

Community Feedback
Fios Air Ais bhon Choimhearsnachd





Introduction Ro-radh

This document details feedback received on the Fort William Town Centre Masterplan (the Masterplan). A summary of the feedback is provided initially followed by more detailed findings and information on the engagement process.

This is the first stage in reporting the outcomes of a programme of community engagement. In the coming months details about how that feedback has been, or will be, addressed by the Masterplan design team will also be made available. In parallel, work is also ongoing to establish the next steps for the Masterplan, looking at how recommendations and proposals can be implemented or delivered, with focus on those for which there was strong community support.

The commissioning partners for the Masterplan are the Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and the Lochaber Chamber of Commerce. The design team comprises the commissioning partners plus Threesixty Architecture.

Executive Summary Geàrr-chunntas Gnìomhach

An estimated 500-600 people engaged with the Masterplan over a period of approximately 2 months.



Overall, the Masterplan was largely received positively by both young and old. There were a range of qualifications and a small number were unimpressed by the vision, "what a wonderful piece of fiction, unachievable", or had concerns about specific elements. There was no consensus on any individual proposal although almost all

elements of the Masterplan were commented on by someone.

Certain measures attracted both strong positive and negative feedback e.g., changes to parking arrangements and the achievability of the proposals was a common concern. However, being given the opportunity to engage was overwhelmingly well received, many respondents were very positive "love the ideas / creativity", "excellent vision, modern and ambitious", they were pleased to see a Masterplan "excellent to see plans in place", and several respondents requested being kept informed as the plans develop "I would very much appreciate being kept in the loop".

...an excellent vision, modern and ambitious.

Feedback was influenced by age. For young people e.g., high school pupils, much of what was important was about the town was what they can access independently so had a focus on

activities and entertainment.

As would be expected, across respondents their feedback concerned Masterplan proposals which directly affected aspects of the town that they were interested in e.g. students raised the potential for Fort William to be more of a 'University Town' and the need for more student accommodation.



Chamber Networking Lunch

Those with businesses on the High Street were concerned that accessibility would be maintained e.g. for deliveries or disabled customers.

However, across all age groups, respondents also demonstrated an appreciation for others needs in the town e.g. pupils at the High School liked the inclusion of later





living homes and were concerned about congestion on road users, while those over 35 commented on town needing better provision for teenagers and "things for young people to do".



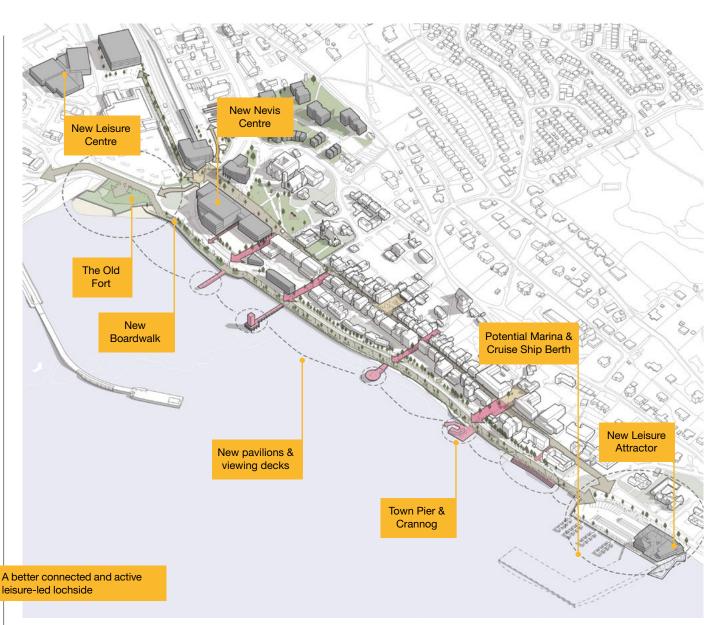


The provision of new leisure facilities and the potential for greater activities within the town was the closest to universally popular, "love the leisure and watersport ideas", but especially amongst younger respondents.

A minority questioned the need for new buildings in new locations, and whether the retention and better maintenance of existing facilities was preferable but proposals for improved facilities were very well received.



and watersport ideas.



The most commented on element was the proposed reduction in lanes on the A82 and provision of multiple road level pedestrian crossings.

Reactions varied from, "love the promenade and reduction in A82 road lanes" to "the reduction of the current bypass to a single lane in each direction concerns me" to "the A82 needs to be bigger!".

