



Huntly Room to Thrive

*A town centre that belongs to us,
With a campus for learning and play.
A rural place with transport that works for us,
Where the focus is people, environment and culture,
And real opportunities exist for enterprise.*



Review

November 2021

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Introduction

About Huntly

Huntly is a small market town of almost 5000 people in the heart of north east Scotland. Largely set on a Georgian grid-iron plan, it is a compact town with lots of activity—that may be missed at first glance—making it the service centre for a hinterland roughly equivalent to the AB54 postcode district. The town is bound to the north by the River Deveron and fantastic open greenspaces that sit alongside it including Huntly Castle, the ancient seat of Clan Gordon. To the south is the main A96 linking Aberdeen and Inverness; the Moray Firth coastline, Cairngorms National Park, Royal Deeside, Speyside whisky trails and city of Aberdeen are all within an hour's reach of Huntly.



A strategy for 2030

The Huntly Town Team was brought together in November 2016 by Aberdeenshire Council with the aim of improving communication, partnership working and project delivery within the town.

One of the main reasons for the Huntly Town Team forming were concerns, both in the community and at Aberdeenshire Council, around the health of the town centre. In recent years a number of businesses had closed, leaving high street properties lying vacant. This continued and intensified in the beginning of 2018 with four key closures including the Visitor Information Centre, a branch of The Royal Bank of Scotland and Cruickshanks which collectively occupied a very large amount of retail space in The Square.

Over the previous ten years a number of large projects, strategies and plans had been worked up with the view to enhance the town, but for a variety of reasons (e.g. changes in macroeconomic context or flooding incidents impeding development) the community had been unable to take them forward. In order to move forward in a more holistic and strategic manner, it was considered a review of these previous plans and strategies was required.

There are a number of groups in the area who have been very successful at fundraising and delivering projects. Over the last few years, however, there has been growing awareness that the funding climate is getting more

challenging. It was recognised by Huntly's groups and organisations to work more closely together on a jointly agreed strategy for the town, that they would be more likely to retain their successful funding record than if they risked working in competition

In 2018, the Huntly Town Team, via Aberdeenshire Council, secured funding from the South Aberdeenshire LEADER Local Action Group (part-financed by the Scottish Government and the European Community LEADER 2014-2020 programme) to commission a comprehensive town strategy. This would be developed in partnership with the community; taking all previous work in the town into account and providing a plan to deliver a vibrant Huntly. The commissioned strategy would deal with some of the key issues in the town centre, whilst supporting the capacity development of the Huntly Town Team and the wider community to deliver the strategy.

2030 was selected as the long-term time frame for the strategy. This year was chosen as it is the expected date that work will be completed on the upgrading of the A96 trunk road between Inverness and Aberdeen (via Huntly) to a dual carriageway with grade separated junctions.

The opening of a town bypass for the A96 in the 1970s opened up new areas of development for the town; the new route of the road has not yet been developed, but it is likely that this major national project will have an equally fundamental impact on the nature of the Huntly.



Creating a strategy for 2030

icecream architecture and CLES (Centre for Local Economic Strategies) were appointed via an open tender to deliver a community-led process that would generate a comprehensive strategy and action plan for Huntly moving forward. Working closely with representatives of the Huntly Town Team throughout, the project team consisted of Desmond Bernie & Neil Fergusson of icecream architecture and Stuart Macdonald of CLES.

At the outset, it was agreed that the overarching aim of the project was to develop a "strategy to ensure Huntly is a thriving town for everyone", as such the project was branded **Huntly: Room to Thrive**; echoing the town's current branding motto *Huntly, Scotland: Room to Roam*.

To develop a forward looking strategy, an open and collaborative method of working was followed. This invited hundreds of people from across the community at each stage of the process of creating a strategy for the town. This activity included pop-up events, workshops, face to face meetings, and online activities. Supplementing this work was a programme of Community Capacity Building activities with Huntly Town Team, to improve collaboration between organisations and gaining access to vacant buildings in the town for temporary uses.

The key outputs of *Huntly: Room to Thrive* in 2018 was a strategy towards 2030, and a set of ‘To-Do Lists’ for each of the strategy’s theme; these are summarised in the next section of this document, and can be viewed online in full at www.huntly.town/strategy.



Making it happen

Since it was launched in December 2018, there has been significant action by individuals and organisations to deliver on the strategy. However a lot has also changed, not least the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and increased urgency to meet Net-Zero emissions by 2045¹. With changed contexts and the three year anniversary of the strategy approaching, Huntly Town Team recognised the need to review and update the community’s plan to reach its strategic objectives by 2030.

