



Options Appraisal for the Regeneration of Nairn's King Street

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Created By:





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## **Foreword**

Nairn is an old seaside town located 16 miles from the Highland capital Inverness; and 22 miles from the Moray capital, Elgin. The proximity to these makes it the ideal commuting town. Nairn used to have its own borough, Nairnshire, until 1975 when it was merged with the Highland Council for voting purposes.

Nairn's town centre has faced numerous reprimands of its appearance through the decades. Empty spaces, derelict buildings, unwanted flats have created a disjointed and unappealing townscape. Although some studies, guidelines, and visions have been created, not much has been implemented to encourage positive change. This paper will endeavour to understand reasons for the current state of conditions, limitations and opportunities. These will then be used to suggest interventions and proposals to the Town Centre and a number of specific buildings within its boundary.

## **Methodology**

Most of this paper's information was gathered through online searches using Google Scholar and peer reviewed journals found on Scotland's University's database. Some research was sourced from Government websites such as the Census data. The main sources of information came from journal articles, books, news articles, databases of academic and professional research articles online. Informal interviews have also been conducted with the district planning assistant from Highland Council, Nairn BID, local MPs and a local historian. Highland Council HIEA site visit and a photographic survey was conducted to review and analyse the town centre and its street scape.

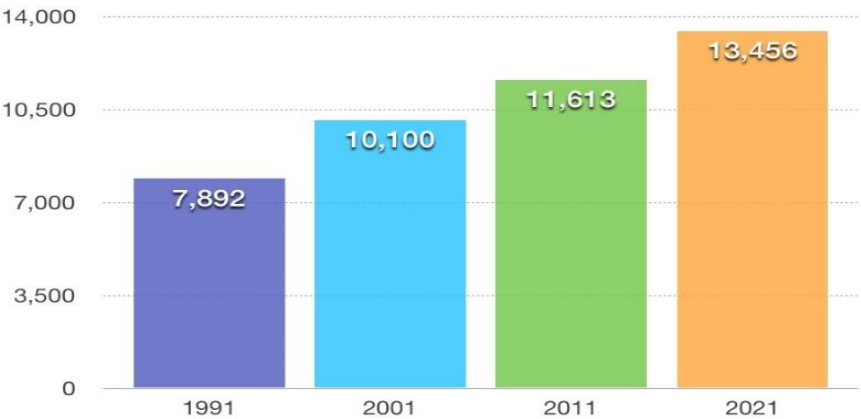
# Socio Economic Analysis

## Population

The population in Nairn has been increasing for steadily for the last 30 years. It is likely that the population will continue to grow at around 14% then reduce to 7% by 2041. This is above the average growth of the Highlands which is +7.5% and Scotland, +4.6%. Between 2001 and 2011, there is a decline in the number 25-44 year olds, which is the likeliest age group to be starting a family or already have young children. There is also a decrease in the 0-14 year old population. This could be because less children have been born/moved into the area since the 2001 census or young families have moved out of Nairn. The population of 45 years olds and over has increased and is predicted to continue to rise.

The population by gender is evenly split with female 51.9 and male 48.1. It should be noted that the 2022 census will have more gender identity terms but it is yet to be published. This should be revisited at a later date to get a better understanding of the population.

Population Growth in Nairn



Population by Age %

	YEAR	0-14	15-24	25-44	45-64	65+
Nairn	2001	18.4	10	25.6	26.4	19.6
Nairn	2011	16.8	10.2	22.5	28.8	21.7
Inner Moray Firth	2020	17	9	24	29	21

# Education

Nairn is on par with the Scotland overall in regard to the highest qualifications held by people aged 16 and above. It is however slightly behind Inner Moray Firth. A report compiled by the Highlands and Islands enterprise in 2018 shows that school leavers in the Highlands are less likely to go onto Further or Higher Education (20% and 35%) compared to 27% and 41% across Scotland.

Education					
LOCATION	NO QS	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4+
Nairn	26.1%	24.9%	14%	8.9%	25.9%
Inner Moray Firth	24.4%	24.6%	14.5%	9.4%	27.1%
Highlands	26.3%	24%	14/4%	9%	26%
Scotland	26.8%	23%	14%	10%	26%

With an ageing population Nairn needs to find a way to encourage 16 year olds and over to remain or they will have a declining labour force and less adults able to help provide care for people. Young people from the Inner Moray Firth are more likely than their peers across the Highlands overall to plan to stay - 49% identifying themselves as committed stayers. More also identify as committed leavers - 26% compared to 22% regionally. Young people from Nairn are most likely to plan to leave the region (28%). Young adults in Nairn (66%) believe that there are sufficient opportunities for them and 75% of them perceive studying in the region is affordable to them. Only 46% feel that the courses they want to study are available to them. Young adults in Nairn are not as aware as their peers in other regions as to what education options are available to them. It is, therefore, important to focus on communicating to young adults benefits of living in Nairn and the opportunities, education and employment, that are available to them to retain them.

# Community and Culture

Community engagement is high in Nairn. There are several active community groups working towards improving Nairn. There is, however, a lack of engagement from young adults in building a future Nairn they would like to live in. Participation is lowest in Nairn amongst young adults at just 51%. Even though participation is low, levels of pride in the Inner Moray Firth, are high at 86%, with most reporting that they have a good quality of life (89%). As young adults from Nairn are more likely to make greater use of available facilities such as museums, galleries, evening classes and exhibitions; investing in these areas could be targeted to encourage these age groups to remain in Nairn. It could also be engineered to boost the local economy and provide a new space for rainy day activities.

Libraries are vital to a community. Studies have shown people are willing to pay slightly more in Council Tax to ensure they keep these essential services. The Nairn Library hosts groups such as: Lego Builders, Bookbug, NHS Drop-In Community Hub, Book and Arts Festival, Book Club and more. Understanding the value of a library can be difficult as most of its services are free at the point of use. It has an important and often overlooked value in the community by book-lending, access to computers, child friendly activities, training courses and a meeting space. A regular library user is associated with a 1.4 per cent increase in the likelihood of reporting good general health. It increases peoples and the communities overall quality of life. Dunfermline Carnegie Library and Galleries are a good example of what can be achieved for the Nairn community. It is useful to locals and great for tourists with a five star Quality Assurance Rating from Visit Scotland.

More could be made of the current museum (*Image 1*). A museum is a great addition to a community. It encourages communities to understand how their towns grew and it can be a place of discussion on how it should continue to develop. It can inspire people of all ages to talk about history in a new, fun, interactive capacity. It can also build a towns sense of pride by having a new carefully designed structure.

A new nursery that has a larger capacity, and its sole design is based around ensuring the best working conditions for the staff and a fun, safe space for children to enjoy, could be a great addition in Nairn. Reports show that nurseries can level the disparity between richer and poorer households with education. Children from poorer social-economic backgrounds are at much greater risk of language delay (which is a key predictor of poorer education outcomes) indicates that there is a fundamental need to enhance the language abilities of these children in their early years.

By creating a new nursery Nairn would have an opportunity to start reshaping child development and education. Inverness University's Nursery and Edinburgh University's Nursery are examples of nurseries that are purposely built to be open and engaging spaces for the enhancement of child development and be a good working environment for the staff. By building new childcare establishments it could encourage more young families to move to the area. At least two should be built as there is a waiting list for childcare services as they are in limited supply. (*Images 2 and 3*)





While transportation to Nairn is good, with regular trains and buses running between Inverness and Aberdeen, the main bus station does not have adequate facilities and could be better utilised. It was created in the post war period and has not been updated since the addition of the food huts nearby which were added in the later decades. A full bus shelter is not needed as only one or two busses use the stop at any given time. It is taking up valuable space and it is not visually attractive to tourists.

Offering 'Hot Desking' office space, is an option that Nairn could review as a means to occupy current empty spaces and to bring in additional income. It could also have the added effect of bringing new people and ideas together to grow businesses within Nairn. Its growth in popularity is due to COVID and businesses not wanting the commitment of owning an office. It also allows start-up companies the flexibility of office space that they need to help their business grow.

The Nairn bypass has a completion date of 2030. Even with the bypass the A96 will still be a main road and most problems relating to it will remain as it is the central road in and out of Nairn. It will still have traffic, be unsafe and environmentally detrimental. There is little that can be done to mitigate this given the way the town has been developed.

## **Economy**

All major global economies have reported weak growth or even contraction in the first quarter of 2022 as high inflation (9% as of June 2022), the conflict in Ukraine, and supply chain challenges related to the pandemic all weighed in on economic performance. The Scottish economy grew by 1% in the first quarter of 2022 and 0.3% in March. Scottish business across all sectors continue to report widespread inflationary pressures, recruitment difficulties and some supply chain

disruption. The latest forecast for 2022/23 shows a growth of 4% over 2022, followed by a drop to 1% in 2023. Growth is expected to remain around the 1% level up to 2027. Prolonged high inflation will reduce consumer spending and business investment.

The three main employment industries in Nairn are 'wholesale and retail trade, motor repairs', 'health and social work' and 'construction'. Accommodation and food services' was the fourth biggest employer, these being the hardest hit sectors during COVID. These sectors including 'Manufacturing' have the highest concentration of employment in Inner Moray Firth, 43% of these jobs were most exposed. The Highlands are ranked third out of Scotland' 32 local authorities for jobs at risk. (This is in addition to being ranked 5th out of 32 local authorities in terms of Brexit vulnerability.) During COVID the rate of unemployment in Inner Moray Firth rose from 2.3% to 4.9%, with youth unemployment rising from 3.5% to 8.1% (December 2020). The self-employed have been more negatively impacted by COVID with self-employed females at higher risk than males, reflecting the segregation of women into particular at-risk sectors such as childcare.

Some companies and sectors are struggling more than others to recover from the pandemic and Brexit and now must survive another hurdle. Local companies are pessimistic about the future because of the cost-of-living crisis. Nairn has seen the majority of its High Street stores survive the last two years; new stores have even opened which is a sign of confidence of consumer spending locally. It could take years for the economy, tourism and consumer spending to return to pre-pandemic levels but if Nairn reinvests in itself, it will be able to make a more sustainable economy for itself for the future.

## **Tourism**

As international travel recovers from the coronavirus pandemic and travel restrictions, the volume and value of international visits to Scotland in 2021 remain at significantly lower levels than seen up to 2019. A total of 536,000 visits were made to Scotland by international visitors, staying for 8.9 million nights and spending £521 million. This is an 85% reduction in volume and 79% reduction in expenditure on 2019.

Interruption and restrictions on international travel has led to a renewed interest in staycations. The Highlands are one of the most popular destinations to go in Scotland with searches up by 50%. Outdoor attractions, such as animal parks, fared better during COVID, as visitors to tourist hotspots (castles and museums) decreased. Both free venues and paid entry attractions were affected by 47% less visitors than pre-pandemic levels. It is clear that Scotland's and the Highland's tourism industry has been hit extremely hard for an extended period of time due to the pandemic.



Staycations have been growing in popularity and the Highlands have benefited but with the ensuing 'cost of living crisis' and potential of a recession there is a pessimistic outlook over the next few years for the tourism industry. The sector has reported summer and forward bookings are down, and almost 40% of businesses have reported decreased spending since May 2021. In June 2022, 34% of businesses in the tourism sector described their business as currently in steady recovery, 50% stated that it would take them at least a year to recover while 6% said they were unlikely to make it. To increase competitiveness; improved infrastructure and transport, and improved quality of visitor experience were listed by businesses as things Scotland needed to do to be a more appealing tourist destination.

