

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE – 7 MAY 2002**

#### **STRATEGY FOR THE REGENERATION OF KILMARNOCK TOWN CENTRE**

##### **Report by Director of Development Services**

## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To seek approval of a strategy for the regeneration of Kilmarnock Town Centre.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 As well as forming the civic and community centre for the northern part of east Ayrshire the town centre of Kilmarnock is a key driver of economic development. Strengthening the business heart of the area is critical to the regeneration of the wider economy.
- 2.2 As employment opportunities in manufacturing continue to decline it will become increasingly important for the area to attract investment in service sectors including the retail industry and office-based employment. It is these sectors that provide the buoyancy of successful growth locations elsewhere in Scotland. Although an increasing proportion of office-based employers have sought locations out of town centres, such as Rowallan Business Park many favour traditional locations in town centres with accessibility to public transport services providing central access to a wider labour market, and proximity to other businesses including shops and business services.
- 2.3 In recent years traditional large town centres such as Kilmarnock have faced competition in the retail sector which has undermined their vitality. They have also lost their vitality through a reduced range of quality non-retail facilities such as hotels and restaurants. In the evenings in particular activity has been lost. Such centres require to find a new role which enables them to compete effectively with rival centres.
- 2.4 The former District Council initiated a major programme of amenity improvements in the central pedestrianised area. As a result the amenity of the core of the town centre is of a high quality. There remain areas of lower amenity, however, around the periphery of the core – John Finnie Street, East George Street and the Railway Viaduct area, the Titchfield Street and St Marnock Place area. Continuing improvement of the conservation area in John Finnie Street is particularly important. This forms part of the conservation area embracing Bank Street and John Dickie Street, which forms a vital element in the overall amenity offered by the town centre.

- 2.5** The regeneration strategy presented in this report aims to tackle these issues by drawing together investment opportunities and current interest expressed by developers into a coherent framework focused on the heart of the town centre.

### **3 INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

- 3.1** The amenity improvements initiated by the former District Council were funded entirely by the public sector: the District Council itself, Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire and the European Regional Development Fund. Public funding on this scale is no longer available through the Council or the enterprise agency. There remains the possibility of attracting European funding, although currently such investment does not form a priority within European funding programmes.
- 3.2** The only significant public funding available is from the Public Transport Fund. The Council has been successful in submitting bids from this Fund, and has been awarded £2.5 million for improvements in pedestrian safety and amenity and traffic circulation modifications aimed at improving bus circulation within the town centre. Whilst this is welcome, however, it is limited in its scope: the objectives are very specific and do not include traffic circulation improvements aimed at assisting general vehicle traffic, or infrastructure improvements not related to transport.
- 3.3** Kilmarnock has recently demonstrated that it can offer a successful location for new office developments at out of town locations. These developments have been attracted by relatively low rentals compared to traditional office locations and a stable, and to some extent, "untapped" labour supply – labour turnover is a major business constraint in established office centres. There are indications of interest by developers in establishing further office developments within the central area of Kilmarnock. The local plan also indicates a potential site at the Bellfield Roundabout.
- 3.4** The former District Council set out a strategy for regeneration of the town centre which included the attraction of new residential development. This continues to be a potential source of investment, although there is little interest in fully private sector funded speculative development for general housing. It is more likely that interest can be attracted in investment in low cost housing through a Housing Association or possibly private sector investment in retirement homes.
- 3.5** Underpinning current development interest is the promise of improved accessibility to Kilmarnock following the completion of the M77. Improvement in the rail service also continues to be a possibility. The town benefits from a very centrally located bus station at the hub of a relatively well used network of bus services. This is a significant feature for investors in office developments. The town centre is also relatively well provided with car parking spaces in the surface car parks and the multi-storey car parks.

## **4 PROPOSED STRATEGY**

**4.1** The proposed regeneration strategy would build on known current investment interest by supporting:

- Offices to bring jobs into the town centre
- Housing to bring homes back to the town centre
- Retail investment to bring shoppers back into the town

**4.2** All three types of development would be drawn together to increase the activity in the traditional core of the town centre. More office workers located in the town centre will bring new business to the shops. More people living in the town centre will help to maintain activity through into the evening as well as supporting demand in the central area shops. Retail developments linked by attractive pedestrian thoroughfares and accessible public transport can also help to bring shoppers into all parts of the traditional town centre.

**4.3** A strategy for the integration of new developments is shown in the attached diagram. The key features are:

- Office, retail, hotel and leisure developments in the "top of the town" area focused around the railway station, bus station and multi-storey car park. This area has been the subject of an earlier report to the Committee and a promotional package is currently being developed in conjunction with Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire assisted by external consultants
- Retail and office developments in the Glencairn Square area
- An enhanced pedestrian thoroughfare leading from Glencairn Square along Titchfield Street and King Street through to the top of the town area
- A development axis through Queen's Drive out to the Bellfield Roundabout. The Bellfield Roundabout would become a key gateway to the town. This is also the location of an office development site identified in the local plan. The Queen's Drive area is continuing to attract interest for leisure and retail development.
- A "hopper bus service" linking the top of the town, Queen's Drive and Glencairn Square.
- Continuing improvements to the central conservation area focused on John Finnie Street and John Dickie Street, linking through to the conservation area around the Palace Theatre, Grand Hall and Dick Institute.