The first part of that work is this review of the strategy that will highlight:

- successes and achievements made to date;
- what still has to be delivered, and the reasons why; and,
- highlight any obstacles.

Aberdeenshire Council appointed icecream architecture to undertake this review alongside community activities to reflect on progress to date and bring together a renewed place-based plan. The initiative is one of two pilot actions to be supported by an award of funding to the North Aberdeenshire and South Aberdeenshire Local Action Groups from the Scottish Government’s Rural Communities Testing Change fund.

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/news/reaching-net-zero-1/>

A rural place with transport that works for us

While the linear road and rail transport had been and were due to continue improving, the radial transport outlying villages had suffered service reduction, with many areas in the district isolated from access to public transport. This resulted in an over-reliance on private transport which had a negative impact on job opportunities and social mobility for those without cars and on the environment for us all.

To offset this, improved localised transport across the district is a priority. This should focus on affordability and the need for flexibility to accommodate all potential users. By coordinating localised transport with regional timetables and services, maximum connectivity of transport can be achieved. By continuing to develop the car club service and improving routes for walking and cycling that are accessible for all (regardless of age or ability), more sustainable options will become the norm.

The focus is people, environment and culture

The town centre held a dormant opportunity to broadcast the creative, musical and sporting energy and enthusiasm that exists within the town while telling the story of Huntly and its people. Activities and events should regularly be held in full view offering showcases and an invite for unaware local people and visitors to engage, connect and become part of the vibrant culture. The communication that supports this energy must be coordinated to promote activities and build cross-sectorial working. This will support capacity and make the community more resilient and regenerative.

Internationally it is widely agreed that immediate action is required to mitigate the effect climate change is having on the environment of people to live and work. Huntly is not immune from this and has a contribution to make to national and worldwide efforts while supporting people and culture in the town in transitioning to a circular economy.

Where real opportunities exist for enterprise

The average household income for 2017 in Huntly was significantly lower than the equivalent for Aberdeenshire however the unemployment rate was lower. This suggested a low-wage and low skills jobs market. A perception existed of a limited job market across Huntly and District with many people suggesting the need for people to have to commute well beyond the local area to find work.

To offset this perception and to increase household income, Huntly can reignite a culture of enterprise within the town by supporting employers and businesses to retain and develop their existing business while giving potential entrepreneurs the confidence, skills and space to begin trading in the town.

Offering skills and training to young and under-employed people in the town with a focus on collaborative and peer support has the potential to build a sharing economy, offering a new route for career development in the town. As education becomes more mobile; modules and qualifications could be delivered remotely in huntly alongside the running of a small enterprise. The success of any new enterprise-and in turn the town centre-will always depend on the support of local people as consumers.

Room to Thrive

A strategy that starts in The Square

Follow the line to see what's going to happen...



Room to Thrive asked people what needs to be done in Huntly.

Immediately, we all thought about the empty buildings on The Square, and how there's not much we can do about them right now.



Or to stop at on the way to somewhere else in town, especially if we put the facilities we need to learn, work and play at the heart of our town.

A town centre owned by us
With a campus for learning and play
The rural place where we don't need to drive
Where our people and culture are the focus
And starting an enterprise is a real opportunity.

Find out more at www.huntly.town

Once we have access to a building, what can we do with it?



First off, we'll need to refurbish it a little to make it suitable for new uses.

But what if the building was accessed on behalf of the whole community?



That would put the control of what happens there in our hands.

When people have more reason to come into town, we need to ensure they have the means.



Things like traffic-free paths, community-run bus services, places to lock bikes or quickly park the car.

But this just the start of activity, extending across the streets and spaces of Huntly there is more to be done.



Doing all this will boost Huntly's economy, with more consumer spending and jobs in turn.

We could offer affordable rents for existing businesses or community facilities to relocate into The Square...

...and people have said they want to start new enterprises in Huntly too.

Supporting them to make their ideas a reality would diversify our town's offer, and give everyone more reasons to come into the town centre.



With lots of new things going on in Huntly it'll be important that everyone knows about it.



A website, noticeboard and signposts will help neighbours and visitors alike and help make all of Huntly's life, culture and heritage visible and accessible when standing in The Square.