Nairn has an opportunity to redesign its visitor experience and create brand new attractions. The Highland Council aims to support sustainable tourism and development of attractions that leads to the increase of visitor's stay and spending within Inner Moray Firth with Nairn playing an important role as an existing tourist destination. It will be a benefit to the community, the growth of Nairn and the development of a future sustainable economy.

The beach and parks are some of the biggest and most well-known attractions Nairn has. While the quality of the bathing water on Nairn beach has improved in recent years with it now being rated 'sufficient'; there is still work to be done. There is rubbish being dumped on the beach and in the parks which spoils the scenery, experience and ultimately, the environment. With competition for visitors being high, Nairn could look at initiatives to keep the beach clearer. Entering multiple competitions to win awards for its clean and beautiful beaches would entice more tourists and locals to enjoy its vast outdoor spaces. With the large expanse of beach available, there are very few water sports on offer. There is a growing interest in oceans; Nairn could offer educational experiences. It could also have a school or business solely to teach/supply water sports activities. There is a real need for rainy day activities in Nairn. Improving the Library, Museum, Galleries and multi-use spaces will help but Nairn could open a soft play area with a cafe for young families to stay local rather than have to drive to Inverness or Elgin to enjoy themselves. It could have climbing walls and table tennis for older children. With the addition of a small outside garden, it would be great for families all year round.

## **Funding**

There are a few Government, National Lottery and Historic Environment Scotland funding options to help local community development projects. The Government funding options are: Housing Infrastructure Fund, Self-Build Loans, Empty Homes Partnership, Town Centre Empty Homes Fund and the Town Centre Fund. The Rural Housing Funding works in connection with the National Lottery's Scottish Land Fund. Both funds can pay for feasibility studies, Land Fund can be used to purchase assets and the Rural Housing Fund is used to develop after purchase. There is also an Empowering

Communities Programme which is a group of funds, Investing in Communities Fund, Aspiring Community Fund, Participating Budgeting, Participation Requests and Asset Transfer. Some of these are not grants but can still be used to Nairn's benefit. While some of these options have an end date of 2020/2021, they are expected to be extended with more information being published about them later in 2022.

The National Lottery Funding options are National Lottery Awards for All Scotland, Improving Lives (can be used towards a Mental Health and Community Support facility), Young Start (to help the development of children and young adults in Nairn) and Scottish Land Fund. If the funding criteria does not quite match what is needed the National Lottery might still be able to help.

The Historic Environment Scotland has four main funding options available; The Partnership Fund, The Heritage and Place Programme (which could be the most useful to Nairn), Historic Environment Repair Grant and the Historic Environment Support Fund.

Nairn will need a Master Plan to be able to apply for some of these funding options. By having a plan, Nairn would be able to demonstrate a clear goal which is both beneficial for applying for grants, but it is also something to refer back to, to keep any future development in keeping with the community's needs. The grants that have been listed are only some that are available from three organisations. There will be more grants and other means of investment that Nairn will be eligible for. It should be noted that Community Councils are somewhat restricted in what they can do, however, a SCIO could be set up to manage an overarching plan to improve Nairn and work with existing stakeholders. The SCIO would enable Nairn to apply for grants specifically for improvement and regeneration.

## **Urban Analysis**

This section aims to understand the physical form of Nairn's settlement. Through the centuries the town has been marked by many generations, each with their own different needs and thinking. Understanding the mechanisms of an urban area should highlight its characteristics. It should also help identify valuable urban heritage and possible shortfalls in historical town planning. This information will be crucial in forming viable proposals for the future.

The highlighted colours under urban morphology denote as below:

Red - Main road

Orange - Secondary Road

Blue - Local Roads

Green - Focus Area

## Urban Morphology

The old burgh of Nairn had a fishbone town plan, much like any other early settlements in Scotland. In simple terms most lanes, vennels, closes join into the main street which is the artery of the town. This main street usually sits on a road that connects other settlements.

Image 4, of an 1821 Georgian plan, shows just that. The main street starts at today's Straith monument and the Jubilee fountain. This is where the roads to Cawdor and Kilravock separate. From here the town gradually builds and mixes from a partially residential area to a busy commercial High Street. The High Street runs straight to the beach through the not yet developed, Fishertown area. The road to Forres is less prominent. Bridge street simply feeds into the High Street just like any secondary road. Most of today's town centre streets have not taken shape yet, for example Marine Road, Gordon Street, and Douglas Street. North Street, or King Street as we know it today, was not influential to the town centre. It was a back road, which joined into Burnt Island Street and then to the high street at today's Brackla hotel. It is clear to see that the primary purpose of the Burgh was to serve the two castles/estates that were close by, then to connect with the east. The junction at the High Street and the Bridge Street would have been the busiest area. The road from Inverness is through the back land, only joining the town near the harbour, which suggests a mostly logistical or industrial connection to the Highland capital. This plan shows an early "undeveloped" town. The core layout has not changed significantly in the past two centuries.

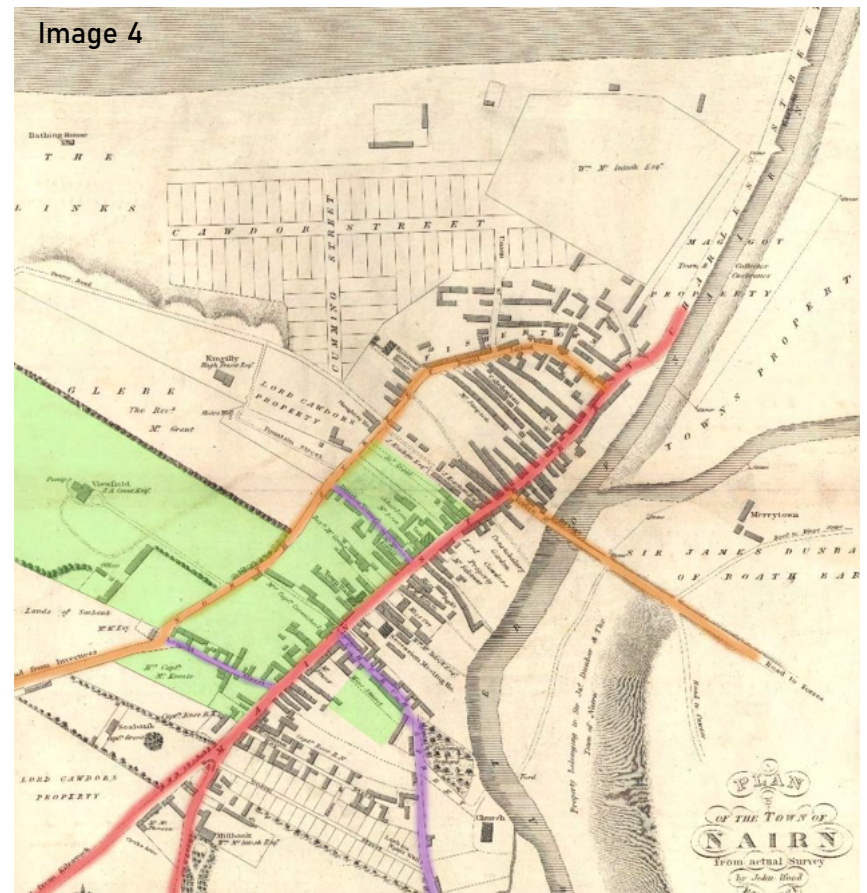




Image 5, of a Victorian Plans from 1869 shows a considerable amount of development within a 50-year period. Nairn is no longer just a town with amenities to serve the estates. The Fishertown area expanded greatly. The arrival of the railway and tourism is now starting to influence expansion of the town in all directions. This results in the emergence of several local roads. Leopold Street has become a main road connecting the High Street with the road to Inverness. Thus, connecting settlements to the east and the west through the Town Centre. The road to Kilravock has been lost to the railway and is now only a local road, and the road to Cawdor became a secondary road.

Developments within our focus area include Douglas Vennel into Douglas Street, the creation of Gordon Street, the erection of Bank buildings, places of worship and hotels, mostly along the main street. Viewfield House and its gardens are intact facing King Street. Through the following decades growth was steady. Fishing and tourism enhanced the town in the Edwardian period and kept it active in the inter war period.

Image 6, the town plan from 1906 shows the town expansion/evolution very well (*fisher town in brown, and the old burgh in blue*). The elaborate town houses and hotel complexes at Seabank (*in pink*) created new part of Nairn, focused on “spa and tourism”. However, there is one development that has proven to be one of the most significant in the town centre's evolution.

As Nairn's Seabank area became increasingly popular to visit, a decision was made to alter the town centre

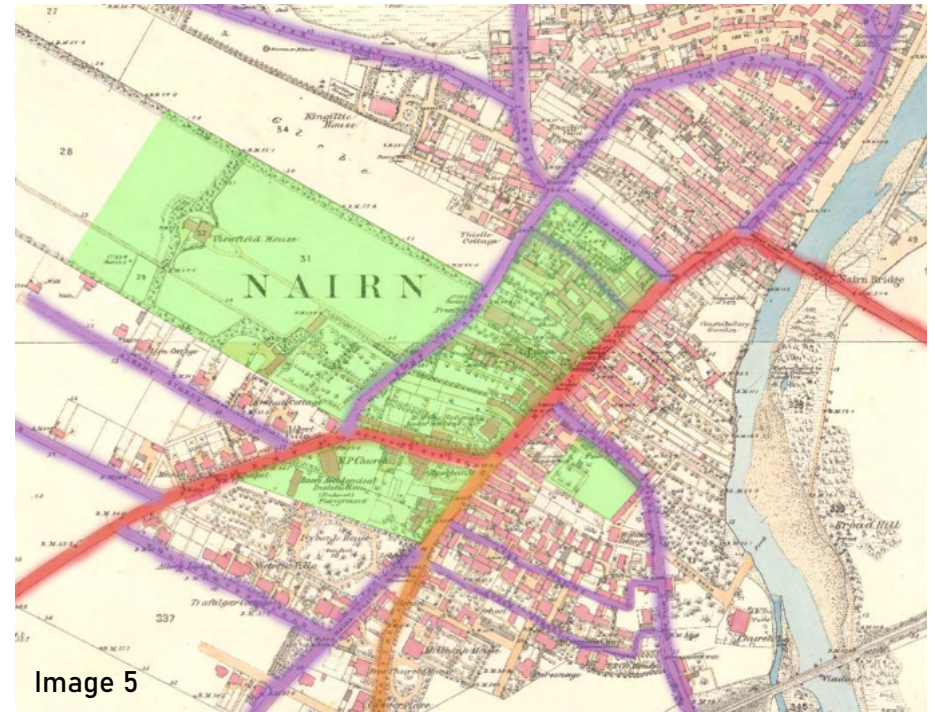


Image 5

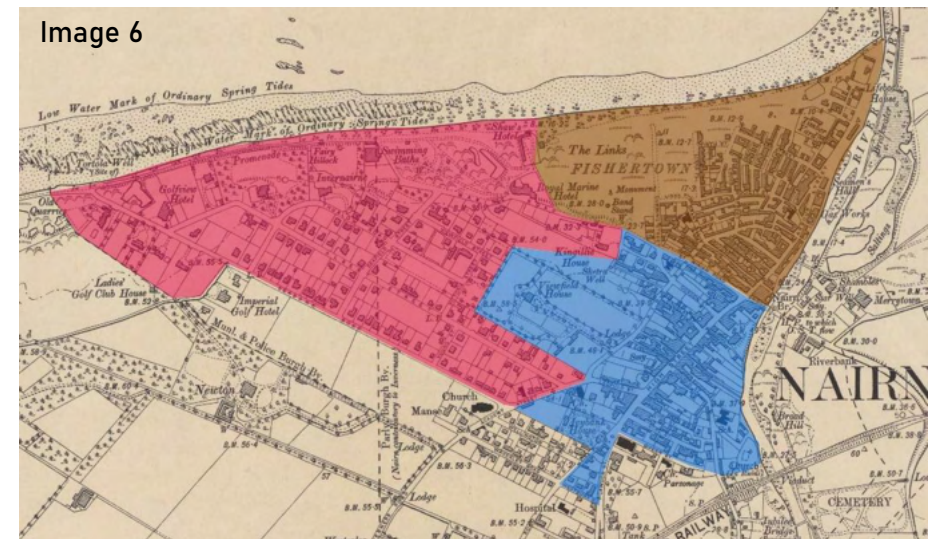


Image 6



road layout. Presumably this was done to allow free flowing traffic between the Inverness Road, the Forres road, and the new seaside resort at Seabank. This meant that visitors from the east would not have to navigate through Fishertown or the Town Centre to get to Seabank. It is arguable whether the recently developed Gordon Street was sufficient enough to satisfy the transport links between these three areas. In any case a seamless merge without obstacles/corners between the two main roads connecting east and west was inevitable. Whilst this was a strategic change to ease access to the seaside it is necessary to understand the impact this may have projected on the town. The development of St Ninian Road has made a clear divide in the previously seamless connection between the High Street and Harbour Street. Consequently, splitting the historic spine road to the harbour, and thus separating the town centre and the high street from Fishertown. Unfortunately, the planners at the time did not foresee the complexity of issues this would bring the town in later decades.

