



Elgin High Street Conservation Area



Part 3: Conservation Area Management Action Plan



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Management Action Plan**

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Contents		Page no
0	Executive summary	1
1	Introduction	2
1.1	Purpose of the document	
1.2	Project team	
2	Scope of the action plan	2
2.1	Preamble	
2.2	Priority projects	
2.3	Action in the medium term	
2.4	Action in the longer term	
3	Notes on costings	7
4	Cost summary	9
4.1	Priority projects	
4.2	Public realm improvements	
4.3	Medium and long term fabric repairs – indicative costs	
4.4	Exclusions	

0 Executive summary

The Conservation Area Management Action Plan for the Elgin High Street Conservation Area is the third of a suite of four related documents linked to a number of strategic economic initiatives which are being developed for Elgin. The documents mesh with three of the platforms set out in the June 2011 'Elgin City for the Future' report, specifically 'High Street First', 'The Visitor Economy' and 'Arts, Culture and Heritage'.

The action plan for the conservation area is supplementary to the management plan, in conjunction with which it should be read. It sets out a menu of costs for dealing with problems identified with the conservation area, in addition to promoting a range of possibilities for enhancement, such as improvements to shopfronts and the public realm. These build upon the programmes which have been put in place already through the Elgin BID initiative and by the Council. The action plan sets out a menu of options and priorities which will enable the Council to set budgets for a programme of work and to capitalise on opportunities for obtaining funding in the years to come.

It will have to be accepted that the problems afflicting the conservation area cannot be resolved in their entirety in the short term. In the conservation area appraisal (Part 1), and the conservation area management plan (Part 2), the extent to which there has been a backlog of maintenance to high level features which are inaccessible - such as gables and chimneyheads - has been identified throughout the conservation area. These problems are not new: they have been afflicting the conservation area for many years. In some cases they have resulted in considerable change both to the individual structures and to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Problems have been exacerbated by the use of soft sandstone from the late nineteenth century onwards - of which decay can be advanced - and by poor standards of repair which have made matters worse. There are several hundred chimneyheads throughout the conservation area and only a very small minority of these can be said to be in good repair.

The scale of the problem is such that to do nothing is no longer an option. Action required now consists of creating greater conservation awareness of the value of the outstanding historic buildings that make up the conservation area, and how to care for them. Raising levels of conservation awareness will not be successful on its own, however, without putting in place effective measures by which property owners are incentivised by seeking expert advice and drawing down allocated funding for carrying out repairs and the enhancement of their properties.

The action plan identifies a range of properties for which repairs might be identified at an early date if appropriate funding sources can be secured, and they have been prepared with that in mind should the Council proceed, for instance, with applications for a Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS, administered by Historic Scotland), or a Townscape Heritage Initiative scheme (THI, administered by the Heritage Lottery Fund). In less detail a broad estimate is given of the cost of the backlog of repairs and improvements that require to be tackled in the longer term. It should come as no surprise that this estimate amounts to millions of pounds, and it confirms the extent to which it is worthwhile taking a long term view by leaving a legacy

which will be beneficial to the wider Moray economy from investing in traditional building construction skills.

It should be noted that the action plan cannot address all of the ills that have been identified within the conservation area. Building on the initiatives of bodies such as the Elgin Fund in the 1960s and 1970s, the need to maintain and enhance the key buildings within the townscape, and avoid them falling into neglect, must be considered as part of the programme if the wider aims and objectives of creating a vibrant city, which visitors will want to come and see, are to be achieved.

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the document

1.1.1 This document is the third of a suite of four documents focused on the Elgin High Street Outstanding Conservation Area. The documents have been commissioned by a consortium of bodies, which include the City of Elgin BID Company, the Elgin Fund and Historic Scotland, led by the Moray Council. The four documents are listed as follows:

Part 1 Conservation Area Appraisal

Part 2 Conservation Area Management Plan

Part 3 Conservation Area Management Action Plan

Part 4 Heritage Trail Interpretive Plan

1.1.2 The document should be read in conjunction with Parts 1 and 2 of the suite of documents. Its primary purpose is to set out costs and priorities for tackling the issues identified in those documents and in such a way in that funding schemes – such as a Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) (Historic Scotland), or a Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) scheme (Heritage Lottery Fund) - can be applied for by the Council in the short term.

1.1.3 It is accepted that while short term programmes can be invaluable in making a difference to how the conservation area is perceived, they cannot address the deficit in a catalogue of maintenance and improvements from which the conservation area would benefit in the longer term. Hence broad budget costs have been evaluated for a range of repairs and improvements that might be addressed in both the medium and longer term. Costs are presented as a menu of options from which schemes may be selected dependent on the requirements of the funding programmes and, in some cases, the willingness of property owners to participate.

