Abstract: This report is the fifth update on the progress of the City of Brechin Townscape Heritage Initiative.

1 RECOMMENDATION

1.1 It is recommended that the Committee:-

1. notes the contents of this fifth report on the progress of the City of Brechin Townscape Heritage Initiative.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The City of Brechin Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) is a five year programme of heritage led regeneration (2008-2013) funded by Angus Council, the Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic Scotland. The total budget is just over £2,900,000 (excluding any contributions from private property owners) and it is run by a dedicated Project Officer who is based in the former Registrar's Office at 32 Panmure Street, Brechin.

2.2 The THI aims to regenerate the centre of Brechin by undertaking a number of physical projects and by engaging with the local community. There are a number of "Priority Projects" based upon reusing/repairing prominent historic buildings and finding sustainable uses for them. There is a budget for "multiple project" grants for undertaking repairs and bringing vacant buildings back into use, which is based upon selection criteria to ensure maximum value for money. There are also sums for public realm projects, training in traditional building skills and community engagement initiatives.

3 PROJECT PROGRESS

3.1 Priority Projects: Significant progress has been made with all of the High Street Priority Projects. The Town House Museum priority project was reopened to the public in August 2010. The grant of £218,438 assisted with the restoration and conversion of the first floor of two buildings, effectively more than doubling the area available for exhibitions.

Between July 2010 and June 2011 grant applications totalling £1.005 million have been awarded to the owners of the following priority projects:-

- 33 High Street Building Repairs Grant of £67,111
- 39 – 41 High Street Building Repairs Grant of £73,916
- 29 – 33 High Street Vacant Historic Floorspace Grant of £335,213
- Merchant's House, 68-74 High Street Vacant Historic Floorspace Grant of £528,785

All of these projects are currently on site, with the two building repair projects nearing completion, and the other two major projects making good progress. In respect of 45 - 47 High Street, the property was purchased by the council in 2010 as part of the Town Centre Regeneration Fund project with restoration of the vacant historic floorspace to be funded through the THI. Listed building consent is now in place for the repair and refurbishment works to this building and further approval has been sought from the Heritage Lottery Fund with works to commence in July.
The combined effect of the restoration of the row of High Street buildings, which forms an historic grouping of gable ended frontages, will be significant. Whilst the works have necessitated a large body of scaffolding to be in place at one time, undoubtedly causing inconvenience and disruption to the High Street, there has been a considerable benefit in allowing adjacent buildings which have shared rainwater disposal systems and valleys to be repaired using a co-ordinated approach.

Restoration works to the building, known locally as the Merchant’s House, at 68-72 High Street, began in February 2011. The building was acquired by Kit Martin (Historic Houses Rescue) Ltd in January 2011 and the property will be converted into two quality townhouses for let. This category A listed building was on the Building At Risk register and prior to this had lain vacant for over 40 years. The significant and rare oak roof with timbers dating from the 15th and 16th century, are being temporarily protected by a roof canopy whilst a new self supporting roof structure is put in place. It is the intention of the contractor to prepare a sample room on the ground floor prior to the completion of the project which will allow for organised visits by prior arrangement.

As noted in the last THI report the East Church priority project continues to be marketed for sale but without a viable end user, this building has been withdrawn from the identified grant eligible projects, and grant funding has been reallocated.

3.2 **Multiple Projects:** As reported in the last THI report, interest in the grants scheme has been good throughout the lifetime of the scheme and whilst not identified as priority projects, several larger projects, many of which are key listed buildings within the centre of Brechin, have been awarded significant levels of grant assistance. Despite the financial climate, the level of interest remained consistent throughout the grant qualifying period.

3.3 Between June 2010 and June 2011 grants totalling £414,138 have been awarded to the following projects, to a total of 15 owners:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Grant Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25a &amp; 25b High Street (front building only)</td>
<td>£8,533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-27 High Street</td>
<td>£41,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-55 High Street</td>
<td>£64,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 St David Street</td>
<td>£47,586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 St David Street (front building)</td>
<td>£20,941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Panmure Street</td>
<td>£49,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Hotel</td>
<td>£130,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 St David Street</td>
<td>£3,891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21a High Street</td>
<td>£2,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 St David Street</td>
<td>£25,842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 St James Place/93 City Road</td>
<td>£20,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These projects have ranged from general building repair items to the restoration of historic vacant floorspace. As previously reported, a number of these buildings are of mixed tenure and co-operation between owners has been essential. The majority of the projects are currently on site, or are due to go on site in the next two months.

3.4 **Grant Awards:** All grants have now been awarded with the exception of two council projects; namely 45 – 47 High Street and the Mechanics Institute, for which the council successfully sought Heritage Lottery Fund approval to extend the application period to July 2011. These projects are now at a significant stage of development and applications have now been submitted.