Illustration: Sarah McKenna

Overview of Huntly's strategic journey towards 2030 created to celebrate the strategy launch in December 2018

Huntly's To-Do Lists

While the strategy sets the overall ambition, the actions within the To-Do Lists build a picture of how that ambition forms in reality. As with the strategy, it was developed over the course of 2018 by people from across the town. As such they are not for one organisation or group to deliver, but open to delivery by anyone in the town. Huntly Town Team agreed to update the to-do lists at regular intervals with progress achieved on the actions, and adding any new ones that arrive along the way.

A town centre that belongs to us

Addressing vacant properties and finding new purpose for the town centre

- ☐ Accept the challenge of repurposing the town centre
- ☐ Access vacant buildings to test possible new uses
- ☐ Employ town centre activators
- ☐ Take control of key vacant buildings, refurbish and lease for new uses
- ☐ Encourage relocation to The Square and high streets

Making a people-friendly town centre

- ☐ Activate quick win maintenance tasks
- ☐ Introduce more planting throughout the year
- ☐ Bring more colour onto the street throughout the year
- ☐ Identify and test alternative approaches to access and parking
- ☐ Install wayfinding signage around town

Protect and enhance Huntly's historic built environment

- ☐ Improve knowledge and understanding of Conservation Area regulations
- ☐ Draw up a town centre maintenance and improvement plan
- ☐ Ensure Huntly's buildings protect the native swift population
- ☐ Invest in the Stewart's Hall to modernise it as an events venue

A campus for learning and play

- ☐ Draft a community-led vision to improve learning and leisure facilities in the town
- ☐ Build modern learning and leisure facilities
- ☐ Improve the facilities in Huntly's parks for all ages

A rural place with transport that works for us

By foot or pedal

- ☐ Promote Cycling Connections and the Bike Shack and support the expansion of these services
- ☐ Construct more active travel paths that are accessible for all
- ☐ Make key crossings more pedestrian friendly
- ☐ Advertise local long distance walking routes
- ☐ Tour hire bikes to different locations

Transport that serves the needs of the community

- ☐ Work out what options exist for a 'community transport' initiative
- ☐ Pilot a community transport initiative connecting people into town and beyond it

Planning for the future

- ☐ Draw up plans for an AB54 path network
- ☐ Prepare the town for the dualling of the A96

The focus is people, environment and culture

Tools to make people & culture visible

- ☐ Find a new home for Huntly's tourist information
- ☐ Market the unique attractions Huntly already has to visitors
- ☐ Launch a refreshed town website
- ☐ Centrally record the number of visitors coming into Huntly
- ☐ Document the past and present for the future
- ☐ Coordinate one town map of walking & cycling routes, history, culture, and facilities

New projects to enhance people, environment and culture

- ☐ Give young people a space to call their own for use out of school hours
- ☐ Open a Huntly Hub in the town centre
- ☐ Support the development of Huntly Heritage Bakery & Cooking Shop
- ☐ Digitise the archives of the Huntly Express allowing them to be accessed online across the world
- ☐ Curate a complementary space where they can be accessed in person
- ☐ Hold a 'Room to Roam' festival showcasing clubs and groups
- ☐ Start a befriending project
- ☐ Put on imaginative exhibitions that generate interest and makes Huntly uniquely stand out
- ☐ Commission iconic public artworks
- ☐ Establish a town trail

Make the community more self-sufficient

- ☐ Grow more food in town
- ☐ Develop a Community Kit of free-to-access resources for events and small projects
- ☐ Support developments to expand the services offered by Huntly Community Kitchen

Where real opportunities exist for enterprise

Support new enterprise ventures

- ☐ Start new businesses for the town centre
- ☐ Make use of vacant buildings to incubate new enterprises
- ☐ Capture visitor spend through town walking tours
- ☐ Capture the opportunities offered by Greenmyres Farm as a venue for enterprise activity
- ☐ Set-up a 'Make it Happen' fund to empower people to do new things

Improving competitiveness of town centre businesses

- ☐ Make it easier for people to pop into town on quick errands
- ☐ Showcase Huntly's business community and opportunities online
- ☐ Improve the 'experience' town centre businesses offer
- ☐ Offer free business mentoring
- ☐ Support ongoing and new town centre events to drive footfall

