Larger businesses pointed to the difficulty in recruiting local people and the challenges of competing in a ‘global market’.

The interviews highlighted a genuine interest in **business development advice** from the smaller town centre businesses and in particular in more effective networking with other town centre businesses. Other findings have been incorporated in the Final Report.

4.4 Huntly as a place to live, work and visit

The consultants developed a community questionnaire which was distributed to a wide number of local residents, businesses, community groups, young people and visitors. The questionnaire focuses on three main sets of issues including views on:

- the town as a place to live and work
- the town as a place to visit
- the town centre of Huntly.

Distribution and collection of the questionnaire was carried out by a number of local organisations and individuals including Gordon Schools, the Marr Area Partnership, Local Traders and the Town Co-ordinator. Questionnaires were sent out to parents and children via Gordon Schools, and to Community Groups via the Community Council network and the Marr Area Partnership. Questionnaires were also available for completion at a range of venues including the library, the Stewarts Hall, the Linden Centre, some local shops and at the Entertainment in Square event over the first week-end of June. In total more than **400 responses** were received and analysed.

4.4.1 Survey returns

More than 80% of the returns were completed by school students and local residents. Just under a fifth was completed by people who work or have a business in Huntly with the remainder completed by visitors to the town.

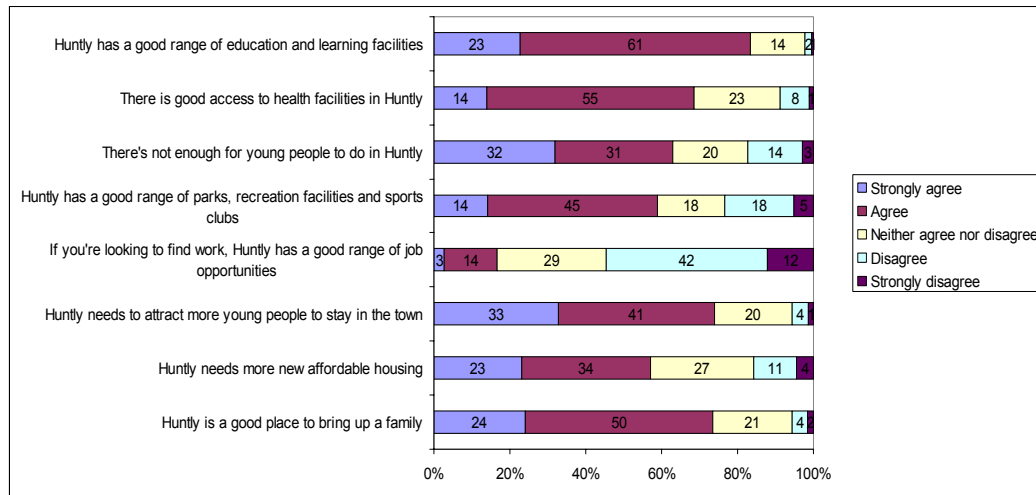
Figure 4.5: Would you best describe yourself as...

Response	Number	%
A school student	161	40
Someone who lives in and around Huntly	165	40
Someone who works / has business in Huntly	69	17
A visitor to Huntly	12	3
Total	407	100

4.4.2 Huntly as a place to live and work

Respondents were asked whether they (strongly) agreed or (strongly) disagreed with a series of statements about Huntly as place to live and work. The findings are shown on figure 4.6 below.

Figure 4.6: Huntly as a place to live and work



The survey produced a number of positive messages with a large majority of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that Huntly:

- has good range of education and learning activities (84%)
- has good access to health facilities (69%)
- has good range of parks, recreation facilities and sports clubs (59%)
- is a good place to bring up a family (74%)

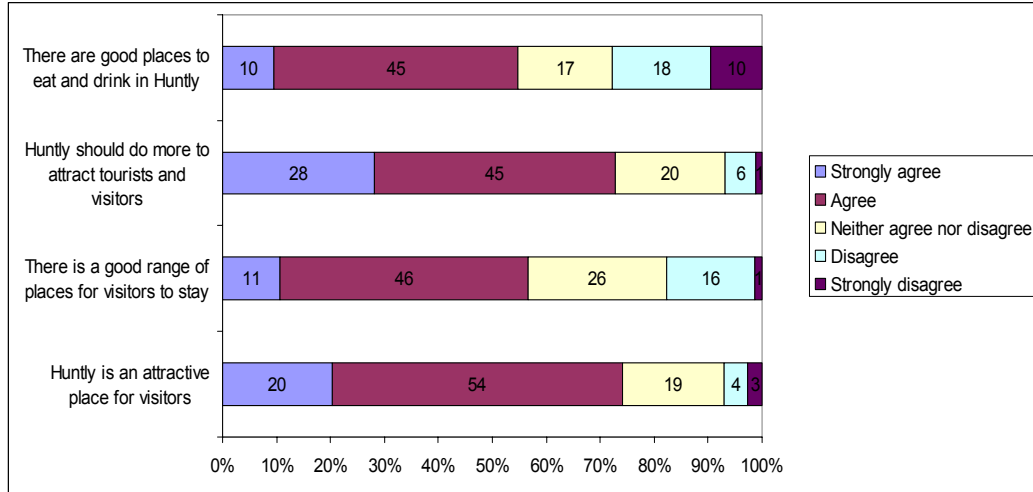
The survey also highlighted some areas where the town could improve its performance:

- 53% agreed or strongly agreed that there is not enough for young people to do in Huntly
- 56% of people disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that Huntly offers a good range of employment opportunities
- 74% agreed or strongly agreed that more should be done to retain young people in Huntly
- 57% agreed or strongly agreed that Huntly needs more new affordable housing

4.4.3 Huntly as a place to visit

Respondents were asked whether they (strongly) agreed or (strongly) disagreed with a series of statements about Huntly as place to visit. The findings are shown on figure 4.7 below.

Figure 4.7: Huntly as a place to visit.