The images below recorded between 1928-1930 allow us to analyse the town from a more detailed and tangible point of view.

Image 7 is a view from Fishertown looking towards the High Street. It gives a very good glimpse of the road networks within the Town Centre. This image suggests a busy yet intimate town. Separation between the old Burgh town and the “new Fishertown” looks seamless and organic, with buildings lining the streets from either side. King Street and St Ninian’s Road seem to be used as local roads.

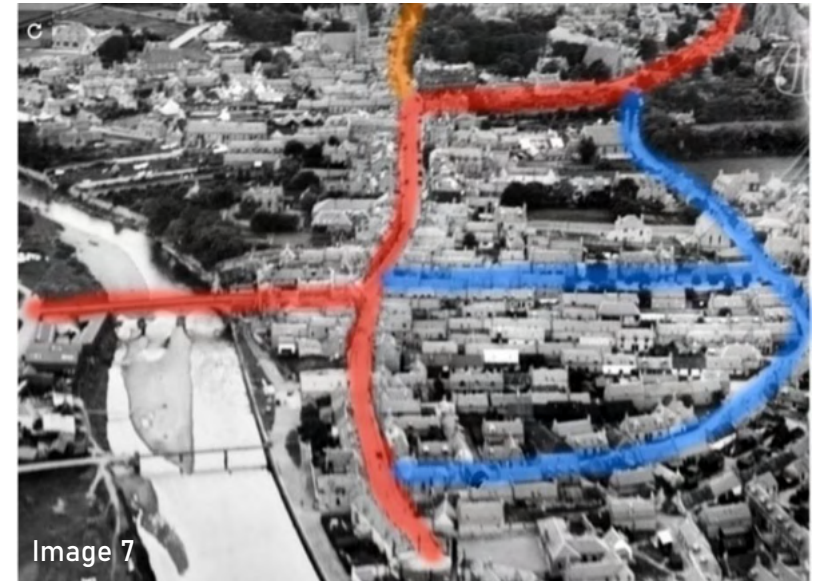
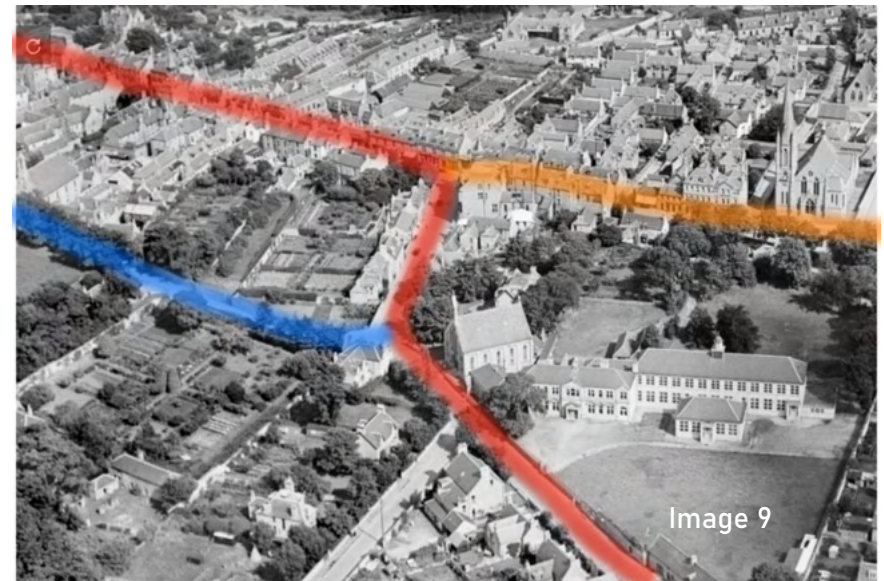


Image 8 is a view from St. Ninians Church looking towards the beach, shows a buoyant High Street with plenty of gardens and allotments. Sun blinds and awnings to the shop fronts were popular from the Victorian period to the 1950' when new glazing products and ventilation systems were introduced.

Image 9 is a view from the Nairn Old Parish Church looking towards the newly built Rosebank Primary School, it demonstrates the thriving town and the road layout. Our Focus area either side of King Street has an extremely contrasting look compared to what currently exists. Stone walling sets the boundary to the allotments within the burgage plots of the High Street properties. The Viewfield house gardens create an attractive streetscape. Even though King Street has been a main street at this point for at least two and a half decades, it still fits into the townscape. No negative impact on the town is visible on these images

These three images perhaps depict Nairn's true sense of place. A small Scottish seaside town with plenty of scenery and tourism. Most buildings here are 1-2 storey high apart from churches and buildings on the High Street. The harbour and the improving road links could have allowed for more variation in materials, however stone and slate stayed predominant. The fishing and the tourism slowly started to decline towards the end of the 1930's and by the 1950's Nairn joined the many Scottish towns with a struggling economy.

Nationwide rationing did not end until the early 1960's. Houses and buildings damaged and destroyed in the war created housing shortages across the country. To tackle the poverty and help rebuild the economy, the government set





out a plan to build new houses, council estates, and on some occasions, new towns. Living in a council house became the new norm, however, this came at a cost. The plan was to clear the slums and replace them with new, nicely proportioned houses for families. Adequately sized kitchens, bedrooms, bathrooms and most importantly, services. All houses were built with electricity, running water and a heating system.

Image 10 shows an aerial view of our focus area from 1953. This closely matches the town plan from 1964. The town looks unmaintained and less occupied. There are also a number of noticeable developments in the town centre. For example, Riverbank and Marrytown area. The depression in the economy is clearly noticeable. There is a large area designated for allotments in the Widefield House Gardens. The area around the Old Social Building looks quite congested and is showing signs of some dilapidation. This is the first time we are seeing the old Regal cinema and the bus station at the junction of King Street and Leopold Street. Greenery has noticeably reduced in the town centre; this further enhances the feel of downturn.

From this image it seems that King Street has started evolving and is looking to take on a more predominant role within the town centre. Combining with the fact the country is in a rebuild and renew era this then seems the perfect time to have a clear set of proposals for the town centre. Unfortunately, this research did not find any evidence supporting that such plans were produced.

It is worth noting a couple of key sites with our focus area for later comparison. The following have been highlighted: The Regal cinema (*in blue*) which has been significantly altered and is now a supermarket, the disused Old Social Building (*in orange*) and police station (*in pink*), and the old priests house (*in green*) which is now the local library.

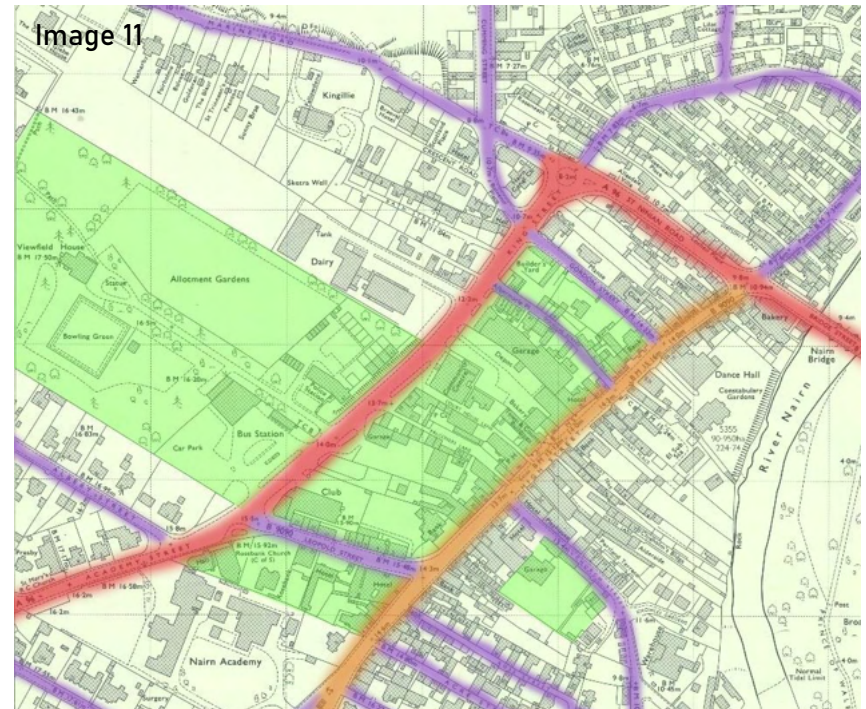


Image 11, of the town plan from 1974 suggests more evolution within our focus area. The cinema has turned into a club, Falconers Lane lost half of its buildings, The library as we know it has taken shape, a police station and a bus station were built in the Viewfield Gardens just off King Street, and the A96 got a roundabout at the junction of Marine Road, St. Ninians Road and King Street. Most of these changes further strengthened the influence of King Street as a main road on the town centre.

Image 12, an aerial view of the focus area from 1994 shows further developments in this area. The Regal cinema has partially been demolished and turned into a supermarket, and there is a new Gas Station with large parking at the demolished Falconer's Lane site. These new developments along King Street suggest a new commercial designation for the area. With a bit of forward planning this could have been a suitable new use in benefit of the community. However,

it seems that around the turn of the millennium things got out of shape. More and more residential developments started forming. Initially on the site of the old creamery and the Garage just below Douglas Street, and in more recent years apartments at the bus station and opposite the new Community Centre. Presumably the construction of these apartment blocks has been influenced by the variety of government incentives for affordable houses.

In summary Nairn as a small burgh, has evolved and flourished as a small fishing community and as a tourist hot spot in the north of Scotland. Unfortunately, the town never made a positive step forward in the town centre development since the depression. Some key issues and failures in planning can be identified during the last several decades. It seems that the expansion of old burghs combined with the evolution in motoring, which created a need for road transport, has disturbed some of the small towns in the region. The 20'th century planners were unable to integrate most newly built main roads into the town centre's streetscape successfully. Dingwall and Elgin have similar issues. Development of new main roads within close proximity of the High Street have deteriorated its sense of place within these towns. Town planning has been unsuccessful or completely neglected, even though there were some good precedents were set in recent designs, for example, the Cullen Town Plan or the Tain Bypass.





