



IMPROVING HUNTLY'S RETAIL SECTOR Executive Summary



 **Huntly Handmade**



May 2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objectives

The overall objectives of the Huntly Retail Sector study are to:

- Identify what can be done to regenerate the Huntly retail sector, including looking at what has worked elsewhere;
- Identify how HDT and others, including local businesses and the community, can support that process;
- Identify possible funding sources to help make it all happen.

Summary Conclusions

The Huntly retail sector and the town centre retail core is facing significant challenges including **competition from larger shopping centres** such as Aberdeen and Inverurie and **smaller centres** like Banff and Keith as well as Tesco and Asda **edge-of-town superstores** and the **internet**. At the same time the **quality of the Huntly Conservation Area is being seriously eroded** by the increase in vacant ground and upper floor properties, boarded up and dilapidated property, inappropriate interventions and by poorly carried out repairs and the lack of regular maintenance of property.

In the longer term the **major expansion of Huntly** with around 630 new houses between 2007-2023 could increase the population by 1,500 (33%) and clearly there are longer term opportunities for the Huntly retail sector to service this market. The pressing challenge is to continue to boost **enterprise and business start up** and at the same time encourage existing established Huntly retail businesses to continue to **innovate and invest** in improvements, training and marketing. Huntly town centre also needs to be promoted as an attractive location for inward investing retail and service businesses.

The fundamental conclusion is that **immediate actions are required now** if the town centre is to remain as *'the heart of the town and wider rural community'*. As a response a **clear vision, strategy and action plan** has been identified.

A Coordinated Proactive Response to Immediate Challenges

A new vision for Huntly Retail Sector is based on the conclusions from regeneration policy context, town centre performance, best practice, market research, business interviews and the outcomes from Consultations/Drop In. The vision and the Action Plan consist of the three programmes and eleven projects are highlighted below.

Vision 2016 & Driving Principles

'The Huntly retail sector is thriving, with a strong and flourishing cluster of independent retail and service business and well maintained property contributing to the town's distinctive character. This includes a good choice of shops stocked with locally sourced quality products and an impressive range of family friendly cafes/bistros/restaurants for a small friendly town.

Huntly town centre actively encourages local enterprise and independent business in a compact pedestrian friendly place that promotes walking and cycling. This is a family friendly place for meeting, shopping, living and events. The Huntly Hub really is a showcase for Huntly Hand Made and is now exceptionally well used by locals and visitors.'

Strategy & Action Plan

To achieve this vision an Action Plan that consists of three programmes and eleven projects has been established. The three programmes are:

Investing in a More Attractive Place

In summary the projects are:

Project	Objectives
1. Conservation of Built Heritage: Management & Maintenance: Proactive Advice	<p>To encourage the conservation of buildings and economic regeneration through imaginative and appropriate re-use or new use.</p> <p>To remove some of the negative connotations sometimes associated with owning and maintaining historic buildings and to develop a stronger culture and awareness of the value of well maintained historic buildings.</p> <p>To enhance and preserve the historic fabric of the Conservation Area, providing protection from unsympathetic alterations or developments in the future.</p>
2. Shop Fronts and Window Display Improvements: Design Advice & Grants	Upgrade the quality of shop fronts and fascias based on re-introducing traditional elements at ground floor level and ensuring that the design of individual shop fronts considers the frontage as a whole. Achieve the active support of independent businesses. Aim to increase footfall/spending within the town centre.
3. Art Project Targeting Empty Shop Fronts	To transform the appearance of vacant/boarded up shop fronts with bright/interesting custom designed art in collaboration with for example Deveron Arts. Could include a visual interpretation of the kind of shop people would want to see: 'Shopjacket'. Similar projects have been used in Paisley & Whitley Bay.
4. Target Vacant Space: Ground & Upper Floors: Demonstration Town Centre Living Project	To provide housing in vacant or underused floorspace at both ground floor level and above shops and commercial premises.

Promoting Independent Retail & Service Business

In summary the projects are:

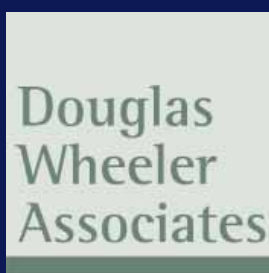
Project	Objectives
1. Retail Business Start Up Initiative / Youth Enterprise Competition	A competition-based initiative with Gordon Schools/Banff Buchan College/National Skills Academy Retail. Establish a local Young Enterprise competition to identify 3/4 of the best retail business ideas. Give the start up retail businesses the opportunity to open in a vacant town centre unit/Hub. This would include provision of business mentoring support.
2. Huntly Hub: Enterprise Arcade: Huntly Hand Made	Establish an 'enterprise arcade' to provide ready-to-move-into retail space as part of the Huntly Hub in the town centre. The aim would be to offer 'incubator' retail opportunities to a 3/4 businesses for up to a twelve-month period as an opportunity for start up retailers to test-trade their business idea in a supportive environment.

Project	Objectives
3. Independent Retail/Service Business Development Advice	Initiate locally delivered targeted retail business development support to independent retailers including assessing potential for increased online sales. This would include one-to-one 'shop doctor' consultations with business development/ mentoring support and coaching/training advice from a retail consultant to target 10/12 independent retailers. Huntly has to be more outward looking and actively promote its existing assets including the independent retailers in the centre. Actively use the 'Room to Roam' logo in marketing.
4. Huntly Rewards	Further development of Huntly Rewards: assess economic impact; more businesses to join: more aggressive marketing: new marketing campaign in the wider rural area
5. Model Lease: To Encourage Use Of Vacant Town Centre Property	Need to persuade owners of vacant shops to be more flexible on leases and rents to encourage retailers/users to bring the space back into use. A simple model lease could be drafted and the principles of a modest turnover rent established.

Delivering the Action Plan

In summary the projects are:

Project	Objectives
1. Reorganise Existing Organisational Structures & Establish One Effective Organisation	To champion the Huntly retail sector, the town centre and to progress this vision, strategy & action plan. Clarifying roles & responsibilities of the existing bodies is essential. Opportunity to reorganise HBA, HADTAG, HETI. Launch one very proactive, effective, well supported and resourced delivery organisation
2. Investing Collectively: Leadership & Finding the Resources: Explore Establishing a BID	Establish the best way to invest collectively. Explore establishing a BID in Huntly town centre. The BID would deliver a sustainable financial model the town centre. Businesses would vote to invest collectively in local improvements.



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