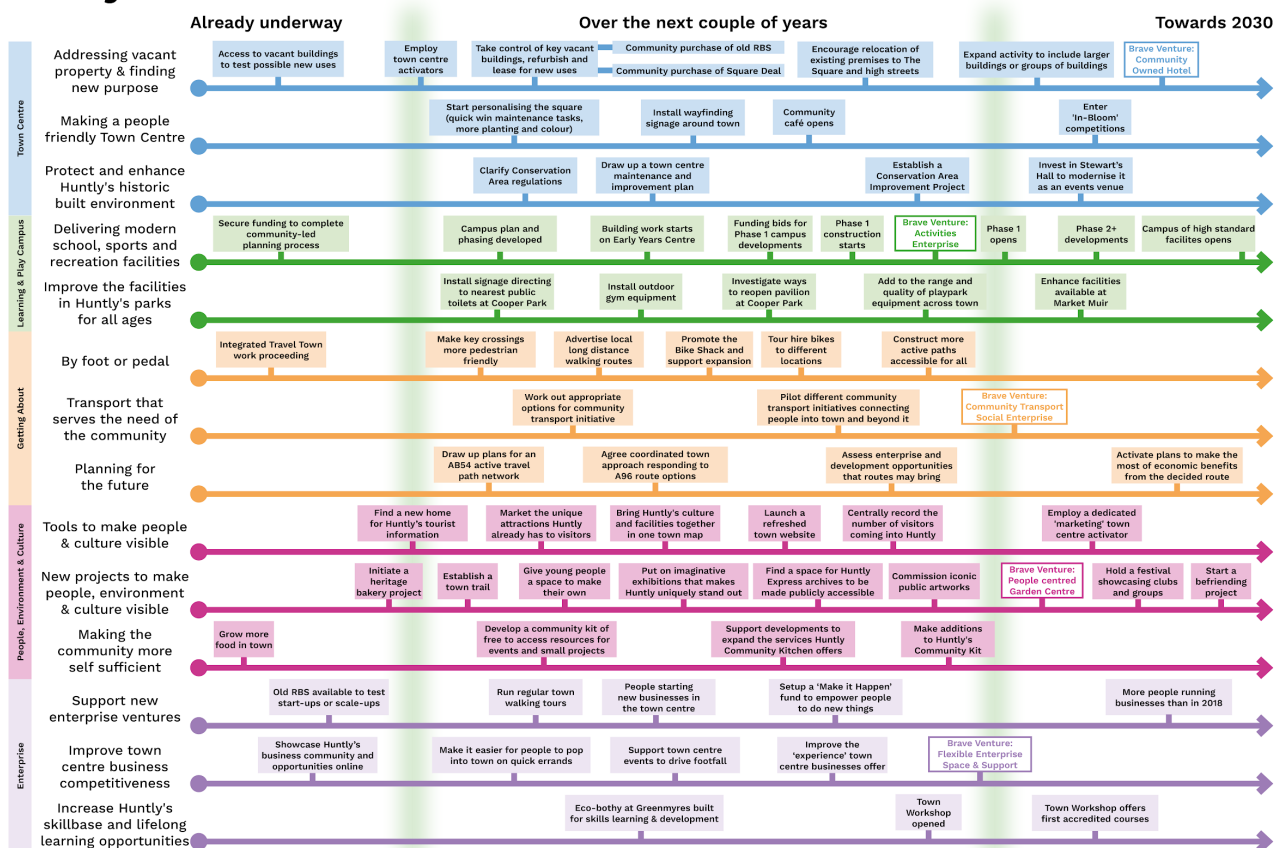
Increase Huntly's skillbase and lifelong learning opportunities

- ☐ Foster partnership working between schools and town businesses and organisations
- ☐ Use the community asset of Greenmyres as an opportunity to learn and develop skills
- ☐ Open a town workshop

Milestones

The contents of the To-Do Lists were mapped in an indicative timeline diagram to show how

Huntly's Milestones



Achievements so far



A town centre that belongs to us

What 'had to change' in 2018:

- Long-term vacancy and dependence on retail has led to the town lacking purpose.
- The level of investment in the fabric of the town centre.
- Few reasons for people to visit the town centre and lack of visibility of the rich community life that is present.

What has been achieved:

Accept the challenge of repurposing the town centre

- There has been strong community support for positive action to reverse the trend of long-term vacancy in commercial premises, particularly on The Square.
- The acceptance of the challenge can be seen by the speed of which actions in this theme have been achieved.

Access vacant buildings to test possible new uses

- In time for the launch of the Room to Thrive strategy in 2018, Huntly Development Trust agreed a short term lease of the old branch of Royal Bank of Scotland on The Square as a pop-up testing space for different community use. This use was superseded by the purchase of the building on behalf of the community (see below).