## **Streetscape survey**

Our desk top study prior to the on-site survey has concluded that Nairn has a conservation area around Fishertown, with a designation date of 1979. This research did not find evidence that this boundary has been reviewed since. The conservation area also lacks an appraisal which should help to identify the special interest and changing needs of the area. In addition, the appraisal provides the basis for the development of a programme of actions that is compatible with the sensitivities of the historic area and enables the planning authority to fulfil its statutory duty to preserve and enhance conservation areas.

Nairn also lacks a Planning Design Guide. This document should identify the local sense of place and give guidance on “good design” regarding urban and rural development within the area. This document should aid owners, developers and designers and should prevent out of context mundane buildings.

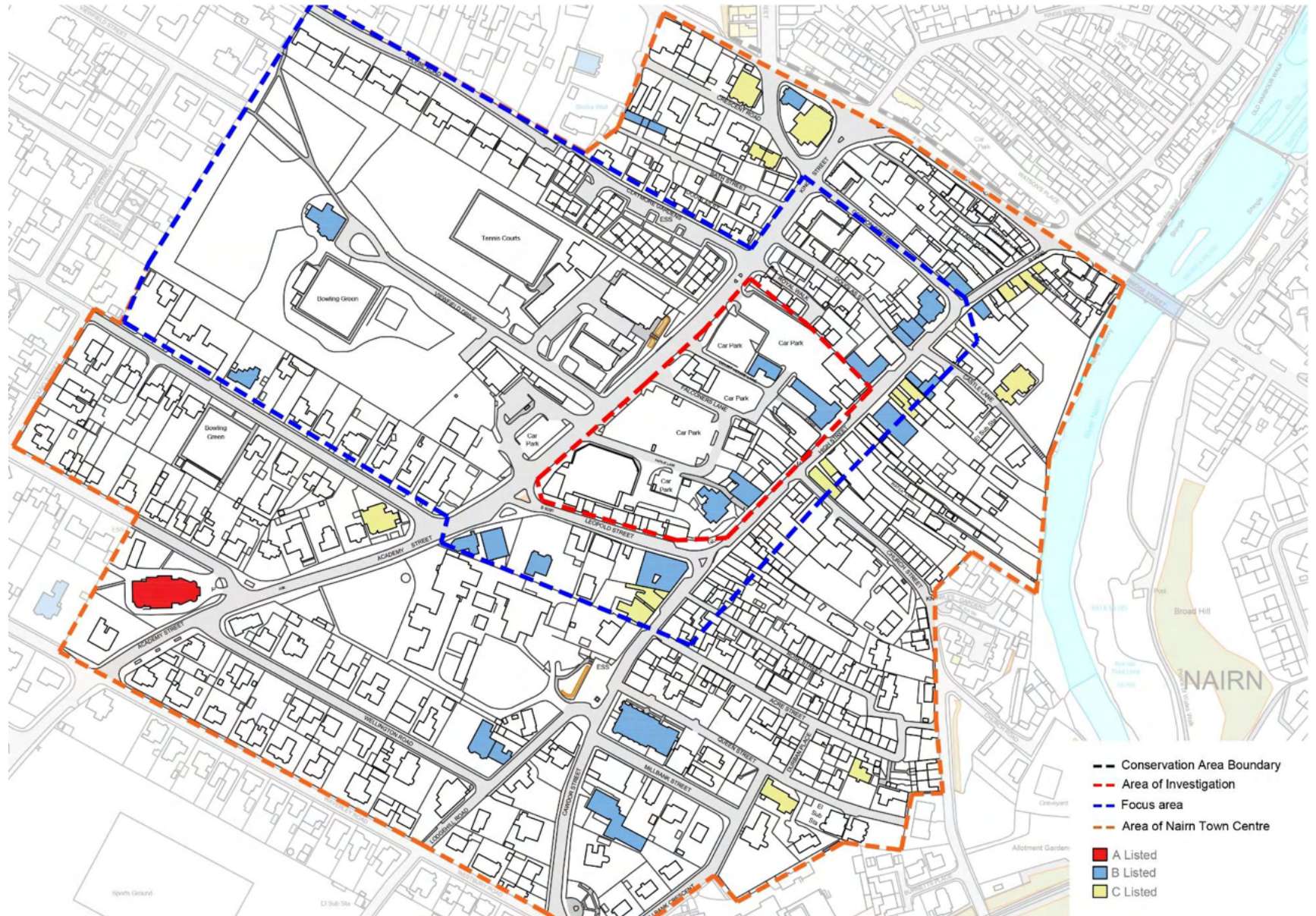
The last notable document is The Nairn Community Town Centre Plan. This was produced by the Highland Council in 2015 to provide a brief and nonspecific action plan on how the regeneration of the town could be tackled. Although this could be seen as a good starting point, unfortunately these plans have not been implemented or developed by the local community or the Council.

As this paper looks to identify viable future uses for the King Street vacant sites, it was necessary to form specific boundaries within the town centre. These break down areas of interest and give an insight on how different areas can influence the town.

The four boundaries are: Town centre, Conservation area, Focus Area, and Area of Investigation. The area of investigation is the area we have been tasked to look at; however, this area cannot be looked at in isolation. Therefore, our focus area has been expanded to include the immediate neighbouring sites. It is necessary to understand how these areas affect each other and the overall success of the High Street.

Plan A shows the listed buildings within the Town Centre. There are 20 B listed, 18 C listed, and 1 A listed building within the boundary of the Town Centre. Most of these are within the investigation area, more specifically, along the High Street. This seems logical when reflecting on the old burgh map. However, during our site survey, we have seen a number of potential buildings with notable architectural merit in, and around, the Town Centre area which could be put forward for listing. One fifth of the town's B listed buildings are within the focus area boundary. This in theory means that any development within this area ought to be designed with care to reflect, and acknowledge the character of its surroundings.

Plan A



Plan B shows the status of occupancy within the investigation boundary. Out of 120 buildings in our investigation area, we have noted 10 unused, and 23 partially used buildings. These equate to 9% unused and 19% partially used. This does not look too serious. However, when we only use the data for our investigation zone, the figures are more dramatic. Out of the 24 buildings in the investigation zone, 9 are partially used, and 5 are empty. This reflects into percentages of 40% and 20%, which supports the fact that there are underlying issues in this area. It should be noted that most of the High Street buildings are mixed use, commercial and residential under one roof. There is a constant risk to the buildings that are unoccupied on the upper floors, as damages caused by defects from above will be more concealed. By the time these are noticed on the ground floor there is a good chance that the damages will be dire. Care must be taken with any new proposals in the focus area, as an inadequate development may increase the number of unoccupied buildings on the High Street.

Plan C and D illustrate the building heights and building dates within the focus area. These plans indicate that the residential areas of the focus area are between 1-2 storey high. Along the high street the building heights vary. With the more predominant buildings such as the Town House, Station Hotel, and places of worship reaching over three storeys high. It is important to take note of these taller buildings as they create landmarks within the town for both the residents and visitors. New development of “high rise” buildings should therefore be considered more thoroughly. If not designed with an appropriate sense of place they will become landmarks of bad precedent for future development in the town. It is easy to see that with an inappropriate design the whole streetscape could be altered or adversely impacted due to the life span of these of these buildings. We can also see that there is a new trend of multi storey developments in the focus area. Most of these are residential buildings constructed in the new millennium.

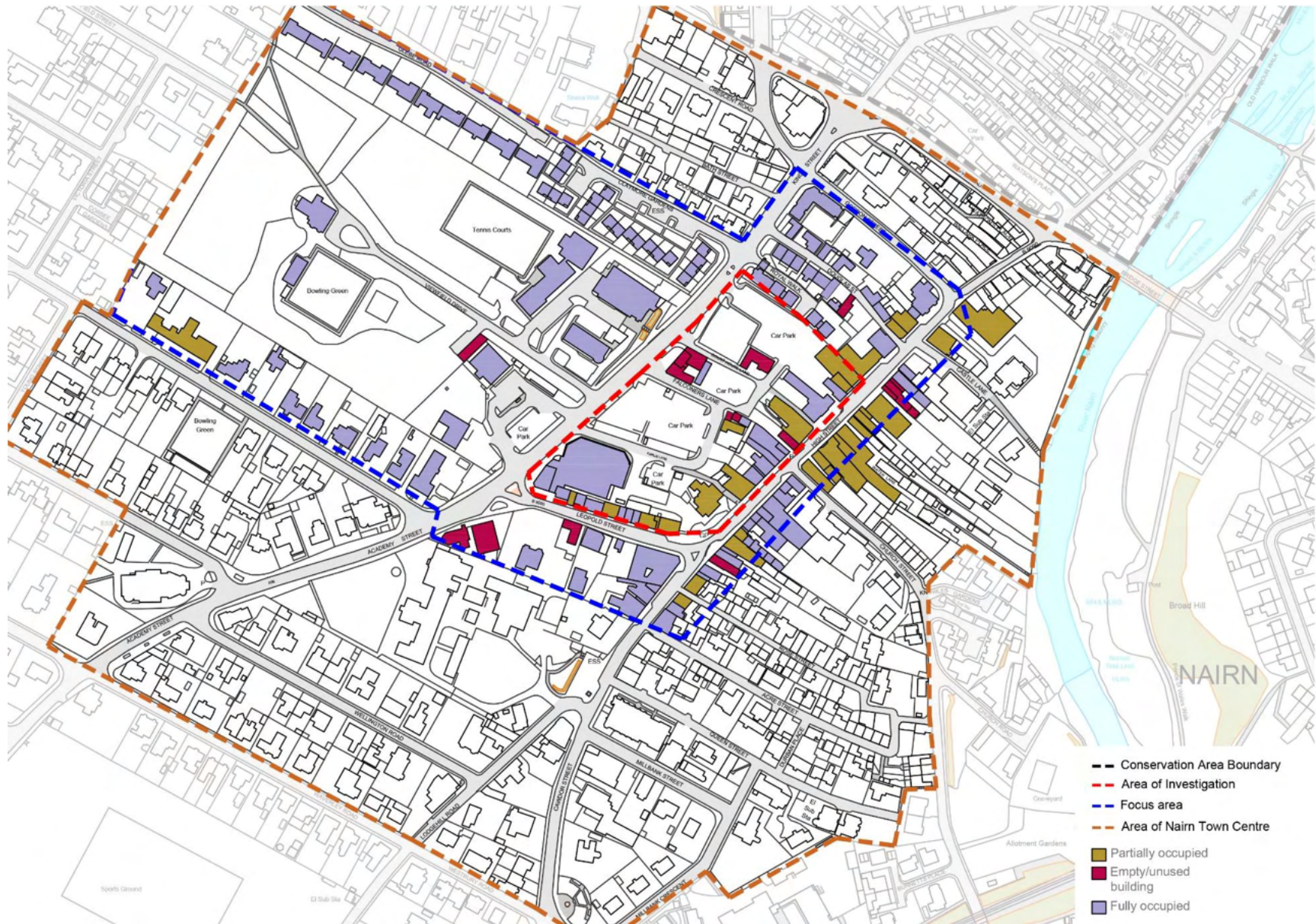
Plan E was devised to better understand streetscape by evaluating character and condition of each building within the focus area. The following categories are:

Good/Fair condition Characterful buildings:

This mark is for buildings that had the appropriate appearance, and their characteristics matched their historic setting. They had to be in a fair to excellent condition, this strengthens the area or the historic town centre. This mark also refers to new builds or successful refurbishments that make a good contribution to the town and reflect a good precedent for future design.