1.2 Project team

1.2.1 For the preparation of this document the lead consultant has been John Mackay of McLeod & Aitken, quantity surveyors and cost consultants. He has been supported by Andrew PK Wright who is the principal author of the Conservation Area Appraisal and the Conservation Area Management Plan.

2 Scope of the action plan

2.1 Preamble

2.1.1 The guidance set out in Sections 3 and 4 of the Conservation Area Management Plan would be expected to meet the requirements of Historic Scotland, tailored to the specific needs of Elgin if the city centre area were to be successful in attracting a Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS). The guidance coincides with that set out in Historic Scotland's advisory publications for property owners, and has been used as the basis for evaluating repairs to the fabric of the buildings identified as priority projects. A description of possible priority projects is set out in the following paragraphs.

2.2 Priority projects



A prominent Category B listed Building at Risk at 186-188 High Street

- 2.2.1 Priority projects have been selected for the impact they are likely to have on an appreciation of the wider conservation area. Some are chosen because they have been recorded as Buildings at Risk (BARs), having a negative effect on surrounding buildings which may be in good repair. For this reason the property at 186-188 High Street is included.
- 2.2.2 Other properties may make a significant contribution to the historic townscape which would be the poorer if the buildings were to be lost, or damaged, through ongoing problems of decay. These buildings have problems which are typical of the conservation area. In a number of cases the upper floors are vacant, suggesting that there is the potential to secure new compatible uses. The early nineteenth century property at 35-37 High Street has been included for the levels of stone repairs required to the façade and to the gable, for the need to undertake window repairs where original windows survive, and to give encouragement to replacing modern windows which do not conform to the design of the originals. This property, unlike many, is occupied at the upper levels, but suffers from a degraded brick extension above eaves level to the rear which is visible from a well-used close leading to the east end of the High Street.



Shops and tenements, of which the earliest is dated 1811, with problems of decay and high level maintenance; as a group the buildings make a strong contribution to the historic townscape and are suggested as a single priority project

- 2.2.3 The objective has been to offer a range of key projects for the Council to take forward for further consideration – one of the options presented includes a range of seven properties of varying ages within a single street block at 161-187 High Street on the northern side, to the immediate west of the Plainstones. The properties exhibit many of the problems to be found throughout the conservation area of poor alterations to shopfronts and signage, advanced stone decay, high level maintenance problems and vacancy at the upper floor levels. Associated with the High Street frontages of this range of buildings the closes are invariably in poor condition and lack interest. One of the closes houses a number of redundant buildings and, although they appear sound, all of the windows and doors are boarded up.
- 2.2.4 The relatively high costs for priority projects reflect the difficulties of undertaking high level work of any kind to the street frontages, and also to the closes at the rear, due to restrictions on physical access.



Advanced stone decay: the tower of the former UP Church on Moss Street, suffering from delamination and contour scaling, and with damage evident from plastic repairs having been carried out in cement; the Muckle Cross (right) has suffered from a complete loss of architectural detail in the lower parts of the monument

- 2.2.5 The former UP church on Moss Street, currently in use as a restaurant, is an important landmark within the historic townscape. It has suffered over many decades from advanced decay of the stonework which has affected carved architectural detail and the stone ashlar walling, much of which is highly visible from street level. Costs allow for extensive stone repairs to be carried out in accordance with the general recommendations set out in the conservation area management plan.
- 2.2.6 The audit work undertaken for the conservation area appraisal confirmed the extent to which historic shopfronts are an important part of the streetscape, often with high levels of authentic fabric surviving. Targeted funding should build upon the success of the initiative of the Elgin BID in this area, and should seek to carry out works of enhancement to colour schemes, restoring authenticity where this may have been lost or impaired, and enhancing signage. Encouragement should be given to shop owners to tackle some of the repairs which would be inordinately costly without financial assistance being made available – for instance, in repairing or replacing decorative cast iron ventilators of which many of these features survive, but often in a deteriorating state.



This attractive cast iron shopfront on South Street, although well maintained, suffers from rust damage to the decorative cast iron ventilators within the stall riser for which a small grants scheme might provide financial assistance for what might be an expensive element to repair or replace

- 2.2.7 Given the extent to which fabric problems have been identified throughout the conservation area - especially at high level - a dedicated fund for a small grants scheme, available to all property owners of historic buildings within the conservation area, would be expected to be well subscribed. A small grants scheme for historic buildings would be particularly valuable for encouraging the retention of, for instance, cast iron rainwater goods for which matching patterns may be difficult and relatively costly to source and to encourage the reinstatement of cast iron patterns where they may have been replaced. It could prove helpful in encouraging property owners to recover the authenticity of lost, or missing, features which are important to how a building is perceived. Replacing carved finials or original window patterns would be eligible for financial assistance, as would repairs to chimneyheads and replacing matching chimney cans, always expensive elements because of the high cost arising from restricted access from within the closes and of scaffolding.