Employ town centre activators

- In late 2018, Huntly Development Trust received funding for a three-year Town Centre Development Manager post to take forward a range of projects to improve the town centre, including community ownership and refurbishment of buildings.
- The Trust has also employed an additional Project Officer to support green travel projects in the town and activities at community-owned Greenmyres farm.

Take control of key vacant buildings, refurbish and lease for new uses

To date, four town centre buildings have been brought into community ownership:

- 10 ½ The Square, formerly Royal Bank of Scotland branch, purchased by Huntly Development Trust
 - This building has been fully refurbished and leased to community-owned Orb's Bookshop, which relocated from Deveron Street.
- 22 The Square, formerly Square Deal store, purchased by Deveron Projects
 - This building has been partially refurbished. With a ground floor community space hosting two food-based Community Interest Companies, The Honest Bakehouse and Neep and Okra.

Refurbishments are continuing to create studio and accommodation for visiting artists in the rest of the building.

- 30 The Square, formerly Cruickshanks department store, purchased by Huntly Development Trust
 - The largest building that has been purchased to date, it is now in the process of being fully refurbished to create a fully accessible multi-use centre, including a cinema/performance space, café, learning and training spaces and large gallery area. If works continue to run on schedule it will be open in early 2023.
- 11 Deveron Street, formerly Huntly Area Cancer Support Centre, purchased by Huntly Development Trust
 - This has recently been purchased, and plans are being drawn up to create a Huntly Travel Hub where the Development Trust's ebike hire operations can have a dedicated base.

Encourage relocation to The Square and high streets

- The action to purchase buildings on behalf of the community, has directly contributed to the relocation of premises to The Square.
 - Orb's Bookshop now has a larger and more prominent store location within the town.
 - Tenants at the Square Deal have scaled up from temporary pop-up premises.
 - When open, the Huntly Travel Hub will take a service operating from inside the Brander Building to a high street location with greater visibility.
- Networks of Wellbeing have been successful in an asset transfer from Aberdeenshire Council of premises on West Park Street to house their mental health and wellbeing activities. While not a high street location, the relocation of these services from their existing base on Steven Road industrial estate to a central location will benefit footfall to the town centre.

Activate quick win maintenance tasks

- Before the pandemic, Huntly Community Council and the Town Centre Development Manager have worked together with Aberdeenshire Council to achieve a number of quick win maintenance tasks to improve the condition of the town centre, in particular The Square.
- The Huntly Town Team are currently restarting this process in partnership with Aberdeenshire Council to establish continual improvement of public spaces.

Invest in the Stewart's Hall to modernise it as an events venue

- A Friends of Stewart's Hall group has been formed.
- It has successfully fundraised to complete small improvement tasks, including refurbishment of the main hall floors, with plans to continue modernisation across the building.



A campus for learning and play

What ‘had to change’ in 2018:

- The potential that the area of north Huntly (extending north from The Square to the boundaries of the Deveron and Bogie rivers) holds for learning and play should be maximised for the benefit of local economy and community equally.

What has been achieved:

Draft a community-led vision to improve learning and leisure facilities in the town

- Supported by the Scottish Government’s Making Places programme, a community-led co-design process devised a Place Plan laying out the vision for investment in the town’s learning and leisure facilities. A number of group organisations in the town are working to bring forward projects to deliver on the Place Plan.

Build modern learning and leisure facilities

- The new Early Years building at Gordon Primary School opened its doors in December 2021. This new facility has allowed for temporary classroom buildings in the playground of the Primary School to be removed.
- Work is due to start on the renewal of the Huntly Sports Trust’s Meadows’ all-weather pitch surface, including installation of new lighting and boundary fencing.
- A new social and learning space, named the John Swan Atrium, at The Gordon Schools has been completed by Aberdeenshire Council.



A rural place with transport that works for us

What had to change in 2018:

- The range, quantity and quality of facilities for active travel.
- Public transport across the AB54 area is patchy.
- A major road project is going to impact the town fundamentally, Huntly needs to ensure it benefits as much as possible from it.

What has been achieved:

Advertise local long distance walking routes

- A number of walk routes have been published on the new [Experience Huntly](#) website. Expanding the number of routes that are available online is currently being worked on.

Draw up plans for an AB54 path network

- In 2020, work was completed for Huntly Development Trust on a AB54 Path Network Strategy.
- Huntly Development Trust are also working with the Sustrans Places for Everyone programme on a *Mini-Holland study* which will determine design options that will improve walking and cycling options in and around Huntly.
- Work has also been completed on paths around the community-owned Greenmyres farm. Linking through forestry to Gartly Moor, and a series of smaller improvements to create a continuous path route from the farm to Huntly.