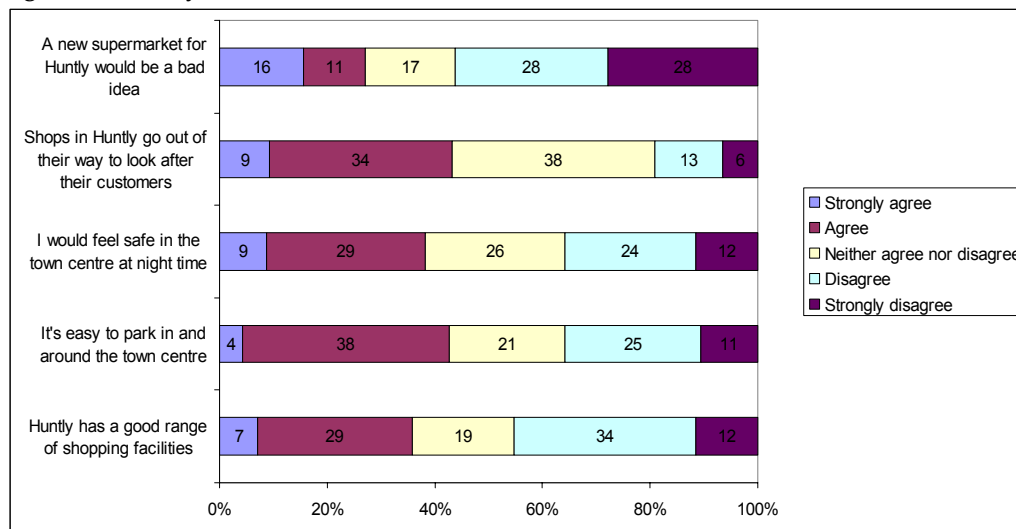
The key messages are that:

- almost three-quarters of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Huntly was an attractive place to visit but a similar proportion believed that more should be done to attract visitors (74%)
- the town was perceived by a large proportion of residents as offering a good range of places for visitors to stay (57%) and good places to eat and drink (54%).

4.4.4 Huntly town centre

Respondents were asked whether they (strongly) agreed or (strongly) disagreed with a series of statements about Huntly town centre. The findings are shown on figure 4.8 below.

Figure 4.8: Huntly Town Centre



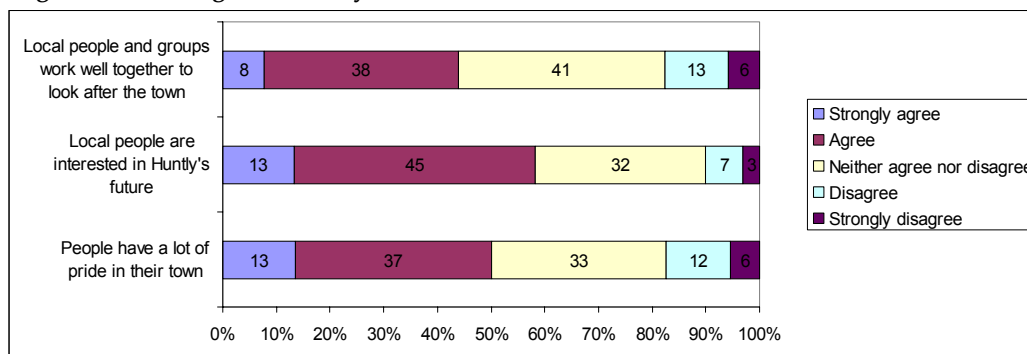
The survey provided some mixed views on Huntly Town Centre:

- in terms of the shopping facilities on offer in Huntly, views were mixed on whether these provided a good enough range with 36% stating that the town centre had a good range of shops with 45% disagreeing with this statement
- 44% of people agreed that shops in Huntly went out of their way to look after customers, although 38% were unsure and around a fifth disagreed or strongly disagreed
- views on the ease of parking within the town centre were also mixed with 43% of residents stating that it was easy to park there, and 36% stating that it was not
- opinion on the safety of the town centre at night were equally balanced, with 38% stating they would feel safe at night and 36% disagreeing with this statement
- the survey also highlighted that the majority of Huntly residents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that the opening of a new supermarket in Huntly would be bad for the town.

4.4.5 Looking after Huntly

Finally respondents were asked whether they (strongly) agreed or (strongly) disagreed with a series of statements about the extent to which local people took an interest in the future of the town. The findings are shown on figure 4.9 below.

Figure 4.9: Looking after Huntly



The key messages from the survey were that:

- there was a strong sense that local people took pride in Huntly with 50% agreeing that people have a lot of pride in their town,
- 58% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that local people were interested in the future of Huntly.
- 46% felt that local groups worked well together in looking after the town although 20% disagreed with that statement.

4.4.6 The key issues facing Huntly

Individuals surveyed were also invited to offer their views on the top three issues facing the town. Respondents were given the opportunity to choose their top three issues from a pre-defined list and / or to identify additional issues as they saw fit. To analyse the results we have carried out a weighting of responses, giving each top ranked issue a score of 3, each second ranked issue a score of 2 and each third ranked issue a score of one.

The results are shown on table 4.10. below.

Figure 4.10: Key Issues facing Huntly

	Rank 1		Rank 2		Rank 3		Total Score
	Resp.	Score	Resp.	Score	Resp.	Score	
Creating more job opportunities	115	345	46	92	42	42	479
A healthy town centre	78	234	47	94	36	36	364
Minimising the effects of a new supermarket	78	234	47	94	36	36	364
Improving leisure and recreation facilities	49	147	67	134	44	44	325
More affordable housing	57	171	52	104	47	47	322
Marketing Huntly and promoting the town	44	132	51	102	37	37	271
Attracting more people to the town	43	129	45	90	34	34	253
Keeping Huntly's distinct character	49	147	34	68	32	32	247
Supporting local businesses to grow	41	123	44	88	34	34	245
Creating high quality facilities for tourists	35	105	26	52	40	40	197
Improving education and training opportunities	26	78	38	76	24	24	178
Supporting community groups	29	87	23	46	28	28	161
All responses ²	644	-	520	-	434	-	-

The table confirms that:

- the top priority for respondents was to create more job opportunities in the town
- minimising the effects of a new supermarket and retaining the health of the town centre were both rates as equal second priorities
- improving leisure and recreation facilities and ensuring the availability of more affordable housing were both relatively high priorities with total scores in excess of 300
- conversely creating high quality facilities for tourists, improving education and training opportunities and supporting community groups were seen as *relatively* low priorities, but each was still important to a significant number of people with around 30 giving each issue a top ranking.

