



REPORT TO: SPECIAL MEETING OF PLANNING AND REGULATORY SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 18 DECEMBER 2018

SUBJECT: MORAY TOWN CENTRE HEALTH CHECKS 2018

BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE)

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To report the key findings of the Moray Town Centre Health Check 2018 and to ask Committee to consider adopting the Moray Town Centre Health Check Report 2018 as a material consideration in future retail planning policy and planning application decision making.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (E) (1) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to exercising the statutory functions of the Council as Planning Authority.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee agree to:

- i) **note the findings of the Moray Town Centre Health Check Report 2018;**
- ii) **adopt the Moray Town Centre Health Check Report 2018, as set out in Appendix 1, as a material consideration in future retail planning policy and planning application decision making;**
- iii) **the publication of the Town Centre Health Check Report 2018 on the Planning and Development website pages; and**
- iv) **note that a report will be submitted to the Economic Development and Infrastructure Services Committee for them to consider and note the findings of the Town Centre Health Check Report 2018.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) indicates the importance of assessing the performance of town centres through health checks. SPP sets out a range of indicators that may be relevant. Paragraph 64 of SPP states the purpose of the health check is to "assess a town centre's strengths, vitality and viability, weaknesses and resilience... to inform development plans and decisions on planning applications. Health checks should be regularly updated, to monitor town centre performance, preferably every two years."

3.2 A Town Centre Health Check Framework was developed in 2010 in conjunction with Hargest Planning Ltd and has been used to prepare biennial health checks since 2010. Assessments are undertaken in town centres of Elgin, Forres, Keith, Buckie, and Lossiemouth. The Edgar Road area of Elgin is also assessed. Limited audits were also undertaken in Aberlour, Dufftown, Fochabers, and Rothes.

3.3 The Town Centre Health Check data will:

- Provide an evidence base for use in other studies and strategies;
- Support the preparation and implementation of the Local Development Plan and economic development policies; and
- Provide a baseline for assessing the impacts of proposed retail development proposals.

3.4 The principal sources of information used are as follows:

- Field surveys undertaken during June 2018 to record the occupier of units and the type of use (Space in Use Survey). The survey of an individual town is completed in a single day.
- Review of Regional Assessor information on floor space.
- Pedestrian flow surveys undertaken in the last week in June 2018.

This information is then analysed and assessed against the vitality and viability indicators discussed below.

3.5 The vitality and viability indicators assessed in the Moray Town Centre Health Check Report 2018 include the following:

- Pedestrian flow
- Diversity of uses
- Vacancy rates
- Retailer representation

3.6 Retailer intentions, rate and yield data, consumer surveys and turnover indicators have not been monitored due to the scale and cost of undertaking the survey, the need for specialist consultants and the lack of response in previous studies.

4. MORAY TOWN CENTRE HEALTH CHECK 2018

4.1 The summary below relates to the key findings of the Town Centre Health Check but does not provide a commentary on all the indicators measured. A copy of the full Health Check is included at **Appendix 1**.

ELGIN

4.2 Comparison retailing (i.e. clothes, gifts, furniture, chemists etc.) continues to be the dominant use within Elgin town centre, with leisure uses (i.e. restaurants, cafes, pubs, sports etc.) also making up a large proportion of units. Convenience retailers (i.e. supermarkets, butchers, newsagents etc.) continue to occupy significant floor areas due to large units such as Tesco, Aldi and Marks and Spencer. The town centre has a good mix of independent and national retailers with just over a third of retailers in the town centre being national multiple retailers. The most notable change in 2018 has been the reduction of vacancies on Batchen Street where a number of independent

retailers have occupied previously vacant units. At the time of the survey there was only one vacant unit on Batchen Street and this has now been occupied by Against the Grain.

- 4.3 There has been a notable decrease in vacancies across the town centre suggesting continued confidence in the town centre as a location to do business. The number of vacant units has decreased by 11 units to 25 since 2016, giving a vacancy rate of 10%. 10% is the average generally used in Scotland to indicate the relative health of a town centre. Despite the general improvement in vacancies it is noted that vacant units within the St Giles Centre have continued to increase. Seven units were recorded vacant in 2018 within St Giles Centre compared to three in 2016.
- 4.5 Footfall has generally increased across the town centre with the exception being in the east end of the High Street where the average hourly pedestrian flow decreased by 72 pedestrians/hour. A similar level of decrease was found at the same location in 2016.

EDGAR ROAD

- 4.6 The Edgar Road area of Elgin continues to provide a significant concentration of comparison retailing, with a large proportion (88%) of this being national multiple retailers. Vacancies have increased since 2016 by two units. The majority of vacancies continue to be within the Elgin Retail Park where Topps Tiles closed and there are four units that have never been occupied. There were substantial increases in the average hourly pedestrian flow at Springfield Retail Park with this having increased by 170 pedestrians/hour since 2016. The average footfall at Edgar Road is 38% of the average found at the Plainstones in Elgin but significantly higher than other count locations within the town centre. Footfall has consistently increased at Edgar Road since 2012 however 2018 saw a particularly substantial increase compared to other years, part of which could be due to the exceptionally sunny weather.

FORRES

- 4.7 Comparison retailing and retail services are the dominant use within Forres town centre but leisure uses also make a significant contribution. Retail service (i.e. salons, post office, dry cleaners etc.) uses have increased by six in comparison to 2016. The number of vacant units has decreased from nine units in 2016 to three giving a vacancy rate of 3%. Whilst there has been a reduction in vacant retail units there are many non-retail units including the former Royal Bank of Scotland that are vacant. The condition of some of these, particularly the longer term vacancies, has a negative impact on perceptions of the town centre. Footfall increased at both count locations in comparison to 2016.