Problems with decorative cast iron rainwater goods – loss of original patterns and replacement in modern profiles and materials

- 2.2.8 Improvements to the public realm have the potential to make a considerable difference to the character and appearance of the conservation area. There is an opportunity to build upon the range of

improvements undertaken already by the Council and by the Elgin BID Initiative. Once more, a menu of opportunities has been provided in the costings for the short term, consisting of repairs to the historic fabric of Braco's Close to the renewal of finishes in other closes which are well used by pedestrians. In the case of improving the surfaces and drainage within the closes, it is recognised that the Council may require to secure the interest and commitment of property owners before schemes can get underway.

- 2.2.9 The Muckle Cross is included as a priority project due to the urgent need to arrest stone decay which has resulted in the loss of carved architectural detail, and because it is a focal point within the Plainstones area.

2.3 Action in the medium term

- 2.3.1 While the priority projects set out in the foregoing section will have an immediate beneficial impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area, they cannot be expected to resolve the full extent of the problems that have been identified from the audit work. There will be an ongoing requirement to put in place financial incentives to encourage property owners to care for their properties, and to undertake appropriate repairs to appropriate conservation standards.

- 2.3.1 The Council has identified funding opportunities that extend beyond CARS and THI schemes, and is alert to the opportunities they present. The longer term objectives set out in the Elgin City for the Future project will certainly be of considerable benefit to the regeneration of the conservation area and may give rise to further schemes of enhancement and of securing more sustainable uses for historic buildings.

2.4 Action in the longer term



The incidence of decaying soft sandstone made worse by the application of dense cement renders and mortar is common throughout the conservation area

- 2.4.1 As noted in the foregoing clause, the scope for undertaking repairs and improvements throughout the conservation area is almost limitless. It is clear from the audit work that problems are coming to a head from a combination of factors. These include: original materials or components which are coming to the end of their lives; from a catalogue of repairs not having been carried out; from the damage caused by inappropriate repairs, or even the total loss of the feature. Repair standards throughout the conservation area have, in general,

been disappointingly low. Unfortunately, in too many cases they have been misguided and have served only to exacerbate the problems of the fabric.

- 2.4.2 Fabric which may appear sound at the present time may be on the threshold of being subject to decay in the years to come, requiring high levels of intervention in the future.
- 2.4.3 There is consequently a need for targeted conservation awareness courses for property owners, for tradesmen, contractors, and also for professionals involved in the care of historic buildings within the conservation area. While the guidance set out in the conservation area management plan will provide a valuable baseline for improving standards, well organised training courses can offer lasting value. There would appear to be opportunities for beginning the process in the shorter term through either the CARS or THI schemes, and these should be embraced.
- 2.4.4 Improving the knowledge and skills of local tradesmen and contractors at work in the conservation area can provide long term solutions to the problems of the fabric from the adoption, and promotion, of appropriate repair techniques. Moreover, given the extent of the problems that have been recorded, this has the potential to provide those with the requisite skills with a distinct commercial advantage over those who may not possess them, and it will be of considerable lasting benefit not only to the long term character and appearance of the conservation area but to also to the wider community in Moray.
- 2.4.5 It should be noted that it is notoriously difficult to provide precise costs for elements of work to be carried out in the future across the whole of the conservation area without a detailed survey being undertaken for each of the properties, of which there are several hundred within the boundaries as they are presently designated. This would be a time-consuming and costly exercise. The methodology by which outline costs have been arrived at is set out in the following section.

3 Notes on costings

- 3.1 As already stated, the absence of detailed surveys of each of the several hundred properties located throughout the conservation area to - firstly, assess their present condition and, secondly, and more importantly, to establish the scale of repairs required to remedy any problems thus discovered - severely impacts on the level of cost advice that can be provided at this stage. However to allow the necessary funding applications to progress guideline costs, summarised in Section 4, have been recommended for the possible remedial works identified during visual surveys of the entire conservation area as undertaken by McLeod & Aitken under the guidance of Andrew PK Wright.
- 3.2 The costing mechanisms adopted to suit the level of information available with regard to the various elements of the overall Action Plan are as described in Sub-Sections 3.3 – 3.9.
- 3.3 Priority Projects – Buildings
 - 3.3.1 A spreadsheet highlighting budget costs for each of the selected buildings is attached to Section 4.