Other issues which were highlighted in the survey results were the need to create places for teenagers and young people, providing more free parking in

² A number of respondents offered more than once choice as their top priority and more than once choice for their second priority. For ease of analysis we have included all responses.

the town centre, pedestrianisation, improved street cleaning, and improving food, drink, entertainment and accommodation in the town.

5. Huntly: challenges and towards a vision

5.1 Towards a strategy

The first part of this report has highlighted the conclusions from a comprehensive analysis of Huntly and its role in serving a wider rural area. This chapter builds on these conclusions and draws on the outputs from a series of workshops that were held in Huntly. The workshops were publicised using posters, flyers, adverts and articles in the Huntly Express and extensive networking by the Gen/DWA team, Marr Area Partnership and the Town Co-ordinator.

Around 120 people attended the Workshops with representation from a wide cross section of residents, businesses, community groups and public sector agencies. A Youth Workshop was also held in the Gordon Schools.

At the first community workshop held on April 14th participants were asked to identify the strengths and weaknesses of Huntly and to help identify what a vision for Huntly in 2020 might be.

Full details of the responses given by workshop participants are contained in appendix one. In the remainder of this section we present a summary of the workshop findings.

5.2 Huntly - Strengths & Weaknesses

Key Strengths

The workshops identified a series of clear strengths which Huntly should seek to maintain and build upon:

For a town of its size the Huntly has an impressive number of large businesses, a number of which have an international reputation. These companies are an important source of jobs in the town and also offer a number of well paid high quality jobs.

At the same time Huntly remains a town of small businesses, with a diverse range of companies. Thus is reflected in the town centre where there is a good range of diverse and independent retailers. As well as being an important source of jobs, the range of shops helps maintain Huntly's distinct identity,

although there was recognition that many businesses will face challenges if a new supermarket opens in Huntly.

The town also has a good location with road and rail links, and a reasonable public transport service, although there was a recognition that much could be done to improve and promote these links.

The town is well served by the presence of a Business Centre offering start up and expansion space for new businesses, located next door to a Learning Centre which provides access to a wide range of learning opportunities through Banff and Buchan College. Developing closer links between these two facilities was seen as a potential opportunity for the strategy

Huntly offers a terrific quality of life, particularly for people bringing up a family – the Gordon Schools and Gordon Primary School both have an excellent reputation, and there are a wide range of social, leisure and sporting activities available to local people.

The town itself was also seen as a key asset to be exploited in the strategy, the town is compact, has distinctive buildings and an attractive town square, and has a striking setting. People were also seen to be warm and welcoming

There is a good range of facilities for visitors including bed and breakfast, hotel (recently the Castle Hotel was awarded four star status) camping accommodation and a number of attractions including Huntly Castle, the town museum, while Huntly's rich history and distinct local character were also perceived to be key strengths which could prove attractive to visitors.

Weaknesses and opportunities

At the same time the workshops noted a number of weaknesses (and opportunities) that the strategy might seek to address.

Some larger businesses have faced difficulties, highlighted by the recent job losses at RB Farquhar. These have raised concerns around the vulnerability of employment in the town to external economic factors and the need to ensure that all local employers remain competitive.

While there are a number of well paid high quality jobs in the town, many people still have to commute outwith Huntly to work. It was recognised that this trend could not (and indeed should not) be stopped, but there was a desire

to see a better range of well paid jobs in the town, particularly to retain and attract younger people to stay in the town.

As noted above the town centre and the range of local shops were seen as key Huntly assets; however it was recognised that both of these faced threats from the proposals to build a new supermarket (or supermarkets) in the town. The workshops recognised that change is inevitable, but there was a clear sense that care should be taken to ensure that local traders had the ability, and the support to address these challenges.

Concerns were expressed about the range of housing available in the town. There were perceived to be shortages in two main areas – affordable housing, particularly for young people and first time buyers, and larger detached housing, particularly for those with young families. A shortage of housing might make it more difficult to attract people to the town, or retain existing Huntly residents.

While the town has a good range of visitor attractions, there was a strong sense that more could be done to market the town to visitors. The workshops emphasised that a range of visitor markets could be targeted ranging from day trippers from Aberdeen to visit local shops and events through to visitors from elsewhere looking to make longer stays in Huntly, perhaps as a base for travelling around the north east of Scotland. Marketing activity could include the production of town leaflets, developing a visitor website and enhancing local signage.

There was also concern that while the town is attractive there was a need to focus on the ongoing maintenance and stewardship of the town and to address some key development sites such the former cinema.

The workshops raised issues about the extent to which local people pulled together to support the town. The workshops highlighted that there is a wide range of very active community groups in Huntly and the community questionnaire confirmed that a majority of people take great pride in the town, but there was a sense that community groups did not always work together.

Overall, the view was that more had to be done to ‘talk up’ the town and to enthuse residents and business. To generalise Huntly needs to move from being a more cynical and critical town where ‘60/40 are against new ideas’, to being a more positive outward looking town where ‘80/20 are for positive change’.

6. Vision: town development strategy and action plan

6.1 Vision for Huntly in 2020:

The GEN/DWA team have used the conclusions from the Workshops and the Community Questionnaire to help shape a strategic vision for Huntly and to test the principles of a long term strategy and five year Action Plan

The vision for Huntly in 2020 agreed at the second workshop in May was one where...

'Huntly is a growing, thriving, well connected and managed market town that retains its individuality. 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.'

The high quality of life, inclusive sense of pride in the town, the positive and committed business community and strong local culture in Huntly means that people want to live, work and visit now and in the future.

Huntly is a town where residents, businesses and agencies all pull together.'