**4.4** Implementation of this strategy will require to be reflected in consideration of planning applications, promotion programmes and investment in transport infrastructure. Practical implications and action include:

- Seek support from developers for the “hopper bus service”, including the provision of car parking spaces at entry points to the town centre.
- Improvements in the amenity of the key pedestrian thoroughfares linking the edge of town locations with the core town centre
- Improvements in the amenity of the one-way system circulating the town centre aimed at making the area more pleasant and safer for pedestrians and improving accessibility for public transport (funds are available for this through the Public Transport Fund – there will be consultation over the summer on detailed proposals including possible modifications in the current traffic circulation system)
- The retention of shops in the core town centre to complement retail developments at the edge of town centre locations
- Seeking investment support for more ambitious schemes to promote the amenity of the core town centre through provision of additional covered pedestrian thoroughfares where feasible and appropriate
- Introduction of a Shopmobility scheme
- Continued promotion of residential development opportunities particularly within the core conservation area
- Localised action planning aimed at integrating development opportunities, such as the plan being drawn up for the top of the town area
- Introduction of improved parking control arrangements to promote a greater turnover of the central car parking areas (as proposed through the town centre parking order currently being developed)
- Development of a new image for Kilmarnock to be promoted through the KTCMI
- Integration of the regeneration strategy for Kilmarnock town centre into a wider economic development strategy of the Ayrshire Economic Forum. A new Ayrshire Business Location Strategy is being developed under the auspices of the Joint Structure Plan Committee.

## **5 LEGAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

**5.1** There are no immediate legal or financial implications arising from this report.

## **6 RECOMMENDATION**

**6.1** It is recommended that the Committee approve the strategy for the regeneration of Kilmarnock town centre as set out in section 4 above of this report.

**Stephen Chorley**  
**Director of Development Services**

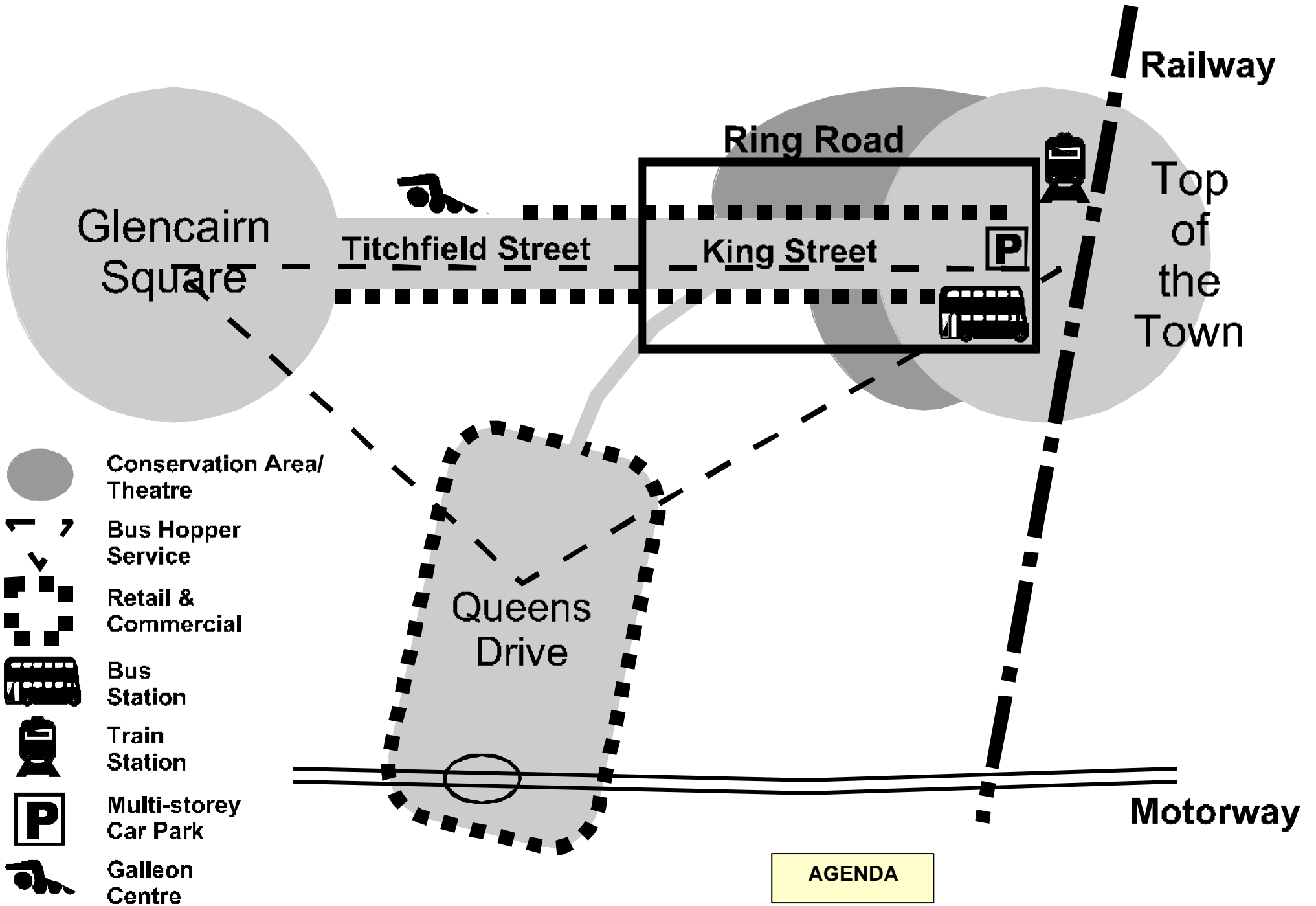
SC/JR  
22 April 2002

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 1 "Office Development within Kilmarnock Town Centre" - Development Services Committee of 28 August 2001 ; and**
- 2 Public Transport Fund Bid document**

For further information on the content of this report, please contact Stephen Chorley, Director of Development Services, on 01563 576011.

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AGENDA