The majority of those who mentioned this issue were positive about opening access up to the waterfront, but concerned about the proposed lane reduction and the impact this would have on current congestion problems. The safety of at grade crossings was also questioned in comparison to the existing underpass.



The proposed changes to the bus and train station were popular although not unanimously and the potential for a multi-storey car park nearby generated positive and negative comments.







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...a balanced approach which considers the needs of both tourists and residents is key.

The proposals for more residential and business accommodation, greater green space, an improved and more accessible waterfront, and a more varied selection of shops were well received.

Young and old alike however, questioned the achievability of the plans, where would the funding come from and, if, and when, would things happen?

Respondents also raised questions about the balance between a Masterplan which meets local resident and business needs and one which delivers benefits to tourism / visitors.

Some respondents explicitly mentioned concerns about shops and facilities being geared too much towards visitors rather than residents e.g., outdoor clothing which was already considered to be well served in the town, "I think the focus needs to be on things that improve life for the locals first".



Stakeholder Workshop



Public Exhibition

The potential for greater renovation, reuse, and repair rather than new build was also highlighted by some respondents, "there is not enough emphasis on making the best of what we already have, and future maintenance". More environmental and sustainable options were a particular concern of the young, although not exclusively, with the importance of net zero, mitigation of climate change impacts, and sustainability measures being properly implemented all raised.



Engagement: Phases

Com-pàirteachadh: Ìrean

Phase 1 - Aug to December 2023

- A stakeholder workshop held on the 2nd of Oct 2023; and
- Public Exhibition in the Nevis Centre 22nd of Nov 2023

Phase 2 - Feb to March 2024

- A 4-week public exhibition in Fort William Library from 26th Feb to 25th of Mar 2024
- A dedicated session with students and staff at NW+H college, UHI on the 12th of Mar 2024
- An afternoon with pupils and staff in Lochaber High School on the 27th of Mar 2024
- A presentation and Q&A delivered at a Lochaber Chamber of Commerce

Since August, Masterplan information has also been continuously available on the Highland Council website - https://www.highland.gov.uk/fw2040 with contact details provided inviting questions and feedback - regeneration@highland.gov.uk.

This document summarises feedback received through community engagement to date. This combines feedback received in Phase 1 from a public exhibition at the Nevis Centre and all email feedback received throughout, with the feedback received through Phase 2. The results of the Phase 1 stakeholder event were included in the draft Masterplan.

During Phase 1 several concerns were raised about the reach of the engagement efforts, and this formed the rationale and basis for the further community engagement undertaken in Phase 2. Respondents highlighted the need for a longer opportunity to engage with the Masterplan and that better engagement was specifically needed with business owners and residents in the town centre.

Initial feedback also demonstrated a concentration of responses from those aged 36 and over with respondents highlighting, "where is the input from young people?" Phase 2 therefore directly targeted younger people through dedicated sessions at Lochaber High School (LHS) and UHI North, West and Hebrides (NW+H).

The Phase 2 engagement programme was advertised by email to an extensive key stakeholder contact list who were invited to share widely and detailed on locally displayed posters.

A leaflet drop to high street premises was undertaken, there was an article in the Lochaber Times, promotion on Community Connections on Nevis Radio, and posts on social media.

The commissioning partners are seeking continued community engagement and on-going dialogue about the Masterplan. Documenting the feedback received to date is a key part of this process. Updates will continue to be provided online and in the Fort William Library.

Engagement: Events

Com-pàirteachadh: Tachartasan

Whilst an exact count of those engaging with the Masterplan is not possible, due to the methods of engagement, the following was recorded:

Website

167 views of the Town Centre Masterplan (Main Report) download page between the 26th February and 25th March 2024.

27 views of the Town Centre Masterplan (Appendices) download page.





Nevis Centre

Over 200 people attended a 1-day public exhibition on the 22nd November 2023 in the Nevis Centre.



Stakeholder Workshop

On the 2nd October 2023
27 people representing 17
organisations attended a
stakeholder event in the MacIntosh
Hall at the Duncansburgh Church
in the town centre.

Fort William Library

Approximately **180 people** viewed the library exhibition, visits were well spread across library opening times and days of the week. It is appreciated that some of those were potentially return visits by the same individuals.