6.2 Town development strategy

Building on analysis from the study, the outcomes from the workshops and the vision for Huntly the consultants developed a strategy and action plan for Huntly based around six key themes. The themes are presented in the order of importance identified at the prioritisation workshop (see appendix 1) and are as follows:

- promoting business development and growth
- promoting Huntly's image and marketing
- improving the environment and encouraging visitors
- investing in quality buildings, sustainable sites and infrastructure
- encouraging skills and learning

- promoting sports, art and culture

For each of the strategic themes we set out an overall objective and some potential projects. The projects have largely emerged from the consultation and workshop process. For each of the projects we set out some indicative actions and estimated costs, as well as an assessment of relative priority and an indication of the agency who might lead the project. It should be noted that these projects do not represent a *blueprint* for the future of Huntly. The projects should be reviewed on an ongoing basis by the Huntly Strategy steering group for appropriateness and likelihood of implementation. We would expect that over the next few years the need for some projects may diminish, while other opportunities may arise.

6.3 Theme 1: Promoting business development and growth

Objective

To support local businesses, large and small, to continue to grow within Huntly and respond effectively to economic challenges. The aim will be to help ensure a business base that can continue to provide a wide range of good quality local jobs for the town.

Projects

Supporting local businesses, particularly those in the town centre was seen as a key priority in both the community questionnaire and the action planning workshop. The workshops identified a number of ways in which this could be done.

The Huntly Business Association, comprised of a number of independent town centre businesses has been active for the last 12 months and has already had a number of successes, most notably arranging late night opening during the Christmas shopping period of 2004. The group has developed a number of ideas for implementation over the next 18 months but is facing a number of barriers including expanding its membership, communicating its work to potential members and planning and implementing activities. As a result there is a strong case to provide a staffing resource to help the current group plan the detail of a more intensive **Huntly Business Initiative** that could include arrangements to deliver appropriate business development advice.

Key projects that the Business Initiative aims to take forward include planning a series of week-end events such as themed markets, entertainment and themed promotions. These could potentially be promoted through a **Business Website**,

or a **Business Section** on the proposed **Town Website**. Further details of the potential events programme are summarised under theme 6: Promoting sports, arts and culture.

In terms of the larger businesses in Huntly the study highlighted that many of these have existing contacts with Scottish Enterprise Grampian who provide relationship management and access to business support programmes. There is little merit therefore in identifying specific additional support measures for these businesses that should be implemented through the strategy.

Nevertheless these companies expressed a strong interest in the future of the town and have been an important source of ideas and support for action to address the town's future. We would recommend that these **larger businesses continue to be engaged by the town co-ordinator**. There is particular merit in connecting these businesses with local school students, especially to promote the range of career options available within local businesses. This could be done effectively through **Determined to Succeed** where the Scottish Executive offers financial support to ensure that Scottish school students have an opportunity to engage in an enterprise led activity throughout every year study at school.

There is a growing recognition that local authorities and other public agencies are significant procurers of goods and services, and that taking action to ensure that local traders have opportunities to tender for contracts can have a significant economic benefit. In Lanarkshire, Stirling and Falkirk work has been undertaken to standardise tendering procedures, communicate tenders to local companies and offer appropriate business development support to help companies tender effectively for local authority contracts in a range of areas from construction tenders, through to childcare support and the provision of school meals. A **local sourcing initiative** could be identify opportunities for Huntly companies to tender for the supply of goods and services, and explore the ways in which local businesses could tender for these contracts. The project in Huntly could be adopted as a pilot project with the potential to roll out across the whole of Aberdeenshire.

There was also a sense that the needs of business in and around Huntly will continue to evolve over the medium to long term. One approach that has worked well in other ATP towns has been Business Needs Survey to ensure that local agencies are aware of the challenges facing local companies and are in a better position to meet the requirements of local businesses.

Finally there was recognition that the Huntly e-business centre is an under utilised asset in the town. Scottish Enterprise Grampian offer a series of services through Business Gateway to encourage companies to take up and make use of e-business including seminars, demonstrations and one to one advice. SEG and the Business Gateway providers could be encouraged to deliver more of these activities in an attempt to drive up demand for e-business services. These events could be jointly marketed and delivered through the Huntly Business Association.

Implementation

Project	Next Step	Cost (over three years)	Lead Agencies	Priority
1. Huntly Business initiative	Identify target companies Membership campaign Attending Initiative meetings	Staff resource 3hrs per week	Town Co-ordinator / Aberdeenshire Council	High
2. Business web-site content - events and activity	(Plan activity programme) Develop website content Sponsorship of events / production of promotional material	£6k	Huntly Business Association	Medium / High
3. Working with larger companies / Determined to Succeed	Engaging with larger companies using Determined to Succeed to promote local career options	£15k	Huntly Town Co-ordinator /Aberdeenshire Council	Medium
4. Local sourcing	Engage with procurement staff to assess scale of opportunity. Carry out feasibility work to assess appropriate areas for targeting	£10k	Aberdeenshire Council / Local Businesses	Low/Med
5. Business needs survey	Carry out survey of emerging business needs and wished of local companies	£7k	ATP	High
6. Promoting e-business	Promoting use of e-business through demonstration centre and encouraging company use and adoption	£0k	SE Grampian	Med

6.4 Theme 2: Promoting Huntly's Image & Marketing

Objective

To coordinate the marketing of Huntly and the town centre to residents and to visitors as part of a day trip and short break destination.

In Huntly more has to be done to change and improve perceptions and increase awareness of town centre shops, services, facilities and attractions and the town as a day trip and short break destination.

Huntly has to be outward looking and actively promote its existing assets including the independent retailers and network of cultural and heritage attractions so that it becomes part of a day trip destination. The challenge is to coordinate marketing activities of VisitScotland, Aberdeenshire Council, businesses and private organisations to ensure a clear, consistent and effective message to residents and visitors. The aim is to attract more visitors and increase average spend. An important priority is to strengthen and extend the existing retail catchment and to reduce retail leakage and increase footfall and customer spend.

Projects

There is some promotional material, particularly leaflets advertising a tourist destinations and events in the area surrounding Huntly. There is however a noticeable lack of information about the shops and services which are currently on offer in the town itself. There is an opportunity to co-ordinate the preparation of new promotional material such as **well-designed brochures and leaflets** to highlight the features and maximise knowledge of what is on offer in the town centre.