The focus is people, environment and culture

What ‘had to change’ in 2018:

- Communication of what Huntly has to offer to people within town and beyond it.
- The range of opportunities available for informal socialising.
- Climate change has the potential to significantly challenge how people live and work in Huntly and its rural communities.
- People don’t always have access to the resources needed to make things happen.

What has been achieved:

Find a new home for Huntly’s tourist information

- Before the pandemic, Huntly Community Council organised a voluntary Visitor Information Service, based in the foyer of the Brander Building on The Square six days a week in summer months.

Launch a refreshed town website

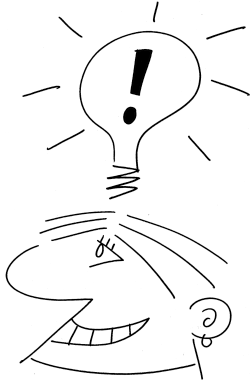
- A new town ‘Experience Huntly’ website has been launched by Huntly Business Association, showcasing the town’s attractions, services and other important information.
- The website also integrates with an ‘Experience Huntly’ smartphone app.

Open a Huntly Hub in the town centre

- When open, ‘Number 30’ on The Square will act as a hub building for a variety of community activities and as a meeting place.

Support the development of Huntly Heritage Bakery & Cooking Shop

- Within Deveron Projects’ Square Deal building, two food-based community interest companies have been supported to take a lease on the premises which opened in 2021.



Where real opportunities exist for enterprise

What ‘had to change’ in 2018:

- Existing business is struggling to compete.
- New enterprises meeting changing consumer demands aren’t forthcoming.
- Opportunities for lifelong learning, through skillsharing or different forms of training are currently limited.

What has been achieved:

Improving competitiveness of town centre businesses

- As part of the new ‘Experience Huntly’ website, app and brand, themed promotions have been organised by Huntly Business Association, e.g. the ‘Fiver Fest’, to encourage people to shop locally in the town centre.

Showcase Huntly’s business community and opportunities online

- Town Centre businesses now have up to date online listings on the Experience Huntly [website](#) and app.
- Supporting social media activity for Experience Huntly also showcases local businesses to new audiences.

Use the community asset of Greenmyres as an opportunity to learn and develop skills

- Conversion of the farmhouse at Greenmyres to create an ecobothly has been completed by Huntly Development Trust. Opened in March 2020 (ahead of the pandemic), since 2021 it has been used by groups as a base for learning or training. A local nursery group that was left without premises during the pandemic has begun using the ecobothly.

Open a town workshop

- Discussions are ongoing with the national Remade network, around the possibilities of creating a Remakery in Huntly.

Progress towards strategic objectives

Huntly, as a town, has achieved a lot of progress since the launch of the Huntly: Room to Thrive strategy in December 2018. This is testament not only to the input that members from across the community contributed to the creation of the strategy in the first instance, but the ambition and tenacity of individuals, groups and organisations who have driven forward delivery. Within the shifting context of the COVID-19 pandemic the amount the town has been able to achieve in a short period of time is even more impressive.

As conclusion of this review, progress toward the strategic objectives of each theme are set out along with future opportunities that can be taken advantage of.

A town centre that belongs to us		
Strategic Objective		Progress and future opportunities
1.1	<p>Community control of town centre buildings with the purpose of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing flexible and affordable options for community and business use • carrying out appropriate modernisation 	<p>Significant community investment has been secured and made in vacant buildings on The Square, the results of this investment are starting to have tangible benefits and are encouraging others to look at the town centre as a viable investment option. That said there are still a notable number of buildings that require investment and modernisation; so more work will be needed in the years to come.</p> <p>As existing community investments come to fruition, there is a role to diversify ownership and investment. This means supporting and/or encouraging private investment as well as other community organisations to achieve control of town centre buildings. This will bring greater long term resilience of the town centre for the future.</p>
1.2	The town has a people-friendly centre; bringing life and colour to the streets making a distinctive place to be that's easy to get around.	<p>In 2018, the town centre's vacancy problem was reaching a crisis point. The immediate priority action was therefore focused on buildings. While the town already has a lot to offer, more can be done to make the life and activity of the people Huntly visible from the street. This would help showcase Huntly as having a distinctive town offering.</p>
1.3	Bring new activity and purpose that creates a positive and modern story of Huntly as a place to live, work in or visit.	<p>The town's community ownership journey has been garnering national press attention, raising its profile. Progress to date has focused on enhancing existing activities in new locations—this is welcome as it is bringing attention to things that were relatively hidden before.</p> <p>When developments by Huntly Development Trust at Number 30 are completed, this will inject a variety of new activities to the town centre for the first time. It is important that this continues onto other buildings in The Square and wider town centre.</p>