UHI Session

Approximately 12 students and 8 staff attended an open evening session at the UHI NW+H campus.



Lochaber High School Session

192 high school pupils plus staff members attended an open afternoon session hosted in the school library.

Lochaber Chamber of Commerce Networking Lunch

Approximately 30 representatives of the business community attended a presentation and Q&A session hosted by the Chamber.





FW2040 Community Stakeholder Group

In August 2023 and June 2024, the masterplan and community feedback were also presented and discussed with the FW2040 Community Stakeholder Group.

This is a group with representatives from local community councils (Ardgour, Nether Lochaber, Fort William, Inverlochy & Torlundy, Caol, Kilmallie, Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge & Achnacarry), Voluntary Action Lochaber, Lochaber Environmental Group, and Councillors from Ward 11 and 21.



Engagement: Findings

Com-pàirteachadh: Toraidhean

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In total 111 pieces of written feedback were received during the community engagement programme.

This is made up of 49 responses – comprising completed feedback forms (from the Nevis Centre public exhibition, the library exhibition, the NW+H session and the networking lunch), and all emails received throughout the engagement programme from November 2023 to now; and 62 worksheets completed during the Lochaber High School session. Examples of the Feedback Form and High School Worksheet are included in Appendix A.

This section provides a detailed breakdown of all the feedback received organised by type of feedback and the nature of the engagement. The first section detailed under Written Feedback deals with all the feedback forms from the Nevis Centre, the library, the NW+H session and the networking lunch plus all email responses. This is followed by additional summary detail from the dedicated sessions at the NW+H and the Lochaber Chamber of Commerce Networking Lunch. These gatherings allowed for greater discussion and findings

have been highlighted which provide more detail on an issue or proposals, or where comments were new or contrasted with the other feedback which was received. A final section deals solely with the responses received during the Lochaber High School session.

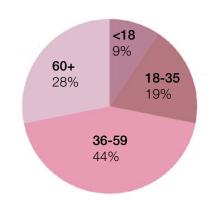
Comments should be read within the context of the engagement sessions. For example, some comments were made by a small number of respondents focusing on particular concerns. The section at the start of this document (p1-9) aims to provide an on balance summary of the all the views received throughout the engagement process and across the range of Masterplan proposals.

Written Feedback

This comprised 37 feedback forms and 12 emails in total. Two of the forms are from respondents who also emailed, and they cover the same issues. To avoid double counting, this summary is therefore based on a total of 47 unique responses. 10 responses came from those representing specific businesses or organisational interests.

Demographic, employment, and residence information was incomplete; however, some details can still be provided. Of those who completed the relevant sections on the feedback forms, the vast majority, 91% (39 of 43 respondents) were resident

in Lochaber, with at least two thirds, 66% of all respondents resident within Fort William itself (the town centre and surroundin settlements of Caol, Corpach, Torlundy, and Lochyside). Of the remaining four respondents, two were from cities elsewhere in Scotland (outwith Highland) and two unreported.



Age Spread of Respondents (excludes High School pupils)

Of the 32 respondents who provided age information, a spread was achieved although the majority were aged over 35. With 9% under 18 (3 respondents), 19% aged 18 to 35 (6 respondents), 44% aged 36 to 59 (14 respondents) and 28% aged 60+ (9 respondents).

Nearly one quarter of all those who responded owned businesses locally (23%), including within the town centre. Whilst 30% indicated they were employed locally and at least (17%) had connections with a community group, charity, or social enterprise operating in Lochaber.

How will removing lanes of the bypass impact the congestion on the A82?





Just over half of respondents (51%) specifically commented on transport related aspects of the Masterplan (changes to the A82/ the proposed new transport hub/ parking reconfiguration).

Concerns raised about changes to the bypass and pedestrian access into town were particularly prevalent although a small number of respondents were very positive about these changes. In addition to potential changes in parking encompassing a potential multistorey car park.

Respondents were keen to see the improved 'flow' of the town for pedestrians and vehicles and most of those who commented welcomed the changes to the transport hub. However, key questions were raised as to how removing lanes on the bypass and creating at grade pedestrian crossings would impact on seasonal congestion issues as well as pedestrian safety. How the plans would affect vehicular access (delivery and disabled visitor) for businesses in the High Street was also mentioned.

Just under one-fifth (19%) of those who responded commented on the need to make sure that the provision of more housing and business premises within the town centre was genuinely affordable, representing mixed use and tenure, and the provision of businesses which serve the community.