A **shop local initiative** should be initiated offering savings and promotions for regular shoppers, actively targeting residents in new housing for example in the west end with a **welcome pack** of information. There is an opportunity to establish a **Huntly town centre web-site** which would promote the benefits of the town as a place to live, visit and shop as part of the overall place marketing strategy. A competition among local school children to **design a logo** for the website should be initiated. Regular updating of the site will be crucial.

The 'family town' branding that appears only on road signs on the A96 has not been exploited. The reality is that from a resident point of view Huntly is ideally suited for families with good schools, good sports and arts facilities and

groups and an excellent quality of life. The impression from a visitor point of view is much less positive and the town does very little in terms of going out of its way to encourage and welcome visiting families. This is now an appropriate time to **review the Huntly Brand** and explore the various alternatives including;

- the family town
- traditional Scotland in one town: castle, golf, shortbread, whisky
- the environmentally friendly town
- the sports & arts town
- the fair trade town
- the Gordon town

Ideally this work should take place ahead of an activity to produce new marketing materials to ensure consistency with the new 'Huntly Brand'.

Implementation

Project	Next Step	Cost (over three years)	Lead Agencies	Priority
1. Town centre leaflet (s)	Agree principles and format with steering group, draft a brief and invite local design companies to prepare costed proposals	£4k	Town Co-ordinator with Huntly Business Association	Medium
2. Town centre web site linked to community web	Agree principles and format with local businesses, draft a brief and invites local web design companies to prepare costed proposals	£4k	Town Co-ordinator with Huntly Business Association	Medium
3. Shop local & welcome pack	Agree principle with local businesses and aim to launch a scheme by late 2006 with town 'welcomers'	£2k	Town Co-ordinator with Huntly Business Association	Medium
4. Review the Huntly Brand	Undertake a through review of the 'Huntly brand' by an independent specialist, review the advantages/ disadvantages, identify a preferred 'brand' with the appropriate graphics/imagery that can	Brief to be prepared and costed	Town co-ordinator/ATP/Aberdeenshire Council/ Huntly Business Association/VisitScotland	High

	be adopted in signs, leaflets, websites , local businesses and agencies			
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6.5 Theme 3: Improving the environment and encouraging visitors

Objective

To create a high quality clean and safe environment focussed particularly on the Square as a lively and attractive public place so as to increase the number of visitors to the town and improve the town centre visitor offer so that it meets and exceeds expectations.

Huntly has a unique townscape and has retained its distinctive local character but more needs to be done to ‘manage’ the town and ensure that the townscape is not eroded. This will secure a hospitable and attractive environment in the town for local people who use the town centre. In addition improved signage and interpretation could be used to celebrate the town’s environmental and heritage assets to attract visitors, help them find their way about and encourage them to make return visits.

Projects

A consistent and **dedicated approach to stewardship** of the town is very important particularly in the Square to tackle maintenance issues like the repair of bollards and removing chewing gum. The Huntly Floral Fund is well supported and ensures a positive impact during the summer. Throughout the town centre shop fronts are generally in character and of reasonable quality however window displays are often poor or non existent and this gives a poor first impression and a feeling of ‘dead frontage’. A **window displays initiative** should be launched to encourage improvements with design advice, competitions with the involvement of local schools, arts and sports groups. These projects will help to instil an even greater sense of ‘Civic Pride’ in the town.

In the medium term the **local environment also presents economic development opportunities** for Huntly. One example that needs to be explored would be to take advantage of local forest resources and encourage the Forestry Commission as a partner to exploit local timber as a renewable energy sources and to promote Huntly as a centre of green energy in the form of wood as well as the Glens of Foudland windfarm. The new housing (and supermarket) design can also be encouraged to include more environmental features to make them more environmentally friendly and sustainable interesting. (See Theme 2) The

Aberdeenshire Council Sustainability Charter also gives backing to this kind of initiative.

Landmark lighting of key built and natural features can also help to develop a strong and positive identity for Huntly. At one time the Castle for example was floodlit. An improved network of **signage and interpretation** based on a ‘Huntly town trail’ should be researched, designed and implemented. The opportunities for gateway signage/art should also be investigated. This could include material that was placed in strategic locations like car parks that would give visitors more opportunity to enjoy the town and raise awareness and encourage pride among local people.

There is also an opportunity to research, assemble and actively promote ‘**authentic holidays**’ in Huntly. The aim is to offer the best of Huntly in an high quality visitor package that could include guest house or four star accommodation with good local food using locally sourced ingredients, with the opportunity to have ‘hands on tuition’ and specialist presentations using local arts and cultural organisations like Deveron Arts/town artist, Huntly Pipe Band/piper in residence, Doric culture, local crafts, environment, archaeology or sports. Research in the USA highlights the principle that visitors will pay premium rates for a high quality authentic experience (promoted through www.handmadeinamerica.com).

Implementation

Project	Next Step	Cost (over three years)	Lead Agencies	Priority
1. Stewardship & maintenance of the town centre	Agree a targeted programme of regular maintenance to establish and maintenance of high standards	Included in existing budgets	Aberdeenshire Council	High
2. Quality window displays	Agree principles, approach retailers and agree a pilot for Xmas 2005	£5k	Huntly Community Council / Huntly Business Association	High
3. Economic development opportunities from the local environment	Audit to identify projects in Huntly that can improve the local and global environment. Business plan to be prepared.	£6k	Town co-ordinator using a summer school with Forestry Commission & wind farm operator contributions	Medium

<p>4. Landmark lighting</p>	<p>Agree a brief with input from Aberdeenshire Council technical officers and invite costed proposals from specialists to include capital funding. Aim for a demonstration projects by autumn 2006</p>	<p>£7k to cover proposal</p>	<p>Town Co-ordinator</p>	<p>Low/Medium</p>
<p>5. Signage & interpretation</p>	<p>Research, design and implement a Huntly town trail</p>	<p>£20k</p>	<p>Town Co-ordinator/ ATP/Aberdeenshire Council</p>	<p>High</p>
<p>6. Authentic holidays</p>	<p>Approach businesses and organisations to establish support for the principle. Draft a short business plan. Aim to promote a demonstration project in summer 2006</p>	<p>£4k</p>	<p>Town Co-ordinator/Visit Scotland</p>	<p>High</p>

6.6 Theme 4: Investing in Quality Buildings & Sustainable Sites & Infrastructure

Objective

To promote investment in high quality residential, business, community and leisure development on key sites in Huntly to offer an attractive choice of property with good infrastructure that contributes to the townscape and makes Huntly a more competitive place.