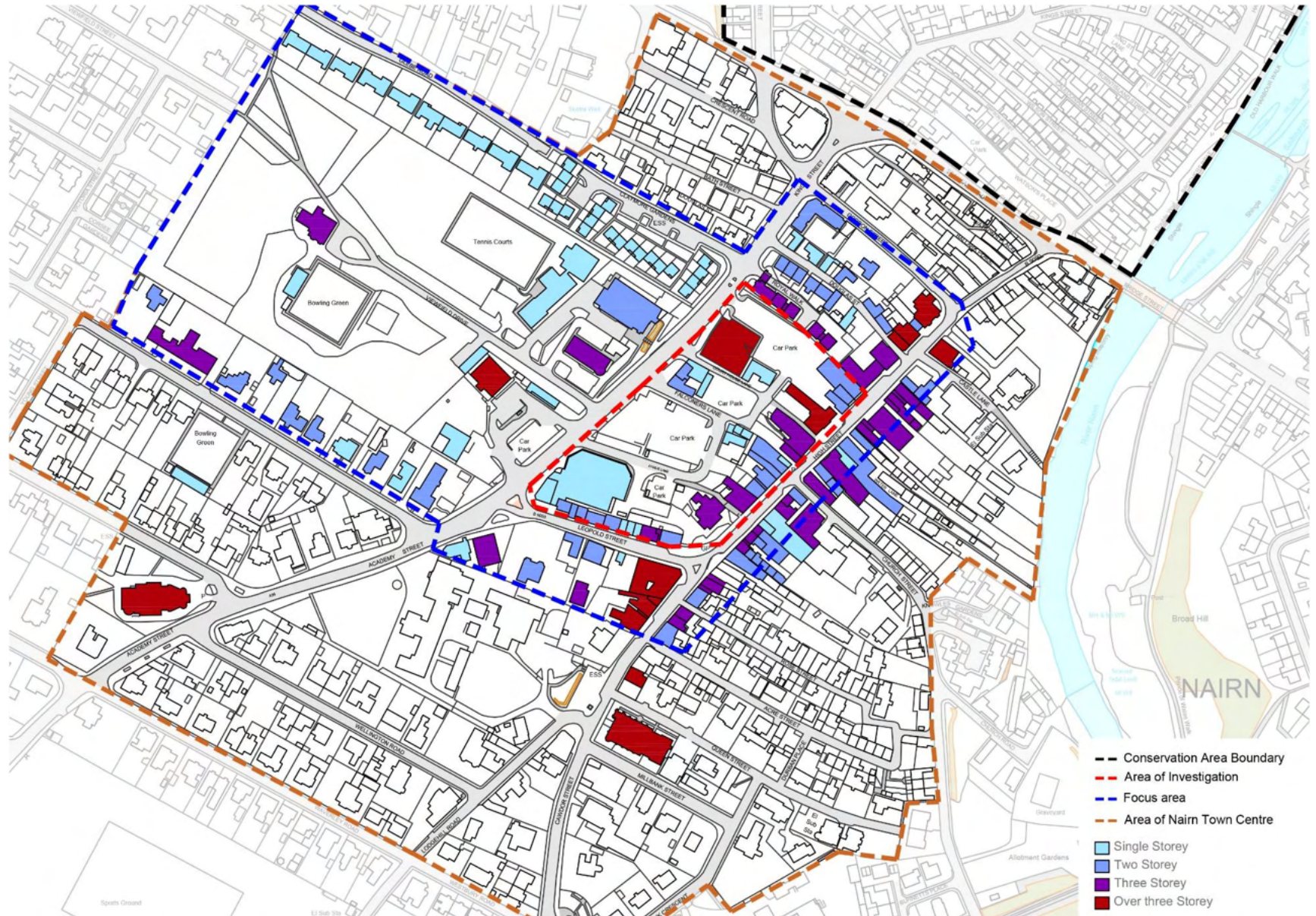


Plan B



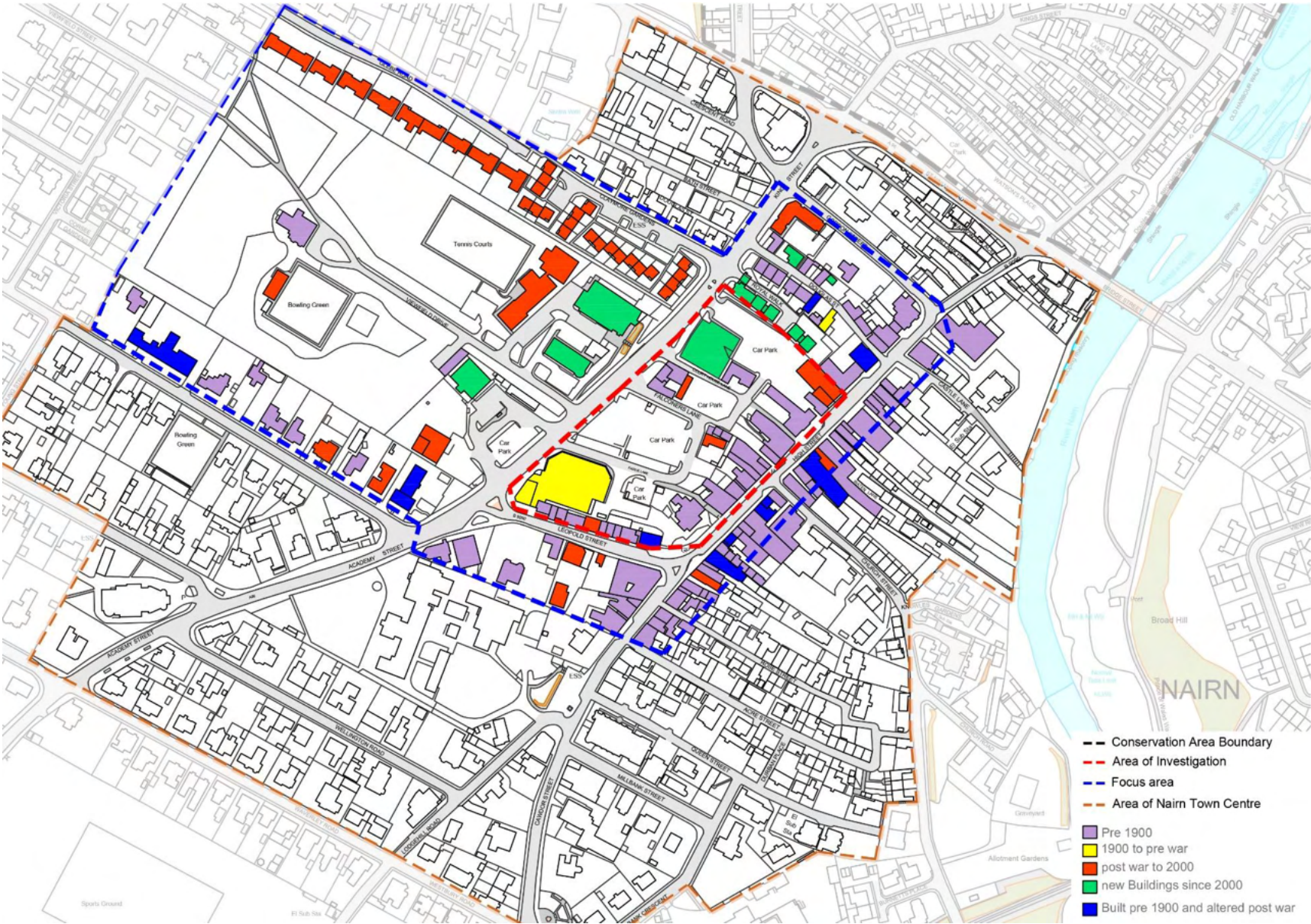


## Plan C





Plan D



#### Poor/Derelict characterful building:

These are authentic buildings that survived through the years and represent the historical town plan of Nairn. All of these have at least one of the following inappropriate design appearances; windows, doors, dormers, roof, facade. They do not contribute positively to the area in their current condition. However, with some intervention a very strong and cohesive historic appearance could be achievable.

#### Detrimental Buildings:

These buildings have all been constructed within the last century with little to no architectural merit that requires conservation into the future generations. They make a negative impact on the character of the present and future appearance of the townscape. These are potential long-term sites that require a well composed future design.

#### Opportunity Sites:

These buildings were highlighted because most of them are not being used to their full potential. It is felt that with some redeveloping these sites could benefit the community in both appearance and socio-economically.

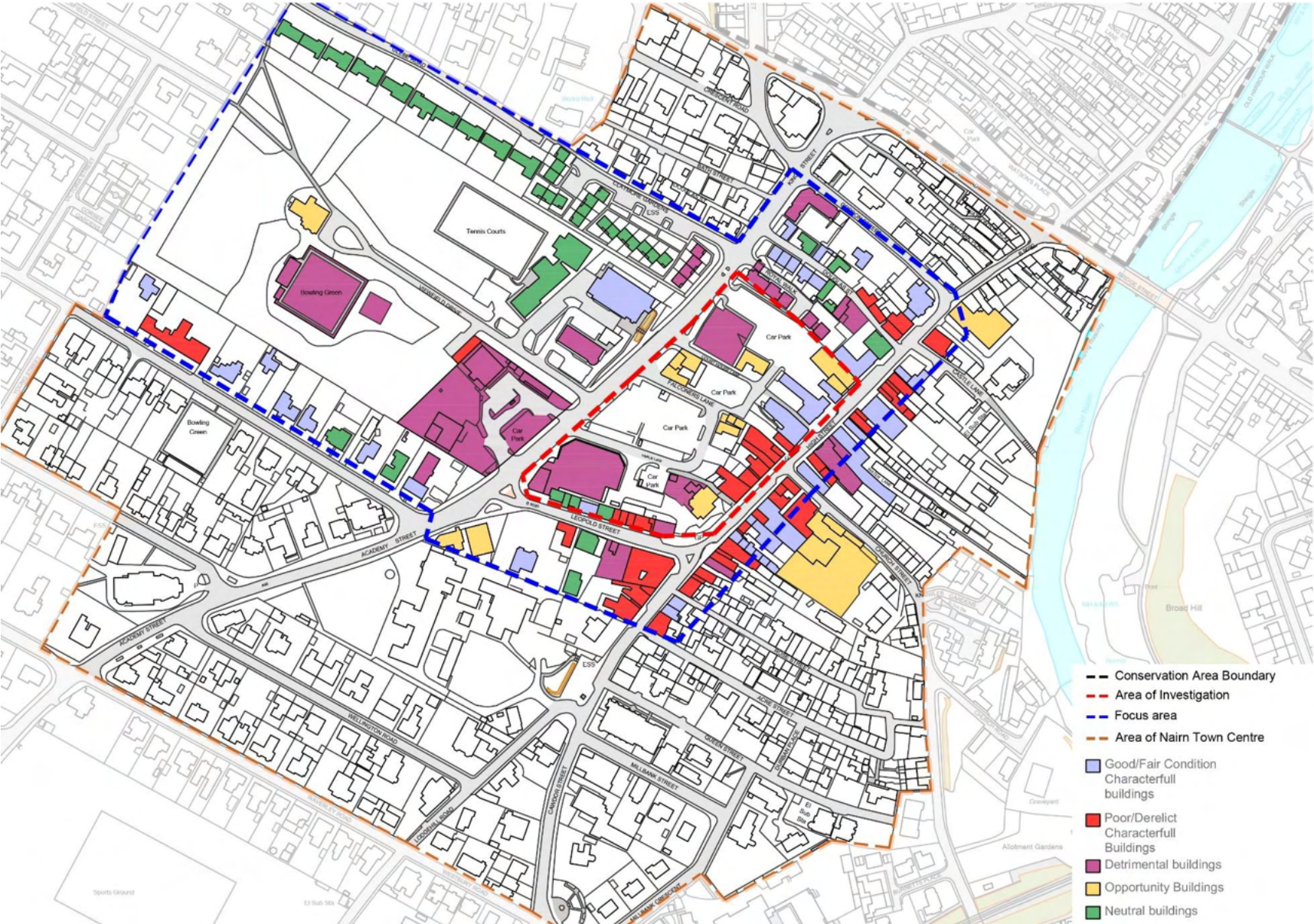
#### Neutral Buildings:

These buildings are labelled neutral because they do not influence the character of the streetscape.