1.4	Develop partnership working between the community, proprietors and the local authority to protect and enhance Huntly's built heritage.	<p>Partnership working in this area has been hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, Huntly Community Council, Huntly Development Trust and Aberdeenshire Council Marr Area Office did compile a list of public realm improvements for The Square, some of which were completed. Long outstanding repairs have been made on individual properties in the Conservation Area, some the results of enforcement by Aberdeenshire Council.</p> <p>The Huntly Town Team, with support from the Marr Area Office, are currently updating the previous list of public realm maintenance issues in the town centre which has the potential for ongoing improvements.</p> <p>There is a risk that while key buildings are refurbished and public realm improvements are made, other buildings—particularly vacant buildings—continue to deteriorate, hampering efforts to enhance Huntly's built heritage.</p>
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A campus for learning and play

<i>Strategic Objective</i>		<i>Progress and future opportunities</i>
2.2	A shared plan exists for minor and major capital investment to continually raise the standards of facilities available.	<p>A community-led Place Plan has been developed collaboratively and sets out the investments that are required to raise the standard and offer of facilities.</p> <p>Community organisations have been working to bring forward projects contained within this plan, for example the renewal of the all weather pitch by Huntly Sports Trust.</p> <p>Some elements of the plan will require significant public investment, and work will be required to see that community plans are reflected in future public investment programmes to ensure that the vision of a modern campus of facilities can be realised.</p>
2.1	Everyday learning and leisure activities blend together creating a town-centre campus of first-class facilities. This campus is a network of coordinated and sustainable facilities generating income and retaining profit for re-investment.	While a plan exists that has the potential to realise this, it is only with long term delivery that it can be achieved. It is important that the opportunity of capital investment to deliver lasting improvement for the town and wider community isn't missed.

A rural place with transport that works for us

<i>Strategic Objective</i>		<i>Progress and future opportunities</i>
3.1	Easy access to active travel—irrespective of age or ability—to get into town, around town and accessing rural leisure routes like Battlehill, Clashindarroch or The Bin Forest.	<p>The importance of this objective has only grown in recent years with the experience of public health restrictions. Plans to improve access paths for active travel have been drawn up within the Learning & Leisure Place Plan and AB54 Path Network Strategy. Initial improvements on the ground include completion of the path between Huntly & Greenmyres and signage to the White Wood at The Bin.</p> <p>In town, the Huntly Development Trust has received funding from Sustrans' Places for Everyone programme, that will create designs for changed street layouts for active travel. With multi-year funding available, this offers a strong opportunity to deliver long term improvements.</p>
3.2	A range of attractive transport options that meet the needs of people living, working and visiting Huntly and District is available.	<p>The options for transport locally haven't changed dramatically since the end of 2018. While timetables are yet to return to pre-pandemic levels, the same number of bus routes and train services are in place. During the pandemic, the Community Mini-Bus reorientated its services to ensure that households weren't left isolated from being able to travel to supermarkets for shopping. The Co-Wheels Car Club now has an electric car in its fleet.</p> <p>Where there has been growth is in the use of the ebike hire by Huntly Travel Hub, which continued and was particularly popular during lockdowns. They are in the process of expanding the fleet of bikes for hire, and the relocation to dedicated premises will heighten the profile of the service.</p> <p>The 2018 strategy highlighted that there are many parts of the community that are only connected into town if they have access to a private car.</p>
3.3	<p>The town is prepared to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> engage with the route planning of the new A96 take advantage of the economic and development opportunities the final route will bring 	<p>Route planning for the dualling of the A96 has only reached the east of Huntly so far. As such it is not yet clear what impact the road project will have on the town—this may be the case for a number of years. When route options are ready to progress, the town should be prepared to engage not only with the formal consultations but consider the wider impact and opportunities they may bring e.g. housebuilding to bring new people to the town.</p>