KEITH

- 4.8 In 2016 Keith had shown improved signs of vitality and viability however the 2018 survey showed vacancy levels similar to 2012 and lower footfall on Mid Street. Vacancies increased from five units in 2016 to nine in 2018 giving a vacancy rate of 11.2%. New vacancies have included long established local furniture retail Third Brothers, Be So Crafty, The Cozy Neuk and Happy Cones. Whilst vacancies have increased there are some new occupiers particularly in the Leisure and Retail Services categories. Footfall on Mid Street fell from an average of 180 per hour in 2016 to 165 in 2018. Footfall has fallen at this location on each survey year since recording started in 2010.

BUCKIE

- 4.9 In 2016 Buckie had performed relatively well however vacancies increased by two units in 2018 giving a vacancy rate of 12.3%. Closure of long established local retailer Cruickshanks, which occupied a large unit, has resulted in a significant increase in vacant floor space. New occupiers have tended to be within the Retail Services category with a new barber and tattoo shop opening. Bank closures have also impacted on the town centre. Average hourly footfall fell slightly on the High Street but increased at East Church Street by an average of 82 pedestrians/hour.

LOSSIEMOUTH

- 4.10 Leisure continues to be the dominant use in Lossiemouth and there has been an increase in Retail Service uses. Vacancies have decreased by one, and the vacancy rate is now 9.2%. The average hourly pedestrian flow decreased significantly at both locations. It is unclear why such a big drop occurred and the 2020 survey will help to determine if this is an anomaly or a trend.

SMALLER SETTLEMENTS (ABERLOUR, DUFFTOWN, FOCHABERS AND ROTHES)

- 4.11 A significant proportion of the uses in all towns are Leisure Services (pubs, cafes, restaurants, hotels, sports facilities etc.), with Comparison and Retail Services also contributing to the mix. Vacancies rates in Aberlour, Dufftown, and Fochabers are all two units or less, giving a vacancy rate below 10%. In Rothes vacancies increased from two units in 2016 to three in 2018, resulting in a vacancy rate of 11%.

Summary Table of Key Findings

Town	Comparison		Convenience		Retail Service		Leisure Service		Vacancy		Vacancy Rate		% of National Multiples	
	2018	2016	2018	2016	2018	2016	2018	2016	2018	2016	2018	2016	2018	2016
Elgin	90	86	19	18	51	47	65	65	25	36	10	14.3	34	34
Edgar Road	21	20	2	2	2	3	4	3	7	5	19.4	15.6	88	75
Forres	28	29	15	13	27	21	23	23	3	9	3	9.3	18.5	20.6
Keith	26	27	13	13	13	12	19	18	9	5	11.2	6.7	13.5	9.6
Buckie	27	28	8	7	16	15	20	21	10	8	12.3	10.3	25	28
Lossiemouth	10	10	6	6	12	9	21	18	5	6	9.2	15.7	7.1	8

Aberlour	7	7	4	5	5	4	10	9	1	0	3.7	0	6	7
Dufftown	7	10	7	6	4	4	19	18	2	4	5.1	9.5	11	10
Fochabers	9	7	4	4	2	3	9	9	1	1	4	4	13	14
Roths	6	7	3	3	2	2	9	9	3	2	11	8.7	18	16.6

5. **SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

(a) **Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))**

Maintaining vital and viable high streets and town centres supports a growing, diverse and sustainable economy. The town centre health check can provide an evidence base for the development of policies and strategies to support town centres.

(b) **Policy and Legal**

Scottish Planning Policy stresses the importance of monitoring the performance of town centres.

If approved by the Committee the Moray Town Centre Health Check Report 2018 would be a material consideration in any relevant future planning applications.

(c) **Financial implications**

None.

(d) **Risk Implications**

The risk of not monitoring the health of town centres would be an out of date evidence base being used for preparing strategies.

(e) **Staffing Implications**

The collection and assessment of data has been undertaken by Moray Council staff.

(f) **Property**

None.

(g) **Equalities/Socio Economic Impact**

There are no direct implications arising from this report.

(h) **Consultations**

The Corporate Director (Economic Development Planning & Infrastructure), the Head of Development Services, Legal Services Manager (Property and Contracts), the Equal Opportunities Officer, and Lissa Rowan (Committee Services Officer) have been consulted, and comments received have been incorporated into the report.

6. **CONCLUSION**

6.1 **Town Centre Health Checks have been undertaken every two years since 2010. This has allowed various indicators to be monitored over time and data to be used as an evidence base for developing policy and**

strategies to support town centres. The 2018 results have seen improvements and decline on some indicators. Generally most town centres provide a wide variety of uses across retailing types with a mix of national and multiple retailers. There have been decreases in vacancies in Elgin, Forres and Lossiemouth, and increases at Edgar Road, Keith, and Buckie. Footfall increased in Elgin, Edgar Road and Forres but decreased in Lossiemouth. In Keith footfall decreased on Mid Street and increased slightly at the access to Tesco. In Buckie there were increases in footfall on East Church Street but a small drop on the High Street.

- 6.2** It is recommended that the Committee note the findings of the Health Check 2018 and adopt the Moray Town Centre Health Check Report 2018 as a material consideration in future retail planning policy and planning application decision making.

Author of Report: Rowena MacDougall, Planning Officer
Background Papers:
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