Just like most of the country Nairn's high street buildings are largely in poor condition. There have been some recent "face lift" interventions, which have comprised of some external redecoration projects. These are fine short-term fixes, but they do not remedy the underlining decays of the buildings. There are only a handful of buildings which can be categorised as good. For example, the Community Centre building. Although not designed with a great sense of place in mind, it possesses adequate scale and a good interest to its facade. The buildings categorised as detrimental are not necessarily "bad buildings", but their position within the focus area create a confused town plan. Furthermore, they accentuate the issues regarding the future development of the Investigation area. For example, the bowling green next to Viewfield House has nothing wrong with it, in fact it forms an integral part of the community. However, it is built extremely close to Viewfield House, therefore spoiling the historic significance of it, additionally it limits the future use/development of this building. The amount of these detrimental buildings with the focus area gives a good indication on some of the key issues relating to Nairn's incoherent town centre.

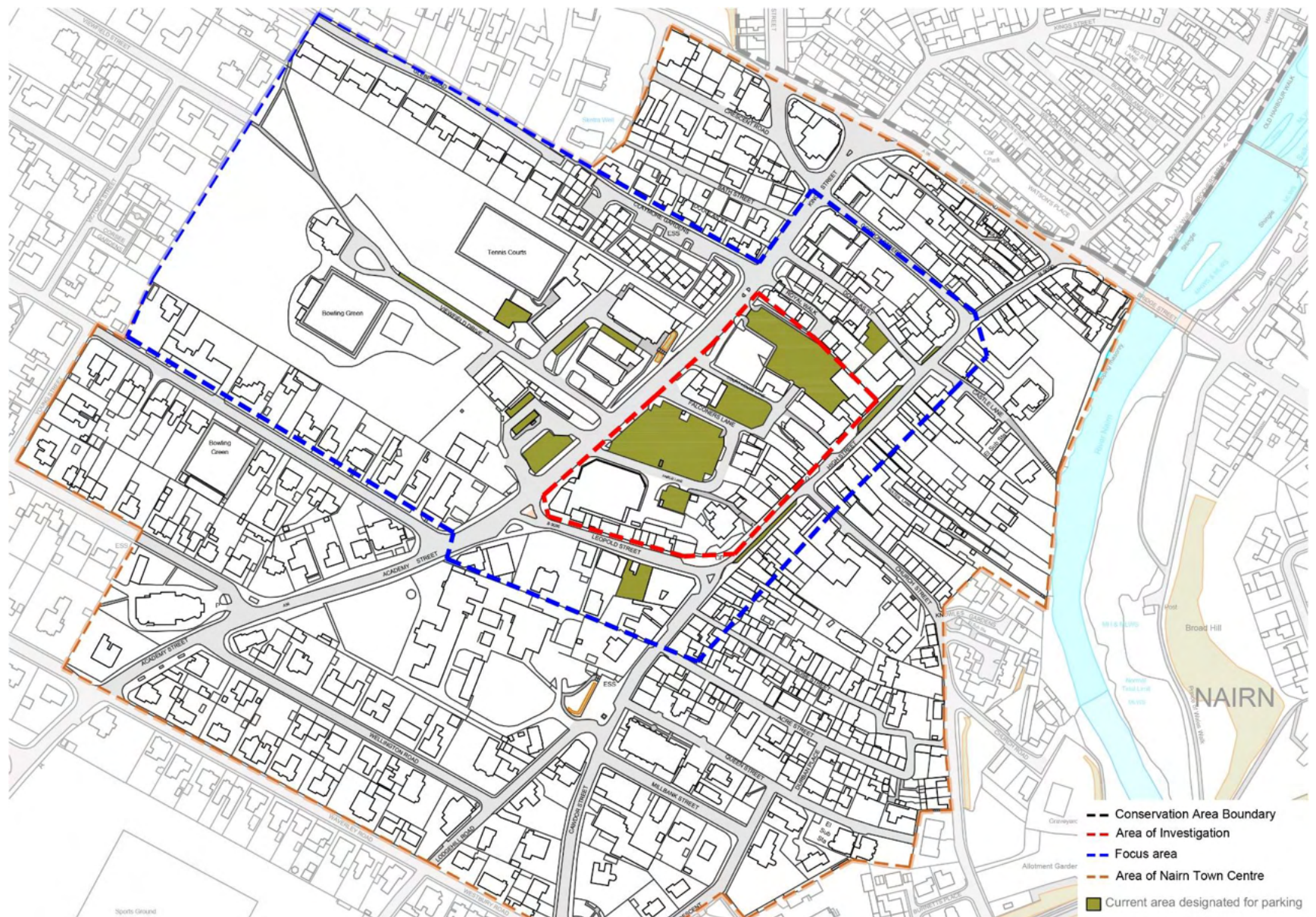


Plan E





Plan F



Plan F highlights the current areas designated for public parking in the focus area. Public car parking has been a sensitive topic within the community for many years. Numerous questionnaires have shown that car parking is one of the most valued assets of Nairn. This holds some logic as it is easily accessible to the High Street and creates better opportunities for businesses. However, some of these spaces create a visually unappealing streetscape along King Street; turning this “treasured” asset into a hinderance that could spoil the town’s future development.

In addition to these plans a utility report has been commissioned to understand the limitations of development in the area, regarding above and underground services. The report is available to see in appendix 1. Predictably it shows that most major services are in close proximity of roads and lanes. This increases the possibilities of potential uses.

The onsite survey also included a general walkthrough. This was carried out to analyse pinch points, focal points, and arrival points to the investigation area, in the desire to better understand the streetscape and its condition.

Although the High Street and its lanes have decayed, they still preserve a certain charm and character. The town reveals some of its history by walking from the train station to Bridge Street. This inspires a pleasant arrival to the town.

There are four on foot access roads to the investigation area from the High Street. One at each end of the Town Hall, one at Falconers Lane and one next to the old RBS Bank building. Through all 4 access routes the pedestrians are greeted with an immediate view of car parking spaces. The arrival to the heart of our investigation area hardly provides an improvement on the scenery. Deteriorating back buildings facing Leopold Street, an unpleasant superstore, *(image 15)* a main road, more car parking, the disused Old Social Building, new multi storey housing, and unpleasant views across the road towards an unwelcoming bus station, *(image 14)* and fire station. Alternatively, the greenery towards Viewfield House creates an attractive view.

The arrival from the A96 is just as poor. The first glimpse of the investigation area approaching from Inverness is the old Regal cinema building. It is visible all the way from the Waverley Road junction. This view of arrival creates an extremely underwhelming sense of place from the streetlights of the Wellington Road junction to the bus station. The old Regal cinema’s site is exceptionally predominant, within the town. The building here greets the visitors and marks an unconscious boundary to the town centre. Therefore, a development here should be striking, inviting, whilst carrying the identity of Nairn. It should make residents proud and visitors eager to explore the town further. Approach from Bridge Street through a roundabout is not much better. From the Douglas Street junction recently developed residential buildings to the left tower over the historic setting *(image 13)*. Disregarding the composition of the town with an “off the shelf” design that could have been built in any part of the country. As it stands the arrival to Nairn from the A96 gives the perception of a struggling and neglected town.





## SWOT

SWOT stands for Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats. It is a way in which organisations can analyse four key aspects of themselves. It can be used to find faults or future opportunities that may have been overlooked.

### Strength

- Nairn's beach, parks and scenery are some of its biggest strengths. There is a renewed interest in the Highlands due to television shows and movies being filmed here. There is a real opportunity for Nairn to advertise its beauty and historic significance and attract more people.
- Golf Courses have seen renewed interest in the sport since the pandemic.
- Nairn has several community groups which aim to create a better High Street and make a more cohesive town. This is because Nairn has a strong sense of community.
- Plenty of tourist accommodation - Hotels, Bed and Breakfast, Self-Catering, and Caravan Parks
- There are good transport links by bus, train and it is close to Inverness Airport, this makes it far easier to access by locals and tourists.

- There are lots of after school activities for young children from tennis, swimming, dance and ballet. The classes are so popular there is a waiting list for many of them.
- The Nairn community is warm and friendly.

### **Weakness**

- When driving into Nairn the area around the Co-op and car parks are unflattering
- The A96 runs through the heart of the town making it unsafe, polluting the air and causing traffic problems. Even with the Nairn bypass these problems will still continue as it will continue to be the main road in and out of town.
- There is very little advertising and marketing of Nairn. Having pamphlets printed and distributed for a few years to other tourist hot spots could make a difference. Other local areas/companies do this, such as Brodie Country Fare, it could be possible to share a brochure to save money while still promoting Nairn.
- Empty high street stores and multiple charity shops can give the feeling that a High Street is 'depressed'.
- There is no greenery on the High Street, like trees or flower arrangements and there is limited seating.
- Buildings on the High Street are in desperate need of restoration. Dilapidation can change the aesthetics of an area. It can also bring problems for its neighbours like falling debris, rot and vandalism.
- Having limited wet weather attractions forces locals and tourists to look outside of Nairn for activities. This is a missed opportunity for more revenue.
- The infrastructure of the town needs to be strengthened to cope with a growing population
- There continues to be poor mobile reception along the High Street and all throughout Nairn.
- The poor internet quality will keep local businesses from reaching a bigger audience. Problems arise when businesses need to upload large documents or videos to their clients and are unable to do so due to a small bandwidth.
- To keep young families in Nairn, it should have more and better quality of educational offerings.
- While having an older population does have its benefits as they bring a lifetime of skills and knowledge it is however a weakness for a small town. As the population becomes increasingly older, they will need assistance, which means there are less people working and studying. It can also put a strain on local health and care services.
- A declining youth population will reduce the local labour force. Nairn needs locals to work, shop and live in and around the town for it to grow.
- Many services have been centralised to Inverness.

- Nairn's communities' groups and the Highland Council have sometimes found it difficult to compromise. It makes it harder to move forward on key issues as no one party can agree on what the end result should be. This is holding Nairn back from its full potential. It is possible to bring in a third party to mediate any meetings to try and help move issues forward.