Total grant awarded for all Priority and Multiple projects approved to the end of June 2011, was £1.97 million. Grants still awaiting approval from the Heritage Lottery Fund total a further £413,000. This equates to an estimated overall grant commitment of £2.38 million with an estimated additional spend/investment by the private/public sector of £1 million

3.5 **Public Realm:** The model which was developed by the THI in 2009 to enhance the closes of Brechin was continued until the end of May 2011. This involved the training and supervision by Angus Council Training Services of long term unemployed 18-24 year olds registered on
the New Deal Scheme and Future Jobs Fund. Further closes have been enhanced by removing the impervious paint covering, repointing in lime mortar and repainting of the pend ceilings. Closes that have been enhanced include both pends to Liddles Close, Blackbull Close and both the High Street and St David’s Street Cross Keys Close pends. The group of trainees also repointed the car park wall at the Mechanics Institute, assisted with the framing and erection of the Cross Keys close mosaic and repointing of the raised flowerbed wall, as well as the manufacture and the erection of a wooden screen to form a bin refuge in Cross Keys close. In May, the trainees also rebuilt a collapsed retaining random rubble wall in Bishops Close. Additionally, the trainees were given a full day’s site supervised training session in rubble wall building and wall pointing by specialist contractor, Laing Traditional Masonry.

3.6 Training and Community Participation: Following the traditional skills provision survey undertaken by the THI in collaboration with Angus College in 2009, the College was successful in obtaining LEADER funding for a second phase to the project which is currently ongoing. The eventual aim of the College is to provide courses and qualifications in traditional building skills. The THI is assisting the project by providing training opportunities to Angus College lecturers. As part of the current phase, lecturers are being offered one week placements on ‘live’ THI funded projects with the co-operation of the contractors. The THI has also been instrumental in securing funding under Historic Scotland’s Craft Fellowship scheme for two joinery apprentices who have been taken on by WH Brown, the contractor working on the Merchant’s House scheme.

The full report on the community archaeological dig in the Bishops Close area, is nearing completion and as before, the results of the dig will be presented to the community by Murray Archaeological Services. Many of the significant finds have been conserved and it is hoped that a selection of these finds will be displayed in the Town House Museum.

Local school pupils from Brechin High, Andover and Maisondieu Primary Schools have continued to participate in the townscape heritage initiative with art based projects. A locally themed mosaic wall panel has now been fixed to a wall in Cross Keys Close and an interpretation sign is currently in production. Pupils on the Rural Skills Programme at Brechin High School will assist with the planting of shrubs to the adjacent flowerbed. Further displays have been put up in vacant shop units on Swan Street and the High Street. These displays have enhanced the centre of Brechin, complementing efforts to regenerate the town centre. Further displays are planned and will include one on the theme of ‘Buildings of Brechin’.

A new joint venture to assist local retailers is currently in development. A visual merchandising two hour workshop has been provisionally organised for local retailers in cooperation with community planning and the local business association. The free workshop will assist retailers in learning about shop displays both in the window and inside, merchandising and approaches to increasing sales and will be facilitated by a former visual merchandising director of Debenhams.

4 ISSUES

4.1 The extent of the scaffolding on the High Street has caused some concern although many of the projects are nearing completion. The poor condition, and scale of the buildings has meant that the scaffolding has been an unavoidable factor, particularly given the types of works that have been carried out.

4.2 Regular updates on the progress of the Townscape Heritage Initiative have continued to be given to the Brechin Community Area Partnership, the local press as well as on a dedicated webpage (http://www.angus.gov.uk/brechinthi). Regular meetings have been held with the funding partners, the Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic Scotland. Both funding partners have continued to express their satisfaction with the progress of the THI and key milestones for grant expenditure have been successfully met. The Project Support Group and Partnership Executive continue to meet on a regular basis and their input and ongoing dedication is commended to the Committee.
5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from the recommendations of this report.

5.2 All of the costs associated with Townscape Initiative project are allowed for within the Planning & Transport 2010/2014 Financial Plan.

6 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

7 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

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

8 SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT

8.1 This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained within the Single Outcome Agreement for Angus:-

- Adults maximise their potential through learning opportunities
- Our natural and built environment is protected and enjoyed

9 CONSULTATION

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

10 CONCLUSION

10.1 The THI is now in its fourth year of implementation. One priority project has been completed and a further four priority buildings have been awarded grants and are currently on site. Many of the grants that have been awarded have been to buildings with multiple owners and have been of mixed tenure. The number of grants awarded has exceeded original forecasts. The partnership between Angus College and the THI has continued to strengthen over the lifetime of the THI and indicates a strong interest and desire to develop and improve traditional building skills essential for assisting in the long term sustainability of the historic buildings located in both Brechin and Angus.

ERIC S LOWSON
DIRECTOR OF INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES

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

P&T/GWC/SK/IAL
27 June 2011