



executive summary

This report, commissioned by the Paisley Vision Board, Renfrewshire Council and Scottish Enterprise Renfrewshire, sets out a strategy and action plan for the regeneration and transformation of Paisley town centre.

The plan calls for a 10-year programme of investment in the town centre which will deliver:

- *40,000 square metres of residential development*
- *20,000 square metres of floorspace for retail/leisure*
- *15,000 square metres of office/studio space*
- *a new public transport hub*
- *a multi-storey car park, and*
- *major improvements in the public realm.*

The total costs of development are estimated to be in the order of £50m over 10 years. The private sector will lead the regeneration process, investing up to £40-45m, primarily in residential and retail development.

A flagship scheme will transform the Eastern Arc (an area extending from Gilmour Street station, through the former Arnott's site and

into Cotton Street/Bridge Street) into a vibrant mixed-use urban quarter comprising luxury apartments, student housing, shops, office and new transport infrastructure.

The plan calls for an investment of around £10m by the public sector. This expenditure will:

- *act as a catalyst for private sector investment*
- *help to secure high quality mixed use development, and*
- *contribute to a programme of investment in Paisley's cultural assets, transport infrastructure and to enhancing the public realm.*

We estimate that the action plan will increase the population of the town centre by up to 1,500 people, and add around 2,000 jobs.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The report was commissioned against the background of continuing concern about the **condition of Paisley town centre** and, in particular, the **decline in retail trade** in the face of severe competition from Glasgow and out of town shopping centres, including Braehead.

Economic and social changes have had a profound impact on

traditional town centres like Paisley. In an era of unprecedented choice, prosperity and mobility, **small and medium sized town centres have struggled to compete** with the big cities and out of town leisure and retail complexes.

The report argues that **innovation and creativity** will be required to respond to these powerful forces and create a sustainable future for Paisley town centre. But **innovation must be tempered by pragmatism**, and a realistic understanding of **market conditions and competitive threats**.

The bulk of the investment required to turn Paisley around will come from the private sector, but the public sector has a vital role to play in creating the conditions for regeneration and establishing a climate of confidence. The Paisley Vision Board partners need to champion a new vision for the town centre, and mobilise the resources of the public sector in support of a recovery plan.

THE CONTEXT

Paisley has an extensive catchment area, but people living in and around the town have access to a wide range of **shopping and leisure choices**. Better off residents are most likely to have transferred their custom to Braehead or Glasgow city centre. Low income households, the young and the elderly do not have the same choices, and they are more likely to continue to shop and



spend leisure time in Paisley. The town centre is ringed by deprived neighbourhoods, and residents of these areas remain highly dependent on the services and amenities of the town centre.

The percentage of Paisley residents using the town centre for food shopping, or to buy clothes and household goods fell by more than half between 1994 and 2004. This **collapse in customer loyalty among middle and higher income households** accounts for the declining quality of Paisley's retail offer, the closure of major stores and the emergence of low-price value retailers.

TOWN CENTRES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The challenges facing Paisley are typical of many medium sized towns in the UK. The role of town centres as the focal point for the life of the community has been undermined by four key factors:

- **increasing prosperity:** we spend more on shopping and leisure, and we have more choice about where and how we spend
- we are spending more on **discretionary purchases** – of goods, leisure, recreation and culture
- our society is **increasingly mobile**, with growing levels of car ownership
- the rise of **out of town developments** like Braehead.

These drivers of change have had a profound effect on town centre retailing, and there has been a parallel trend in the commercial

sector, with offices moving from town centres to out of town **business parks**.

Increasingly, traditional town centres serve a **captive market** of people who are too old, too young or too poor to choose more attractive alternatives. Many towns are in a **spiral of decline**, trading down market while the major cities and out of town centres capture an increasing share of business.