## Opportunities

- Nairn has a great opportunity to increase the overall health and wellbeing of its community. With the vast amounts of open spaces that can be converted/used for sports, it can make it easier for locals to exercise while having fun. It can also ask local gyms to create easy access fitness programmes for people who have previously struggled to do the recommended 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity a week. Cafes and restaurants can also be asked to promote healthier options.
- By better utilising the parks and open spaces for more sports activities and events Nairn could increase the development and happiness of children and young adults. It can also improve the quality of life for its residents.
- There is a shortage of housing in and around Nairn, particularly affordable housing. More affordable housing needs to be built around the town and empty properties should be converted to bring back into use. Flats should not be built on the High Street as they do not match the streetscape.
- Properly restoring the frontages to the High Street should be a key goal for Nairn. It can improve the image of the town and invite more investment to the High Street.
- By filling the empty High Street stores with art until they are rented or purchased could distract people from the empty store and it could make the street a bit more vibrant.
- Long term empty shops, flats and houses should be encouraged to sell their property or to rent them out.
- UHI water-based study programs would be a great addition to Nairn. It could also get local residents interested in learning about ways to protect marine wildlife and the ocean.
- 'Hot Desking' is a new way of having office space without owning an office. It could be just renting a desk for a few hours when it is needed or having a few dedicated desks set for interchanging staff members to work as a team. It is a new way to start up and run a business as it helps keep companies costs low.
- The new Nairn Academy offers a chance to enhance the education in Nairn. If it is handled properly, it will be a great achievement for the community and can make school attendance more of a joy for young adults.



## Threats

- There is a significant and lasting financial pressure from COVID restrictions, particularly on the High Street stores which had to remain closed for periods of time.
- A culmination of factors in the economy has led to higher interest rates. The Bank of England raised interest rates to try and slow inflation by making borrowing more expensive. This in turn makes it more difficult and less appealing to take out a loan to make changes in Nairn.
- Poverty can cause long term health conditions, it can affect academic performance, mental health issues and it holds back individuals and the economy.
- Complacency on the part of the councils and locals can result in a slow pace of change. The movement needs to be pushed forward and the team working on change needs to be motivated.
- The community can be resistant to change. Whether it is because they do not understand the process that needs to take place or they do not wish for the facade of their property to be altered; even if it is heavily subsidised or free. If there is a public consultation which explains the process and the length of time it will take to achieve, people will be able to lower their expectations of immediate change while understanding the importance of maintaining the plan for regeneration in Nairn.
- The rising inflation rates have increased regeneration and building costs. That should be considered when evaluating projects moving forward.
- On going low tourism post COVID is a threat to a significant portion of Nairn's tourism trade and income.
- Moving socially beneficial council services from the High Street, like the library, will decrease footfall on the High Street. It will also make access to those valuable resources difficult for many people.

## General suggestions

Now that many of the issues have been revealed, it is clear to see that the solutions to these are quite complex. Perhaps this is the reason no concise master planning or town planning has been put forward in the recent decades. The aspiration of the community to reinstate Nairn as a tourist hotspot with plentiful jobs and a good place to settle for families and alike will require significant effort from both the local council and the community. Town planning is evolving, communities

can no longer rely on the local councils to suggest change and implement ideas. Local communities ought to take more charge to make up for the lack of resources with the local council.

The redevelopment of the investigation area should ideally work in unison with the High Street regeneration. This means that plans need to be in place to resolve issues on the High Street. Enhancing the townscape by adding greenery and recreational/urban areas are fairly well detailed in previous papers. The condition of the existing fabric along the High Street is a concern. To mitigate further decay of the high street a maintenance group could be created. This perhaps could ensure that the most basic maintenance gets carried out on the High Street buildings regularly. For example, cleaning of roofs, gutters and downpipes. These are one of the most overlooked tasks. However, it is also the cheapest and easiest way of ensuring that the water is kept away from the fabric. If these works get carried out on a number of buildings at the same time period by the same contractor, then costs could be minimised for each individual building/owner. If this is successful then additional small repairs could be added to the regular maintenance regime, such as external redecoration and repointing where needed.

In order to improve and enhance the character of the High Street, an appearance guide could be created. This should be similar to the “Guidance for Businesses” created by Edinburgh Council and “The short Guide on Traditions Shop Fronts” created by Historic Scotland (Please see appendix 2 and 3). A guide outlining the desired appearance of the High Street would ensure a certain look of unity. This could outline a desired appearance whilst creating a look of unity and enhancing the identity with the area.

Office work as we know it has changed over the years. The pandemic has accelerated home working. Exploiting this new “favoured” way of working could be a great opportunity for Nairn and its unoccupied buildings. The tranquillity and scenery surrounding the town is the ideal place for any home working. Ballerina Ballroom, the old Taxi building and unoccupied upstairs accommodation could be turned into hot desking spaces, meeting rooms, artist workshops and compact industrial kitchens. This would allow a wide range of remote working to be done outside of people’s homes without a long commute. An increased number of people working from the Town Centre during the day could also have a positive effect on the High Street businesses.

For the preservation of tangible history and character it is imperative that a conservation area appraisal and management plans be commissioned. Although Nairn has evolved through the decades it still retains some historically valuable spaces. With a more in-depth study there could be scope to extend the conservation area towards the Golfview and possibly the area between the river and the High Street. A conservation area and management plan should identify the sense of place with the area. It should also have a much-needed guide on how to preserve and enhance the character of that area for future generations. A supplementary design guide could also be created to further aid any future design with the town

not just in the conservation area/areas. A good precedent for this would be the recently approved Tain conservation area and management plan and the Coll design guide (*see appendix 4 and 5*).

It was felt during this research that there are a number of different forces trying to make individually created ideas and plans come to life. This creates tension between the community and the local council. Although every case is different the principals remain the same, so we ought to take notes on successful previous regeneration in the country, such as the Stromness regeneration. Making a comprehensive master plan for the town can be the key to the success of the regeneration. All major projects require a well thought out, detailed proposal with outlined milestones that all relevant parties have agreed to. As regeneration could last for decades it is crucial to have objectives and guidelines to refer to in order to remain on the right path. It is also important to plan ahead both with projects and their respective funding's. A major regeneration could attract grants and fundings from different sectors. Knowing when to group fundings together and when to push on with a single one will be overwhelming. Appointing a regeneration coordinator can help with these tasks. It can also help relieve tension between different parties and can ensure that the project runs smoothly, and objectives get achieved.

Getting the investors and developers on board is just as important. Most of the time brown field sites come with an increased risk factor. That is why developers are hesitant in taking them on. It has been proven in other parts of the country that these challenging sites could be made more appealing with certain incentives from the council/community. Large greenfield sites should not be given away to developers. Instead, they should be used as “bargaining chips”. Depending on size and location, greenfield sites should come with an additional task of developing a neglected brow field site in the town centre. This reduces risk, it also connects the developer with the town and the community. In some cases, this can encourage the quality of workmanship. These are all suggestions that could take effect in the immediate/short term.

## Proposals

We have identified several possible uses that could help to improve Nairn's town centre both from socio-economic and from the community point of view. Below, each use has been paired with a visual image of a successful precedent to give an idea of what is possible. These uses could be mixed and matched around the Town Centre. However, there needs to be a common theme of consolidating the ineffective and unappealing area along the King Street. This street should be



lined with Greenery or buildings up to 3 storeys high (Including roof build up). Keeping in mind the suggested uses below we have also devised a couple of possible plans for the Town Centre. These are by no means definitive. Their primary purpose is to start positive discussions/negotiations between the local council, the local community, and possible investors. These plans should evolve/develop in the further stages of the town redevelopment, with aspiration to take action in the medium to long term future.

### Civic/Cultural Centre

This building should present a network of spaces or buildings that provide essential and cultural services to a city or town. In Nairn's case this building could house a museum, library, gallery, visitor centre, café/restaurant, and community meeting spaces. It is the interactive quality that makes Dunfermline library (*image 17*) so popular, with a small museum and art gallery that has activities even for young children to enjoy. The Shetland Museum and Archives (*Image 16*), which has a restaurant, in Lerwick is another example of a multipurpose space that is useful to its community and is visited by tourists. It has a large, open, interactive museum about the creation and evolution of Shetland. It stores all the Shetland archives for people to access. There is a small gallery which exhibits local artists. On the top floor it has a busy restaurant which prides itself of locally sourced produce and only seasonal ingredients. The museum is also a valuable source of information for tourists as they can get advice on attractions and events.



Image 16



Image 17

## Nursery

Nairn has two nurseries. One at Millbank Primary school and one in the old RBS building. The Millbank nursery is an outbuilding with limited architectural remit regarding its use. None of the existing nurseries have been purpose built. They resemble an emergency/temporary solution. A building specifically deigned to be a nursery should be playful whilst leaving a sense of safety and pride with parents in the community. A good precedent building would be the Arcadia nursery in Edinburgh. *(Image 18)*

## Kids Play Zone

Numerous studies have shown that Nairn lacks rainy day activities. A kid's play zone with a snack bar would be the ideal place in unpleasant weather for young families, especially to those that rely on public transport to get to bigger towns nearby. A good precedent building would be the building at the Playful Gardens at Brodie Castle. *(Image 19)*

## Shop

As highlighted earlier the Old Regal Cinema/Coop Building is a detriment to the streetscape and the town centre. Unfortunately, the old cinema building has been altered extensively and therefore holds no preservable architectural merit. To allow this space to make a positive contribution to the community the current Coop building should be demolished and relocated. There are several new Coop buildings around the country that have been designed with consideration to their surroundings, such as the new Sleaford Coop in Lincolnshire. *(Image 20)*



Image 18



Image 19



## Affordable Housing

This topic has been quite controversial in the community for a few years. Although this is a desirable asset to the community the flats behind the bus stop are out of place and character. The newly built flats opposite the community building are a bit better in their design however, they still pose a negative impact on the town centre's streetscape. These two developments are in close proximity to each other and suggest a lack of imagination regarding the town centre development. Filling empty and unused spaces within the town centre with developments that are heavily encouraged and subsidised by the government seems to be the way forward by the Local Council. Plans for these do not require too much effort, and when combined with the lack of resources statement from them, it becomes quite predictable what might happen to the vacant sites along King Street. The community's aspiration to have an affluent Town Centre would require more of an upmarket/luxury housing

Image 20



Image 21



Image 22





rather than affordable flats which are strongly conflicting with the community's desire. It is also worth noting that, just because affordable houses are meant to be built on a budget, they do not have to be unaspiring. People should still feel a good sense of place and pride in them. A good precedent here would be the award-winning Goldsmith Street development by the local council in Norwich, Norfolk (*Image 21 and 22*).