Projects

The analysis, consultations, workshops and the community questionnaire have all identified the need to encourage new investment to provide **well designed good quality affordable and other housing** in the town. A detailed **housing development framework**, identifying important sites for the town’s future development should be prepared. This should also consider opportunities in the town centre to provide housing in vacant floor space above shops and commercial premises.

On key sites like the land east of Pirriesmils Cottages (100+ residential units in a prominent location), the mixed use development proposed on Deveron Road and the Westpark Street/Former BT Site, detailed **design briefs should be prepared** to encourage high quality mixed use development. The briefs would include detailed advice on scale, grain, massing and materials to raise the quality of new development.

At the appropriate time **design statements should be provided** in support of any planning application. The design statements should cover site location, context, local facilities, urban form, landscape character, site constraints and opportunities, visual impact, design strategy, development concept and design features. (e.g. environmentally friendly, recreation areas, sustainable urban drainage system)

Finally Aberdeenshire Council have recently commenced a review of traffic management proposals for Huntly. The outcomes from this study should be reviewed and assessed against the key projects set out in this action plan.

Implementation

Project	Next Step	Cost (over three years)	Lead Agencies	Priority
1. Development Framework & Design Statements	Agree key sites for the future development of the town and prepare an overall development framework. Design statements to be prepared at the appropriate time. Sites could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Land east of Pirriesmils Cottages ➤ Deveron Road ➤ Westpark Street/Former BT Site ➤ Potential Town Centre Living Opportunites 	£8k	Aberdeenshire Council Planning	Medium
2. Review traffic management proposals	Initiate a review of the traffic management proposals that are emerging for the town centre to ensure business and residents view are taken on	£0	Aberdeenshire Council Transportation & Infrastructure	Medium

6.7 Theme 5: Encouraging skills and learning

Objective

To ensure that Huntly residents have the opportunity to enhance their skills and access well paid locally based employment opportunities, particularly those which meet local skills needs.

The consultations suggested that there is a strong base of skills development and learning activity in Huntly on which to build, including the Banff and Buchan College Learning Centre in the town. There are also a number of skills issues and opportunities which could be addressed, some of which relate to business development aspirations in the town and some which could provide local people with better access to local employment

Projects

Aberdeenshire Council have been considering potential locations for the development of an **integrated business and learning centre**. In the feasibility study, Huntly was identified as the first reserve for the creation of such a centre. We would recommend that Area Manager and the Town Co-ordinator keep abreast of developments with this project and continue to make the case for Huntly to be a preferred location.

A key aim of the strategy is to promote Huntly as a location for visitors and tourists. To support this consideration could be given to the development of a **hospitality training initiative** to enhance customer service skills. Based around the Welcome Host model and aimed either at people already in work, or those looking to secure jobs in local businesses, the training courses could also focus on developing knowledge of Huntly's history, or details of other tourist attractions in the area. These training courses could potentially be delivered through the Huntly Business Association. There could also be an opportunity to establish a small **traditional building skills training programme** with the involvement of local builders/contractors and the emerging Scottish Traditional Skills Training Centre.

Implementation

Project	Next Step	Cost (over three years)	Lead Agencies	Priority
1. Virtual business and learning centre	Keep abreast of progress with the Virtual Business and Learning Centre Project	£0	Aberdeenshire Council	Medium
2. Hospitality welcome programme	Assess demand for training Develop additional Huntly history and attractions elements Delivery	£10k	Visit Scotland / Huntly Business Association	Medium
3. Traditional building skills training programme	Assess demand and explore principles with Scottish Traditional Skills Training Centre	£8k	Scottish Traditional Skills Training Centre	High

6.8 Theme 6: Promoting Sports, Health, Arts & Culture

Objective

To use sports, the arts, culture and the heritage of Huntly to generate even more civic pride among residents and make the town an attractive day trip destination for discerning visitors. Overall the objective is also to further improve the health and well being of Huntly residents

Cultural, leisure and sporting activity are all essential ingredients to a lively and vibrant town and help stimulate social and economic well being. Building on existing strengths they attract people to live in or visit an area and encourage businesses to locate there. In Huntly the Square, local shops, cafes and bars as well as the wide range of community, arts and sports activity all help to define the character of the place. They:

- are a source of civic pride and a positive way of celebrating diversity
- can be an important factor in economic success
- promote and develop lifelong learning
- can help tackle community safety and promote social inclusion by enabling more people to participate.

Statistical projections for 2010 show a 47% increase in the 65+ age group and this will place particular demands on local health provision. There is also a need to provide more integrated services for children, families and young people and to ensure further improvements in health and well being in the Huntly area.

Projects

In response to the large number of community, sports and arts groups and activities in Huntly an up to date **community directory** would be a very useful tool for visitors, new residents and existing residents who want to explore new activities. The community directory might also encourage more co-operation between groups and break down some of the 'wee cliques'.

A local project to deliver real **improvements to the health and well being** of Huntly residents needs to be initiated. The project needs to reflect the statistical projections for a significant increase the 65+ age group as well as the need to provide more integrated services for children, families and young people and other significant health issues like smoking attributable deaths, alcohol related admissions and mental health issues.

Huntly has an extensive range of venues from the Stewart's Hall, the new cadet centre, Ex Servicemans Club, Linden Centre to local hotels and bars. The aim should be to more actively **promote availability and co-ordinate events in these venues** with the active support of local artists and musicians. In this way there is an opportunity to increase early evening activity once the shops have closed. As part of this initiative the town should research a '**town marquee**' to stage regular events in the Square and at Market Muir. The marquee could also be hired out to generate revenue.