The focus is people, environment and culture

<i>Strategic Objective</i>		<i>Progress and future opportunities</i>
4.1	Making use of a range of tools to communicate to locals, visitors and potential visitors alike.	<p>A key first step in addressing this objective was modernising the town's website, which in 2018 was relatively obsolete. Huntly Business Association has taken the lead on this and established a new website with integrated smartphone app, and social media channels for promotion of the town generally, specific businesses and special offers.</p> <p>There are opportunities to expand this marketing, with search engine optimisation and media campaigns nationally that put Huntly's unique attractions on the radar of potential visitors.</p> <p>The objective refers to a "range of tools", and there is still room to go beyond digital. For example, traditional physical marketing of attractions across the north east to encourage day trips. There is still a need for more wayfinding and interpretation of Huntly's story on the ground in the town.</p>
4.2	Empowering people of Huntly to contribute towards life in the town through the sharing of skills or resources and actively pursuing ventures that include opportunities for socialising and inclusion across communities.	<p>This area of life in the town is one that has been adversely impacted by the pandemic. While it has facilitated new ways of connecting digitally, and allowed people to stay in the town more by working from home, opportunities for the community to come together have been limited. Experience of the pandemic may have left some wary about coming together in groups of people, and some key venues (e.g. the Stewart's Hall, Brander Library and Linden Centre) are yet to open as normal. Consideration therefore needs to be given to what actions can be used to approach this strategic objective in the current context.</p>
4.3	Take action that reduces greenhouse gas emissions and allows the town to transition to a circular economy.	<p>Urgency, globally, towards this objective has only increased, with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recommending that reaching Net Zero emissions by the middle of the century is required to limit global warming close to 1.5°C. In April 2019 the Scottish Parliament passed a declaration that we are in a climate emergency. Actions to meet Net Zero emissions will only happen with action on the ground.</p> <p>Working in partnership with Huntly Development Trust instigated a pilot on Smart Local Energy Systems with ZUoS Ltd. Supported by the UK/Canada Power Forward Challenge, this saw installation of technology in individual households that integrate grid and load control across generation, storage, and demand side response. The Trust are also continuing investigations to the possibility of hydrogen production at Greenmyres.</p>

		There is a strong, and important, opportunity for the town to actively engage with Aberdeenshire Council, the Scottish Government and UK Government to make their Net Zero transition goals a reality on the ground.
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Where real opportunities exist for enterprise

<i>Strategic Objective</i>		<i>Progress and future opportunities</i>
5.1	Existing businesses and new enterprises complement each other to sustain footfall.	<p>Footfall and business activity in recent years has clearly been dictated by public health restrictions. In relative terms, the town centre business environment has not dramatically changed, but relocations of Orb's Community Bookshop and at Square Deal place it in a better position that it would otherwise be in. A number of other vacant units on The Square are currently subject to private refurbishment and relocation, which will bring another noticeable improvement to The Square.</p> <p>Promotional activity of local businesses by Huntly Business Association through Experience Huntly is encouraging footfall that may be otherwise missed.</p> <p>While there are green shoots, the situation is still relatively fragile. There are still high level of vacant commercial premises in the town centre, and any support that can be afforded to the business environment should be sought.</p>
5.2	Starting new enterprises is a supported process.	While regional and national enterprise support is still in place, there is no community-based supported process for people looking to start new enterprises. The need for this will grow over time to ensure that vacant commercial units can find a new use.
5.3	Develop lifelong learning opportunities, within existing organisations, services and businesses that can increase the town's collective skillbase, and capacity to apply these to enterprises.	<p>Progress towards this objective would have been made with the Huntly Hive co-working space planned by Huntly Development Trust and would have included a space suitable for training. However work on this was paused in response to the pandemic. Activities are now planned to be included in the refurbished 'Number 30'.</p> <p>There is an opportunity to do more, or apply innovative thinking for delivery from other parts of the strategy to make the most of this strategic objective in the long term.</p>

Conclusion

The result of community effort in 2018 created:

- a wide-ranging strategy;
- comprehensive 'to-do lists';
- shared vision; and,
- a roadmap of milestones of how to get there.

What was unclear when the strategy launched in 2018 was how much of the plans could be achieved, and what in timescales. With hard work and perseverance individuals, groups and organisations have been able to collectively attract seven-figure sums of investment to the town, which is beginning to have tangible benefits and is a strong foundation to build upon towards the initial 2030 strategy goal.

The town's achievements to date should not be underplayed, but there is still work to do to attain the level of ambition that was set in 2018. Through the Testing Change Fund awarded by the Scottish Government through the South Aberdeenshire Local Action Group, there is an opportunity to develop a renewed focus for investment of time, resources and capital in Huntly over the next few years as it continues to work to be a thriving town for all.