### Parking

Whilst this is another desirable asset to the community it should not exist to the detriment of the townscape. The utilities report in appendix 1 proves that with some effort it could be viable to have the car parking spaces underground without disturbing routes of major services. Ideally this should not be more than 1 storey deep. It is worth keeping in mind that the King Street parking used to be the back land of old Burgage plots some of which might still hold valuable local archaeology. If the underground solution proves to be unviable in later discussions it is still important to consolidate the car parking spaces. In this case a two-storey car park with green walling could be a good solution. A “big box “of greenery in the town centre could attract interest in visitors and residents. Regular maintenance of these plants would strengthen the sense of quality and care in the community. Our precedent here are some of the external envelopes at the old industrial redevelopment at Het Funen Amsterdam. (*Image 23*)



Image 23



Image 24

## Viewfield House

Viewfield House is one of the key buildings in the Town Centre. It has great history and although the gardens have been encroached upon by recent developments, the building is largely untouched. This place deserves more care and better use which hopefully our proposals will convey. A development here will have to include conservation of the existing building and most likely an extension. This should be carefully designed to enhance the character of the building. Good precedents would be the Serpentine Museum extension in London (*image 24*) or a rural house renovation extension on the Island of Coll. (*image 25*)

## Water Sports School/Marine Biology Centre

Nairn has one of the most attractive beaches and marine life in the north of Scotland. Unfortunately, it is felt that the existing services within the town do not accommodate the potential that related industries could bring to the community from a socio-economic point of view. This type of building could attract attention not just from the community, but from neighbouring counties and possibly from the rest of the country. Given that the town centre is so close to the beach it would be beneficial to place such a building in the heart of the town. This could improve business, furthermore it would also minimise large scale building on the beaches of Nairn. This new use within the town

Image 25



Image 26





could attract interest from young adults and would also add to rainy day activities. Precedent for this building was taken from the Pannar economic and agriculture learning centre in Thailand. *(Image 26)*

### Youth Club

The use of youth clubs has declined in recent decades. Social interaction between young adults have also changed dramatically. Studies have shown that the constant communication through technology is negatively impacting on the in person social skills of the younger generations. The proposal of a youth club could encourage social interaction, it could also act as an after-school activities space. This new use in town hopes to strengthen the sense of belonging in young adults within the community. It could be a convenient space for rainy activities. A good precedent for this type of building would be the youth Centre in Novelda Spain. *(Image 27)*

Image 27



### Public Toilets/Showers and Bus Station

The current facilities in Nairn could use some updating. They have a rundown appearance that is in clear view of the main road. Even though a public toilet/shower is essential for every town centre, it can be an opportunity to express colour and vibrancy. *(Image 29)*



Whilst a formal bus shelter is not needed in Nairn as only one or two buses use the stop at any given time, it will need updated facilities, such as snack and refreshments area. The current bus stop area could be streamlined to make better use of the space, buses would no longer need to turn in and the space can be used to build something else. *(Image 28)*



Image 29



Image 28

### Option 1

This option was based on the fact that the underground car park might not be feasible. Therefore, the town plan proposal has been laid out to include the green walled car park in the town centre. Consolidating the large Coop building would allow a generous multi fronted civic centre to take centre stage. The back elevation of the high street buildings should be concealed with some sort of greenery, this would allow for an intimate urban garden in the heart of the town. Given the size of the town the fire station does not need to be located in the centre town. It could easily be move towards the industrial estate. A new nursery could be built in its place. The Viewfield House could be remodelled to house a mental health centre and zen garden. This could cater for the local community and beyond, increasing footfall in the town centre. The location of the marine biology and water sport school could act as a good catalyst for change in the high street area.

## Option 2

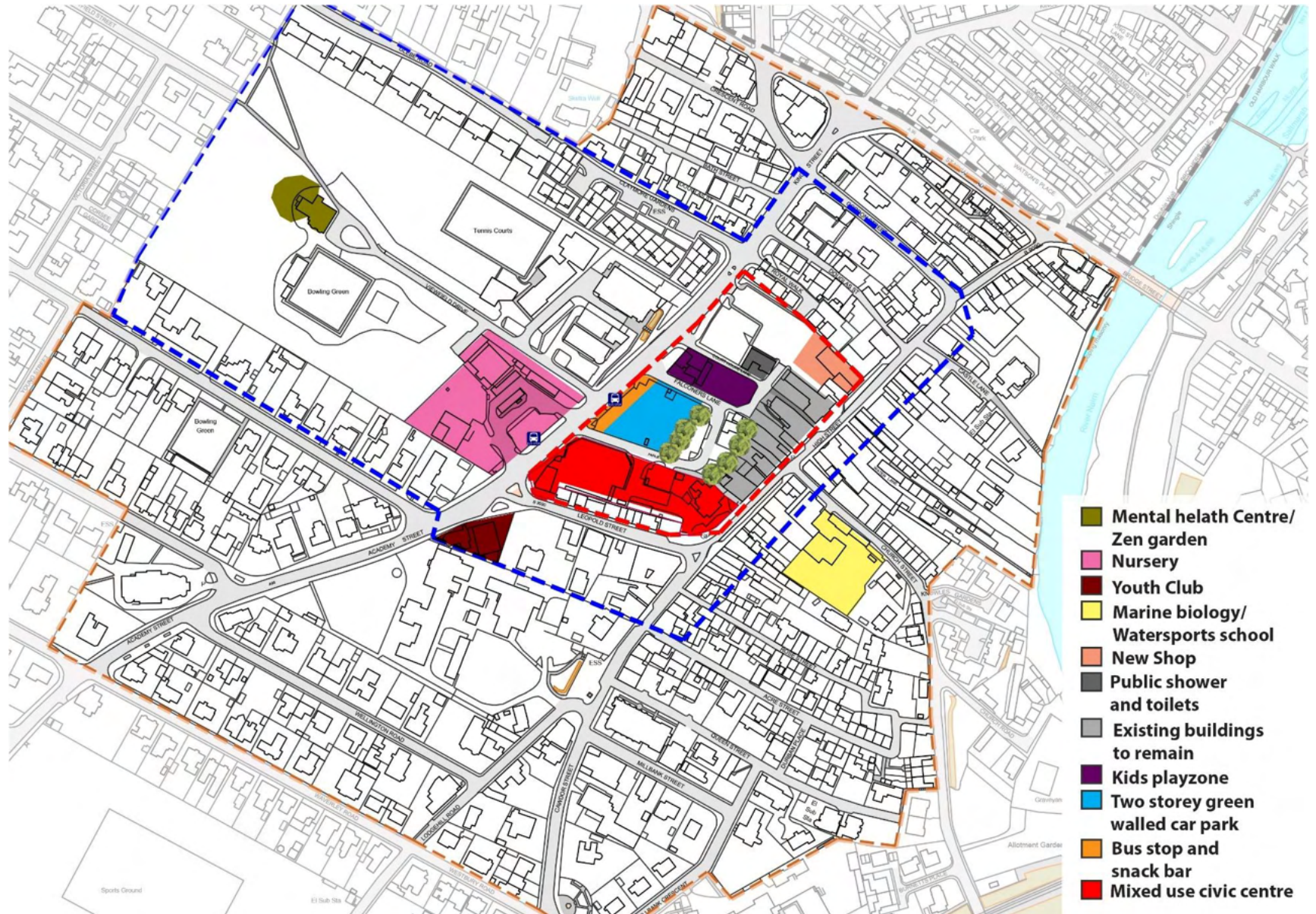
This option was based around the Viewfield House Gardens. This space at present has most of Nairn's sport activities, apart from the swimming pool near the putting green. Building on this use, the youth club could take the place of the fire station, bus station and housing, with the addition of a sports facilities. Viewfield House could be turned into a physiotherapy centre to maximise the changing use of the surrounding area. Furthermore, this would have a great chance of increasing footfall into Nairn from other communities nearby. The rest of the town has been laid out with a more conservative approach. Most uses here would not require major disruptions, The shop will remain a shop, and most buildings would only require restoration and rebuild apart from the nursery and the civic centre. The intimate garden between the civic centre and the existing high street buildings could be a nice urban addition. The church building next to Rosebank Primary should have the chance to form a new breakout space for the school. For example, the music hall or even a dedicated swimming pool just for the school kids in the community. Parking here is under the vacant King Street site through an underground car park.

## Option 3

This, perhaps, is the most ambitious plan. It was based around the history and heritage of Viewfield House within the town centre. As there were no future planning developed for Nairn in recent decades, most buildings were just placed in an unordered fashion. This resulted in a large encroaching of the Viewfield House gardens. If the community were to decide through a heritage impact assessment that this area is still valuable to the community, then perhaps these buildings could be moved on to the sports ground just off Academy Street. This area could be designated as the new sports facilities. Viewfield House gardens could be renewed for a better community feel, it could be turned into a state of the art music school with a small cafe to attract footfall from surrounding communities. The rest of the proposal are similar to the previous ones apart from the large area designated for affordable housing near the High Street and the relocation of the Police Station. However just like the fire station there is no need for this building to have prime position in the town centre. Parking is proposed as per option 2.

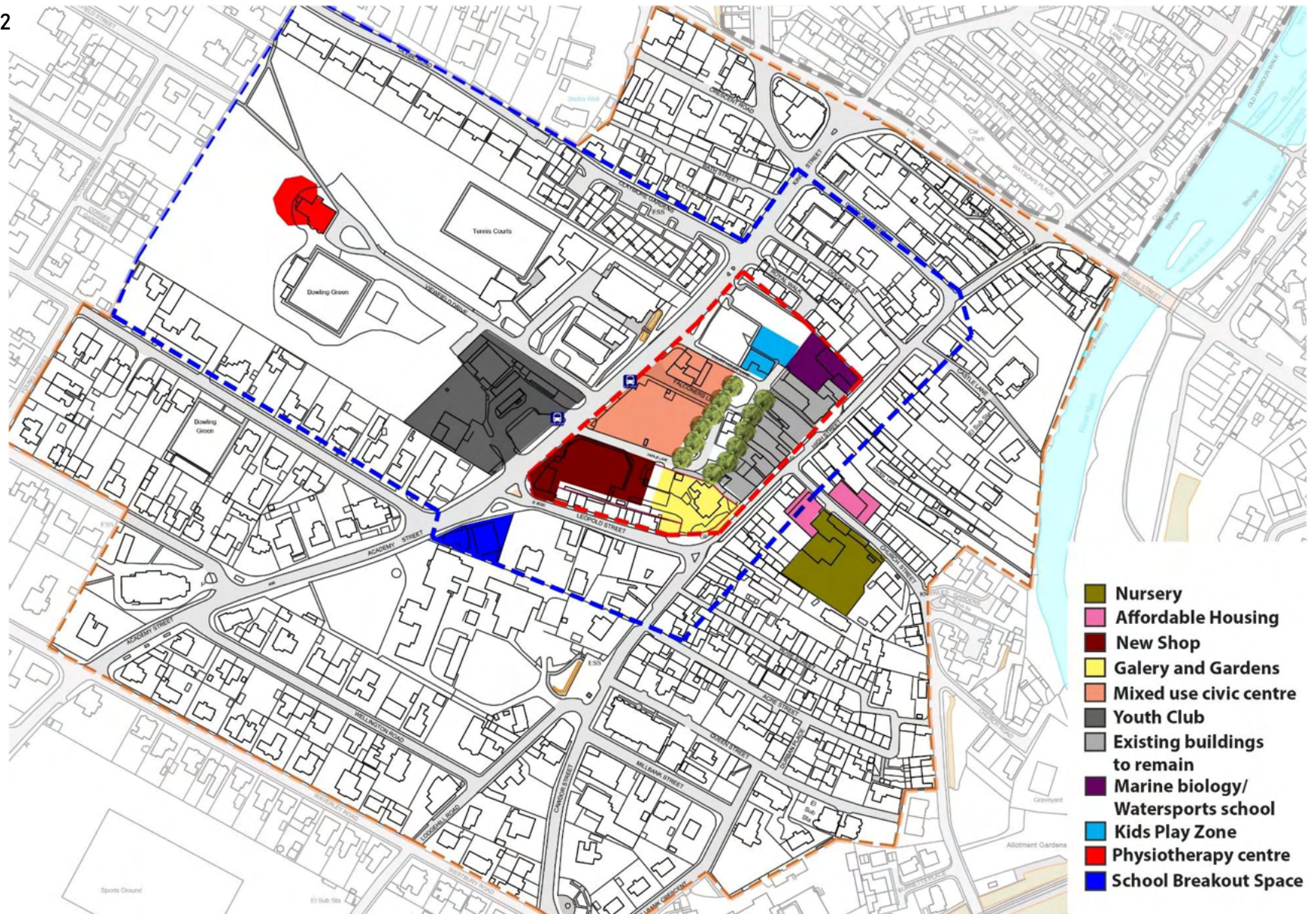


## Option 1





## Option 2





Option 3