Festivals and events can play an integral part in the marketing a town. They create new reasons for people to visit places and spend money on goods and services. The further development of the current **events programme** in Huntly that includes Music in the Square and the Deveron Arts sponsored Halloween Event should be pursued. The aim should be to build on events and progress a regular calendar of high profile quality events that attract locals and visitors alike. The town co-ordinator is currently considering the possibilities of hosting a Continental market in the town. The events need to help extend Huntly's sphere of influence and continue to improve internal and external perceptions of the town centre. They also present the opportunity for good news stories to be used to improve the town's image and forming part of an integrated place marketing strategy.

There could also be an opportunity to reconsider establishing a Farmers' Market that compliments the local retail offer. There are now over 250 farmers' markets in the UK. In Scotland farmers markets now turn over between £10 - £15 m per year on the 50 markets have now been established. The Scottish Association of Farmers Markets highlight the main advantages are that consumers can buy locally produced, high quality food at good prices, town centres see the number of shoppers and footfall increase and local farmers get the full retail value of their produce. There are also opportunities to start up new small and medium sized enterprises.

Huntly has a great many **sporting strengths** and the highlights include:

- the Nordic Ski Centre has produced some of Britain's best competitive cross-country skiers
- Huntly Football Club has been the leading club of the Highland league over the last 15 years
- Huntly Golf Club already attracts many visitors
- Huntly Rugby Club is the 3rd Aberdeenshire Club in the SRU ratings,
- the Huntly Triathlon is the only Olympic Distance event in the Aberdeenshire.

The majority of the sports facilities in the town are located near the school or between it and the river. This provides a memorable backdrop to activities particularly with the Castle. The other sports ground at The Market Muir provides a good facility at one of the main gateways to the town.

A project that **capitalises on Huntly's sporting strengths** needs to be initiated focusing on improving the Huntly Sports Trust, assisting Friends of Market Muir and re-establishing the 'recreation strategy group'. The project should use the school sports co-ordinator at the Gordon Schools to further improve school-club links. Longer term opportunities that could be explored include linkages with outdoor education courses at Aberdeen College and the Sports Science Department of Robert Gordons University, exploiting the cycling potential of the area, promoting a "Schools Olympics" and exploring the potential for a sports summer school running concurrently with an arts school and to exploit the synergy between the two.

Implementation

Project	Next Step	Cost (over three years)	Lead Agencies	Priority
1. Community directory	Agree principles, format and possibilities for a web based tool that can be easily updated. Invite costed proposals from local web design companies.	£7k	Marr Area Partnership using local IT/web design company	High
2. Health & well being initiative	NHS Grampian to take the lead in establishing the Huntly health and well being initiative	£5k initially	NHS Grampian	Medium
3. Venues: improvement & promotion	Convene meeting with hoteliers/publican/licensees and others to assess interest	£5k	Town Co-ordinator / Huntly Business Association	Medium
4. Town marquee	Research need for and identify options for establishing a town marquee or other facility for young people in the town	£5k	Community Councils / Youth Groups / Town Co-ordinator	Medium
5. Events programme	Develop a three year programme of arts, culture and sports events with business and community support	£40k	Community Councils / Huntly Business Association/Town Co-ordinator	High
6. Exploiting Huntly's sporting strengths	Promote an initiative to further exploit Huntly's sporting strengths with short, medium and long term proposals	Capital cost to be identified	Aberdeenshire Council Education and Recreation and school sports coordinator	High

7 Implementation and next steps

7.1 Background

Implementation of the Huntly Strategy and Action Plan need to be **coordinated**. Aberdeenshire Council through the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership and the Marr Area Partnership have already established a **Steering Group**. The **Steering Group** includes representatives from Aberdeenshire Council, Marr Area Partnership, Strathbogie Community Council, Huntly Community Council and Huntly Business Association, Council officers and councillors. This is now an ideal opportunity for these and other partners to focus priorities around the Huntly Strategy and Action Plan, to mobilise their resources, co-ordinate investment, increase the impact of that investment and to generate even more confidence.

7.2 Delivery Objectives

Public sector partners will have an essential role to play in **championing the Huntly Strategy** and **securing delivery of the regeneration Action Plan**. This joined-up approach will be essential, but in practice this will be a complex process given the need to build more **mutual trust** and ensure **effective co-ordination** targeted at a local area. In this context the following objectives for an effective delivery structure have been identified. The delivery structure should in summary:

- adopt an integrated and holistic approach, reflecting current Government policy and wider best practice on town regeneration
- focus on the wider regeneration of Huntly
- be capable of reflecting and co-ordinating the diversity of programmes and projects in the action plan
- take account of partnership structures which already exist namely the ATP and Marr Area Partnership
- focus on much more than physical regeneration, targeting challenges like unemployment, employability, health and community safety
- deliver joint working between partners and be accountable to but not controlled by partners
- have the full support of Huntly businesses and residents and key Councillors but not be dominated by one side
- have an independence from Aberdeenshire Council and other public agencies

- be empowered by the partners to allow an appropriate level of delegated decision making and responsibility

7.3 Way Forward & Implications

Experience elsewhere highlights that irrespective of the delivery structure adopted an action driven full time **Project Coordinator** is essential to ensure that effective communication and co-ordinated delivery continues as implementation of the Huntly Strategy and Action Plan proceeds. In anticipation the **Huntly Town Coordinator was appointed in May**.

The Huntly Town Coordinator will become the clear focus for ensuring that public and private sector partners carry forward agreed actions and be responsible for progressing actions where no individual partner has primary responsibility. A **Town Project Champion** who is well known and respected should also be identified. The Town Champion's primary role will be to advocate and promote the wider benefits of the Huntly Strategy and Action Plan and continue to build support among public and private sector partners.

As a result a simple two-tier delivery structure is recommended in Huntly based on the **Town Coordinator** reporting to a decision making/accountable body **underpinned with a formal Huntly Strategic Partnership**. It will be essential to ensure that the new partnership has enough independence and 'clout' to be effective.

Huntly Strategic Partnership

Key Roles

The key partners namely Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership, Marr Area Partnership, businesses and community representatives and the key members of the Steering Group would adopt a formal partnership agreement. The partnership agreement would:

- commit all parties to the principles of the Huntly Strategy and Action Plan
- establish a partnership board serviced by the Town Coordinator with a base in Huntly town centre
- co-opt appropriate members to ensure effective and meaningful business, local community and youth involvement
- identify a town project champion
- undertake detailed development planning and programming

- establish and monitor key performance indicators including retail and housing investment, local training, employment, social regeneration, green environment and sustainability standards
- prepare annual Business Plans
- be reviewed after three years.