- 3.3.2 Costs assume that fabric repairs extend to the rear elevations to the closes, and incorporate those parts of the foreland properties within the closes which are inseparable from one another. It should be noted that, at this stage, there has been no access to the interiors of the properties and so it is not known whether there are problems associated with structural defects or arising from timber infestation.
- 3.4 Priority Projects – Historic Shop Frontages
- 3.4.1 Costs allowed for assume that approximately 15 no, of various sizes, require replacement and enhancement.
- 3.5 Priority Projects – Shop Fascia Signage
- 3.5.1 Costs allowed for assume that approximately 50 no, of various sizes, require either replacement or enhancement
- 3.6 Priority Projects – General Fabric Repairs
- 3.6.1 As already highlighted in Section 2 there are several hundred buildings within the conservation area each of which are suffering from various degrees of disrepair. The wide variance in the scale of remedial works, especially those at high level, that might be required, allied to access problems for both the erection of scaffolding and the subsequent removal of defective materials specific to each property, makes it virtually impossible to provide realistic costs at this time. As such the sums highlighted in regard to the repairs of stonework, chimneys, parapet gutters etc. are based simply on assumed averages for each of these elements, these averages having been assessed from the information gathered during the visual surveys.
- 3.6.2 Approximately four hundred uPVC window units, of varying sizes and at all floor levels, were identified during the examination of the area. The sum provides an indication of the cost of replacing these units with traditional timber sash and casement windows and repairs to internal finishes in connection with this work. It would be unrealistic, of course, to anticipate that all uPVC windows would be replaced.
- 3.7 Public Realm Improvements - Restoration of Historic Closes
- 3.7.1 The historic closes, around forty in total, vary greatly in style, length and overall area. Costs to restore the finishes within the closes associated with the priority buildings have been included under that specific section. For the remaining closes an average allowance of £10,000.00 per close has been allocated. In addition to the upgrading of the hard surfacing and lighting within each close this allowance includes for the replacement of missing gates and the laying of slabs with carved close names at entry points. Problems with drainage would be resolved.
- 3.8 Public Realm Improvements – East End of High Street
- 3.8.1 The costs shown are based on improved surfacing to the pavements running from the Sheriff Court to the Little Cross and continuing on past the Museum to meet the relief road. An allowance for constructing stone pillars and erecting new entrance gates and overthrow to Grant Lodge has also been included for consideration in conjunction in order to improve access, as recommended in the heritage trail interpretive plan.

- 3.9 Public Realm Improvements – Lighting
- 3.9.1 Provisional sums have been allowed to cover the cost of lighting to the groundscape, trees and buildings within the pedestrianised area of the High Street along with a contemporary lighting scheme for St. Giles Church.
- 3.10 Figures set out in 4.1 and 4.2 will require to be tailored to suit applications for identified funding packages.
- 3.11 Medium and long term repair costings set out in 4.3 would be spread out over a number of years, for which priorities would need to be reviewed on a regular basis.

4 Cost summary

4.1 Priority Projects

• Nos 186-188 High Street	£ 142,630.00
• Associated Close	£ 12,650.00
• Nos 35-37 High Street	£ 132,195.00
• Associated Close	£ 12,650.00
• Nos 161-187 High Street	£ 675,510.00
• Associated Closes	£ 50,600.00
• Former UP Church, Moss Street	£ 435,160.00
• The Muckle Cross	£ 49,335.00
• Historic Shop Frontages	£ 175,000.00
• Shop Fascia Signage	£ 125,000.00
• General Fabric Repairs (Short Term)	£ 500,000.00

4.2 Public Realm Improvements

• Restoration of Historic Closes	£ 500,000.00
• Paving - Sheriff Court to Little Cross	£ 50,000.00
• Paving - Little Cross to relief road	£ 20,000.00
• Entrance gates etc. to Grant Lodge	£ 20,000.00
• Groundscape lighting to City centre	£ 200,000.00
• Lighting scheme for St. Giles Church	£ 20,000.00

4.3 Medium & Long Term Fabric Repairs – indicative costs

• Stone repairs	£ 1,750,000.00
• Chimney repairs	£ 1,500,000.00
• Slating repairs	£ 250,000.00
• Repairs to lead parapet gutters	£ 200,000.00
• Repairs to cast iron rainwater goods	£ 25,000.00
• Replacement of PVC rainwater goods	£ 30,000.00
• Repairs to timber windows & doors	£ 75,000.00
• Replacement of UPVC windows & doors	£ 600,000.00

4.4 Exclusions

The above figures include professional fees but do not include allowances for inflation, Value Added Tax and other exclusions noted in Section 3.