Demand for housing in general and accommodation for specific user groups e.g. students was also highlighted.

> More housing and accommodation thats affordable for locals would really help the community.



Just over one-fifth (21%) of respondents were positive about the proposals for an improved link to the waterfront. New viewing decks and a boardwalk to the Old Fort were highlighted as positive although the impact of weather and water conditions on these and the proposed landscape buffer was mentioned.

How will the weather impact the new proposed boardwalk?



Better links with work being undertaken to progress the Fort William Marina was suggested and the potential to learn from the experience of Oban, which has a sea-facing shop frontage, was recommended.



Improving the link to the waterfront with a new boardwalk would be a great enhancement to the town centre.

The potential to infill parts of the waterfront for development or for the creation of wetlands to attenuate sea level rise / flood waters was also mentioned.

The provision of spaces and facilities with views of the water was seen as a real asset.



More green space is needed with spaces for seating, children and young adults.

The proposals for new gathering and green spaces were well received (13%) and the value of the historic environment, specifically the architecture of certain High Street buildings was mentioned (9%) including the cultural attraction of the West Highland Museum (4%), and the Old Fort (4%).

Respondents highlighted the need for more leisure facilities with a focus on residents not just tourists e.g., a snooker, darts, or pool hall.

It would be great to have things for the locals to do...



Respondents highlighted the importance of the provision of a range of activities and areas including the proposed event space which meet different age groups and interests, suggesting options such as public access astro turf at a new leisure centre, football (an indoor/outdoor town pitch), yoga, a youth café, paddlesports hub (potentially as part of the waterfront), swim shop, and crazy golf.

Proposals for the provision of co-working space (for those who are remote workers, working from home or those working while travelling) was welcomed and the importance of accessibility across the Masterplan was also raised.

Accessibility is really important to me...

One in ten respondents raised more strategic concerns about the deliverability of the Masterplan, specifically what the proposals would potentially cost and where would the funding come from? Respondents also questioned what the impact on, and relationship with, wider infrastructure might be from this kind of development with links between the Masterplan, plans for a new hospital, the current Corran ferry, and housing development in the wider area being referenced.

How will we fund this proposal?



NW+H Session

A small number of students and staff engaged during the college event. Much of the discussion reflected wider feedback (as reported under the Written Feedback section). However, some different and specific comments were received, and these are detailed below.

Several students were interested in the potential to refurbish and upgrade the hospital in its current location, for the following reasons:

 The hospital is very accessible, relocating the hospital to Blar Mhor will only increase car use rather than reduce it.

- Environmentally, it is likely that the building has substantial embodied energy/carbon.
 "refurbing and upgrading the hospital would be the responsible thing to do"
- The Hospital brings foot fall to the town centre, that would disappear.

The potential to focus on making Fort William a University Town was also discussed, with the following proposals suggested:

- The STEM Centre should be developed in the town, rather than at Blar Mhor. Developing at Blar Mhor would increase car use and make it more difficult to access.
- Vacant properties could be used to celebrate the art and fashion works from the college

 this would also benefit the vacant properties.
- Opportunities should be investigated to strengthen UHI's presence within the town.

Linked to both above was the key feedback that students should be kept in the town and the role of affordable accommodation was central to this:

 There are few affordable student accommodation options in the town.

they are trying to make the town better.

- Local landlords are too expensive and favour Air B&B.
- The university accommodation associated with UHI is expensive/ unaffordable.

Lochaber Chamber of Commerce Networking Lunch

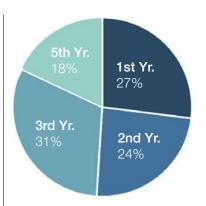
Attendees at the networking lunch raised similar issues to those expressed throughout the engagement programme (and reported under Written Feedback). Much of the discussion on the day focused on the importance of transport infrastructure to businesses and the prosperity of the town. Therefore, there were concerns around the proposals to reduce lanes on the A82 and increase the number of pedestrian crossings.

Additional questions were raised about the proposed massing of the buildings, especially around the Parade and attendees highlighted the need for greater flexibility so business can respond to the seasonality of visitors, the weather conditions, and the resulting variability in footfall e.g., simpler permissions process for outdoor seating in the High Street. The potential for art and exhibition spaces was also discussed. The suggestions in the Masterplan for meanwhile spaces were well received but the need for a permanent art/gallery facility was highlighted.