Huntly Town Coordinator

Maintaining an appropriate separation between the Partnership and Executive functions will be important to ensure accountability. The following functions are envisaged as being the responsibility of the Town Coordinator:

- lead, manage and co-ordinate investment in Huntly within the Strategy and Action Plan
- work with the Town champion to promote the Huntly Strategy and Action Plan among public, private, voluntary and community partners and ensure that investment priorities are aligned
- refine and deliver an agreed agenda based on the vision, strategic themes and action plan that is set out chapters 6
- develop funding packages and secure funding for other economic development, social and environmental improvements
- build capacity and promote continued participation from businesses and residents in Huntly
- report to the Huntly Strategic Partnership as the policy focussed, decision making accountable body.
- work with local agencies, businesses and the community to help ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of Huntly.

7.4 Recommendations

The Steering Group and Aberdeenshire Council and the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership are invited to approve the vision, strategy objectives, action plan programmes and outline projects as the basis for future investment decisions in Huntly over the next 3-5 years.

Appendix 1: Workshop Responses

Prioritisation of key themes for action (lower score = higher priority)



Priorities

	Group1	Group2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6	Group 7	Group 8	Total
Promoting business development	1	2	1	1	2	3			10
Encouraging skills and learning	5	6	2	5	5	1			24
Investing in buildings, sites and infrastructure	3	3	2	6	4	4			22
Promoting arts sport and culture	6	4	5	3	5	4			27
Improving the Environment and encouraging visitors	3	5	4	2	3	4			21
Promoting image and marketing	2	1	5	4	1	1			14

Strengths and Weaknesses of Huntly

Strengths

- Existing business base
- Number & diversity of independent retailers
- Well known & international companies
- Range & quality of arts facilities/activities & groups
- Range & quality of leisure facilities: golf; swimming pool; tennis courts; skiing.
- Townscape character & buildings
- Compact town
- The town is friendly and has an attractive location
- The town has a rich history
- A safe place to bring up a family
- Flexibility of business: ability to change

- Railway and rail links.
- A96 road
- Good bus service
- Caravan site
- B&B & boarding houses
- Castle
- Learning Centre/College
- Business Centre
- Gordon Schools (the local high school)
- Creche facilities
- Local produce
- Not much graffiti
- The Square
- Heritage, ancestral roots
- Tradition, culture & language- Doric & strong ties with the countryside & history
- Friendly, welcoming & inclusive
- Significant skills in engineering
- People-very friendly place

Weaknesses

- No facilities for kids- 'the family town': where is it?
- No good jobs for local people & recent job losses at RB Farquhar
- No affordable housing
- Improvements in housing-variety/affordability
- Smoking in cafes
- Lack of service companies
- Communication & cooperation amongst groups
- Litter - the town has a feel of not being looked after
- Accessing information on facilities & groups
- Sports- excellent potential, but lack of investment
- Lack of marketing
- Lack of expansion space for the town: by pass & to rivers are the constraints
- The Picture House building needs to be refurbished/redeveloped
- Lack of signage on what's available in the town
- Infrastructure capacity for house building needs to be increased
- Local transport outside peak hours- lack of frequency
- Need for more practical shops
- Town centre vulnerable to two supermarket proposals
- Lack of public funds/grants

- Need better traffic management system
- People congregating at unsocial hours- anti-social behaviour
- Not enough facilities for visitors (i.e. good coffee shops)
- Good customer service & attitude
- Lack of community spirit?
- Not public enough- don't 'shout' about Huntly enough
- Not enough for local young people to do
- Higher % than in rest of Aberdeenshire of school leavers with no qualifications or employment prospects
- Council links-planning emphasis tends to be on Deeside, meaning Huntly is 'out on a limb'
- On the edge of European funding, so lose out
- Being traditional, change is slow
- Inverurie syndrome: 'everything has gone to Y'.
- Poor self image
- A lack of willingness to get involved, and a critical attitude towards those who do
- Could promote better architecture
- Road links, trunk road

What could Huntly be like in 2020?

Group 1

A town where:

- Individualism is encouraged
- A rural hub. A market town with transport facilities, a lot of activity, a hospital, good services.
- The quality of life is such that people want to live in and move to the town
- Housing is affordable

Group 2

Good

- New businesses/housing
- Cinema
- Wine bar
- Expand the learning centre
- Children's services

Bad

- A town of the older generation- no young people
- A 'ghost town' with no shops (due to supermarket development)

Group 3

- An attractive town
- The people in Huntly will have pride in place
- The community will be pulling together
- There will be lots of small events in the town's diary
- There will be opportunities for professionals
- There will still be a lot of small businesses

Group 4

- Expanded, but with the retention of a vibrant Town Centre
- More housing, properly planned with a proper focus on the town-housing in keeping with local character
- Retain shopping diversity
- User friendly- with the town providing a good service
- Good information provided on facilities available in the town, raising their profile
- Joined up agencies (businesses and community)
- Events: build on current success
- Affordable workspace
- Strong involvement

Group 5

- An attractive market town retaining its culture
- Greater diversity of shops, pubs, restaurants, etc., plus regular market in the Town Centre
- Want to be seen as a quality town
- Boost tourism all year round
- More general information available to tourists
- More devoted & focussed local authority
- More care taken over the environment

Group 6

- Centre of learning- new technology, skills training
- A tourist centre at the heart of the North East
- A business conference centre
- A town that has kept its atmosphere & heritage
- Maintained town centre that will offer what people want, striking the balance between retail parks, supermarkets and the Town Centre
- Beautiful, bolder, smart, prosperous, quality

Group 7

- Needs to grow, at a measured pace
- Attractive to visitors with a variety of shops. Stop the leakage/ shopping draw away from Huntly
- Buildings better maintained
- Promote the town as a centre of local culture
- High quality services offered
- Speciality shops
- A sporting centre of excellence