
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

13 September 2023

North Ayrshire Council

Title: Irvine Town Centre Working Group Update

Purpose: To update Council on the progress made by the working group to evaluate options to bring the former Forum building, former Ruby Tuesdays building and subsequent surrounding buildings that have fallen into disrepair back into a usable state.

Recommendation: That the Council Notes the progress made by the working group and agrees to receive a further update towards the end of 2023.

1. Executive Summary

1.1 A working group of Elected Members and Officers has been established regarding Irvine town centre in accordance with a motion passed by Council on 17 May 2023. The purpose of the working group is to discuss and evaluate options outlining the ownership position and options for bringing the former Forum building, former Ruby Tuesdays building and subsequent surrounding buildings that have fallen into disrepair back into a usable state. This report provides an update on the progress made to date including the identification of short-term improvements and the development of a feasibility study.

2. Background

- 2.1 Our town centres are facing challenges due to changing and evolving retail patterns. Town centres are a key element of the economic and social fabric and can be a central component of successful local economies and offer a base for small businesses and jobs. They are often at the core of community life, offering spaces to meet and interact with access to facilities, places to live and services that people require. It is therefore important that our town centres are functioning, well-maintained assets that develop to support the needs of their residents, businesses and visitors.
- 2.2 Through the Placemaking theme, the Regeneration Delivery Plan promotes the importance of place, repositioning of our town centres, town centre living, and leads on a response to derelict sites. Bringing town centre properties back into positive use and creating places that are vibrant, welcoming, sustainable and attractive is central to this ambition. Through the development of the Plan several properties were identified as having a substantial negative impact on our town centres and requiring action.
- 2.3 At the meeting on 17 May 2023, North Ayrshire Council agreed that a working group of local Elected Members and relevant Officers be established to discuss and evaluate

options outlining the ownership position and options for bringing the former Forum building, former Ruby Tuesdays building and subsequent surrounding buildings that have fallen into disrepair back into a usable state. Furthermore, it was agreed that a report on the outcome be submitted to the first meeting of the Council following the summer recess.

- 2.4 The working group is comprised of Elected Members from the Irvine East, West and South Wards and representatives from the following Services: Corporate Property and Transport and Sustainability; Economic Development, Growth and Regeneration; Finance; Housing; and Public Protection and Neighbourhood Services. Two meetings have been held to date on 30 June and 23 August 2023.
- 2.5 The working group has identified and agreed the three initial actions which are being progressed by Services to:
- Engage with landowners to understand their plans for the properties and increase awareness of opportunities through the Repurposing Property Grant Fund.
 - Identify and implement short term improvements to improve the aesthetics of properties and surrounding area, subject to securing the necessary consents and permissions.
 - Develop a high-level feasibility study to consider potential opportunities to repurpose the properties and surrounding area.
- 2.6 The identified properties are within private ownership. A letter was issued to each owner by the Regeneration Team. This extended the offer of a meeting and requested information on their plans for their respective properties. It also outlined the offer under the Council's Repurposing Property Grant Fund, which offers grant funding for feasibility studies to identify potential options for vacant and derelict sites and their viability. There has been no response to our correspondence to date however Officers from Regeneration and Protective Services continue to try and engage the owners to bring proposals forward.
- 2.7 Engagement with the neighbouring Rivergate Shopping Centre has been positive and is ongoing to identify opportunities for partnership working. Site visits have also been undertaken to consider short term improvements that could be undertaken to improve the aesthetic of the area. These have identified that works could include pressure washing, weeding, soft-washing and graffiti removal. Quotes are being obtained via Streetscene with a view to progressing these works. Disclaimer waivers will be sought from landowners prior to implementing any short-term improvements alongside a contribution to the works where possible.
- 2.8 Consultancy support was procured by the Regeneration team via the Council's Professional Services Framework to prepare the high-level feasibility study. Graham and Sibbald are currently developing the study, the objectives of which are to:
- Identify viable alternative uses that support regeneration priorities;
 - Promote a Community Wealth Building approach to the re-purposing of vacant/under-utilised properties;
 - Take into consideration aspirations for neighbouring properties such as the Rivergate Shopping Centre and wider regeneration proposals; and
 - Assess alternative options in terms of indicative value and likely cost against current operational and maintenance costs.

2.9 The study process will:

- Confirm the current ownerships and any aspirations for redevelopment;
- Detail existing constraints and potential opportunities for mitigation;
- Engage with property owners including the Rivergate Shopping Centre;
- Engage with Scotland's Town Partnership to learn from national experience and best practice;
- Identify a range of alternative uses including consideration of residential, business, commercial, leisure and community opportunities;
- Undertake a market analysis for proposed alternative uses; and
- Assess the viability of redevelopment through an assessment of indicative development costs and indicative values.

2.10 The final report is due by the end of September 2023. It is proposed that a further report updating on the progress of these actions be considered at a future meeting of the Council in late 2023. It is envisaged that the outcome of this work will help to inform the Council's approach to vacant town centre properties going forward.

3. Proposals

3.1 That the Council notes the progress made by the working group and agrees to receive a further update towards the end of 2023.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

4.1 The actions being progressed are being funded using existing Regeneration budgets. This includes the allocations for Council led projects under the Communities and Place Fund. Notwithstanding the outcome of the feasibility study, it is likely that significant financial resource would be required to implement any longer-term actions in the area. Potential sources of funding will be investigated through this process.

Human Resources

4.2 The actions being progressed are being delivered through existing cross Service resources.

Legal

4.3 Disclaimer waivers will be sought from landowners prior to implementing any short-term improvements. As the properties and associated land are in private ownership, a full assessment of the legal considerations associated with the options presented through the feasibility study will be required prior to any delivery.

Equality/Socio-economic

4.4 The actions being progressed assist in meeting our socio-economic duty as set out in the Fairer Scotland Duty. They seek to tackle the identified long-term vacant and derelict land and buildings within Irvine town centre thereby reducing their levels and impact on communities. They also aim to build community wealth and tackle local

deprivation through the regeneration of our communities by maximising the potential of underutilised land and assets.

Climate Change and Carbon

4.5 The potential for sustainability and low carbon related improvements will be considered as part of the feasibility study.

Key Priorities

4.6 The actions being progressed align with and contribute to the following Council Priorities:

- Wellbeing: to transition to a wellbeing economy, delivering prosperity, wellbeing and resilience for local people and to ensure our places and spaces where we live, work and visit are well maintained and accessible.
- Communities and Local Democracy: that our places encourage strong inclusive communities and respect the local environment and cultural heritage.

Community Wealth Building

4.7 The work being progressed contributes to our aims to build community wealth and tackle local deprivation through the regeneration of our communities by maximising the potential of land and assets. The potential for wider community wealth building opportunities and benefits will be investigated through the feasibility study.

5. Consultation

5.1 The working group is comprised of Elected Members and Officers from across Services, who are proactively engaged in the development of this work. Initial approaches have been made to landowners and engagement will be ongoing throughout the development of the proposals. The feasibility study process will engage with Scotland's Town Partnership to learn from experience across Scotland.

RUSSELL McCUTCHEON
Executive Director (Place)

For further information please contact **Claire Fitzsimmons, Interim Senior Manager – Regeneration**, on **01294 315305**.

Background Papers

Regeneration Delivery Plan, 2021