Lochaber High School (LHS)

On the 27th March 2024 the Masterplan exhibition panels were set up in the Lochaber High School library from 13:00 to 16:00 (covering lunch break and periods 6 and 7). An invite went out to all staff and pupils.

An estimated 192 high school pupils attended, where they were invited to view the exhibition panels, ask questions, and fill in a feedback form. 62 forms were filled in, covering pupils from years 1 (17), 2 (15), 3 (19) and 5 (11). This reflected the classes e.g. Geography which were able to attend during the school day and pupils who use the library at lunchtime (which is open to all). Not all sections were completed on all forms, however a good level of response was achieved.



Percentage of Respondents From Each School Year

When asked 'Do you like the Masterplan for Fort William Town Centre?', of the 54 pupils who filled this in, pupils were overwhelmingly positive with 78% (42) giving this a rating to the left of the midpoint of the scale, as seen on the next page, (towards the 'Like a lot'). 13% (7) rated the Masterplan to the right of the scale (towards the



Lochaber High School Consultation

'Dislike a lot'), with 9% (5) choosing the midpoint. To allow further analysis, numerical values between 1 (Dislike a lot) to 10 (Like a lot) have been applied to the scale retrospectively. On this basis, the mean average score across all pupils was 7.4.

Pupils were then asked to list what elements of the Masterplan they liked and disliked, and why. A whole range of elements were recorded, although overall, the 'Like' list was longer than the 'Dislike' list. Specifics elements which were liked and mentioned by 6 or more pupils (10% or more of all respondents) were as follows (in order of popularity):

- New Leisure Centre (52%)
- New boardwalk including the viewing platform (35%)
- Watersports Centre (31%)
- Extended Parade and more greenspace (19%)
- New Transport hub (rail and bus station) (19%)
- Multi-storey car park (19%)

- Marina and Cruise ship pier (19%)
- New homes (17%), "there always needs to be more homes".
- Potential food hall (13%)

The leisure centre is in need of an upgrade



Over half of pupils liked the proposals for a new Leisure Centre, which was popular across all age groups, "time for an update" and "more space to do other sports". Although two pupils disliked this proposal as they didn't want it to move from its current location. In combination with other proposals, it is apparent elements which create the potential for more and new activities in the town, specifically the proposed Watersports Centre, extended Parade and greenspace, and the new Boardwalk, are very important to young people, "a football pitch in town so the young team can go there instead of getting into trouble. You know how much we like football."

Pupils also welcomed the proposals in general which showed a range of improvements or renovation, "I like the fact that they are trying to make the town better". Regeneration of town centre squares (Monzie and Gordon), a potential new Nevis Centre including the library, a proposed Youth and Community Hub, and the fact the plans looked modern were all liked.

Specific elements which were disliked and mentioned by 6 or more pupils (10% or more of all respondents) were as follows:

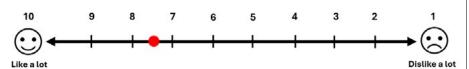
- Lane reduction on the A82 (28%)
- Multi-storey car park (15%)
- New train and bus station (11%)

 "train station is big enough"
 and "inefficient use of funding for things which don't need changed".

More homes would be good...



Over a quarter of pupils disliked the proposed lane reduction changes to the A82. Other transport proposals received a mixed response with different pupils disliking elements which others had liked, specifically the proposal for a multi-storey car park and the new train and bus stations.



Pupil Masterplan Evaluation Scale

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Pupils also commented on more strategic concerns about Masterplan delivery and questioned the timescales (15%) "it will take a long time to complete" and "I won't be here", and the achievability of the plans and how they can be funded (17%), "I feel like it won't actually happen" and "I don't think it is realistic", "it will be too expensive".



How long will it take to complete?

The proposals for the station hotel, getting rid of the underpass, and removing Middle Street where also disliked by some.

Pupils were asked what was most important to them about Fort William Town Centre currently.

A whole range of aspects were mentioned by one or two respondents e.g. the Parade, Nevis Centre, the Leisure Centre, the old Fort, green spaces, and specific businesses e.g. the Granite House and the Highland Bookshop. "It's a small but active town". Far and away the most important individual element, identified by nearly one fifth of all respondents (19%) was the Cinema – this was important across all age groups. Fort William had been without a cinema for many years until the

Highland Cinema opened in 2020. This is accessible and provides entertainment for all ages.

Finally, pupils were asked how they would like the town centre to look and what they would like to be in the town in the future. 17% (9) of all respondents mentioned a nice town centre, clean, tidy with a good environment and better-quality buildings, "town to look nicer and cleaner".

Strong feedback was received about shopping and retail in the town. 28% (15) of pupils would like to see better shops in the town especially for clothes/shoes, tech/games, and specific chains e.g., Nandos, Primark, H&M. A shopping centre was mentioned (3) as were more local shops selling necessities (2). Pupils also specifically stated they would like less outdoor shops (7) and less tourist orientated gift shops (4). More places to eat and drink, especially for younger people was suggested (5).

It would be great to have more things to do



After retail, the option to have more activities was the next most popular answer. 17% (9) made suggestions such as an art space, cookery club, trampoline park, ice rink, go kart track, but overall "more things to do" was key. This ties in with the strong like for the activity elements of the Masterplan. More entertainment was also mentioned (4) and more buses and better links between parts of the town was highlighted (4).

Appendix A: Feedback Forms Foirm Fios Air Ais

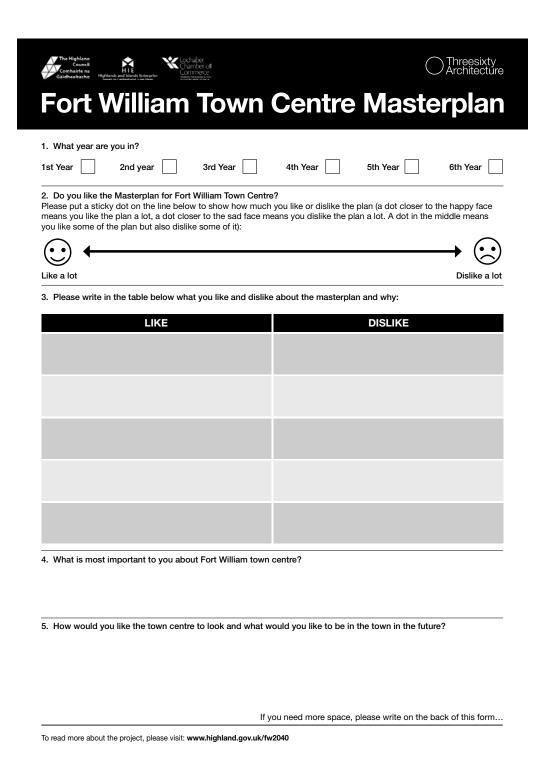
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Fort William Tow	n Centre Masterpla	n
Name:		
Address:		
Email:		
Are You: (Please tick all that apply) A Lochaber Re	esident	
A Regular Visitor to lochaber (eg. for work, family, shopping, leisure etc	Employed Locally (work in Lochaber)	
An infrequent / one-off visitor to Lochaber (eg. on holiday)	An owner of a local business (trading and/or registered in Lochaber	
Would you like to move to Lochaber	Member of a community group, a charity, and/or social enterprise operating in Lochaber	
f you are a local resident, how long have you lived in	n Lochaber?	
Less than 1 year 1-5 years	6-10 years 11-20 years 20 years +	
What age group do you fall into? Under 18 18-35	36-59 60 +	
Have Your Say What do you like about what you have seen? consideration? (please use both sides of this form if nee	? / What do you dislike? / What needs further eded)	
	Email your thoughts to: regeneration@highland.gov.u	ık

To read more about the project, please visit: www.highland.gov.uk/fw2040

online at: www.highland.gov.uk (search Privacy Notices/Fort William Town Centre)

A copy of the Highland Council privacy notice detailing how we use and store your data can be found

Leave this feedback form with us here today



Next Steps

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In the coming months, another document like this one will be produced. This will set out how the feedback received during the community engagement process, which is detailed in this document, has been addressed by the design team. This will include where any changes or additions have been made to the Masterplan, or where clarification or further work is required.

Further Information Tuilleadh Fiosrachaidh

You can read more about the project at:

Website:

www.highland.gov.uk/fw2040

You can request further information or submit feedback by:

Email to the Regeneration Team: regeneration@highland.gov.uk

or

Email to the FW2040 Project Manager: **Alison.Martin5@highland.gov.uk**

or

Telephone: **01397 707232**