FOCUSING ON THE POSITIVE

We need to overcome pessimism about Paisley's prospects by **adopting a positive approach and an optimistic tone**. Paisley has many **strengths and attributes**, including its large catchment population and substantial business base; a new university; access to Glasgow airport and the motorway network; and its fine architecture and townscape.

Paisley has been through difficult times, but it is still a distinctive and special place which is **better placed than many towns of its size and type** to transform itself into a competitive 21st century town centre.

MARKET TRENDS AND PROSPECTS

Paisley's status as a retail centre has declined, and this is reflected in the **closure of major stores, high vacancy rates, low demand and**

a shift towards value retailing. The situation may get worse before it gets better, with new competition coming on stream including the Silverburn centre at Pollok, which opens in 2007.

The leisure market has followed a very similar trajectory, while the office market (though boosted by new low cost space on the town centre fringes) remains uncertain. Prospects are best in the residential market, with luxury apartments coming to the market at Anchor Mill and other locations.

THE CHARACTER OF PAISLEY

Paisley is a **handsome and distinctive town**, with a riverside setting, fine buildings and townscape. Its urban form is largely intact, but the declining fortunes of areas such as the West End and Gauze Street have resulted in pockets of dereliction and decay. Immediately adjoining the core area there are secondary streets where retail is in deep decline.

Paisley has a new university, but it has not yet acquired the character of a **university town**. The university needs a more stylish and lively urban environment; Paisley needs to capture the university's potential as a driver of change and regeneration.

The town has suffered from a **bad press and a negative reputation**, and there are concerns about litter, vandalism and crime. Too often, Paisley presents an image of **shabbiness and neglect**.

TRANSPORT AND ACCESS

Paisley is strategically located, close to the motorway network and an international airport, and is well served by rail and local buses.

But the quality of infrastructure and services is variable. Key issues include:

- **major roads** encircle the town centre, cutting it off from residential areas and business locations, and discouraging **walking**
- **points of entry** to the town are unattractive and unwelcoming
- the **pedestrianised** central area is attractive, but needs better management and maintenance
- there is an adequate supply of **parking**, but the quality of some car parks is poor
- the town centre is a hostile environment for **cyclists**
- **rail services** to Glasgow and the Clyde Coast are excellent, and the rail link to Glasgow airport has received the go-ahead, but Gilmour Street station is unwelcoming
- the quality of **bus services** and vehicles is mixed, and Central Road is an ugly and threatening environment.

SUMMING UP

The challenges facing Paisley are **complex and deep-seated**. Throughout the UK traditional town centres have struggled to

come to terms with a changing environment and hostile market conditions. Paisley's decline is not "somebody's fault", and there is no quick-fix solution.

The way forward is through **diversification**: creating a rich mix of activities and uses to replace an unsustainable retail mono-culture. However, market conditions are not favourable, except in the residential sector, so the partners will need to adopt a **practical, realistic and incremental** approach.

This means creating **demand conditions** that will boost confidence and attract investment, for example:

- providing attractive, high quality housing
- bringing more students to live in the town
- delivering modern workspace for knowledge-based businesses
- growing the creative community.

The key message is that **the continuing decline of the study area** is not inevitable. PVB has a key role to play in promoting recovery by:

- championing the vision
- proactive management and maintenance
- mobilising public sector resources for investment
- engaging with the private sector to deliver development and regeneration.

THE STRATEGIC PROPOSITION

The report sets out a strategic proposition based on a number of **guiding principles**:

- there is **no realistic prospect that Paisley can win back its former status as a shopping centre** in the foreseeable future
- the **competitive pressures on Paisley will intensify** in the short-medium term
- the process of market adjustment means that **Paisley is set to become a value retail centre**
- in the medium-long term, regeneration and diversification will help to achieve a **quality retail and leisure revival**
- **residential development represents the best prospect for market-led regeneration** in the heart of Paisley
- the **office market is volatile** and there is evidence of a mismatch between present day demand and available supply
- the **university is a key economic and cultural asset**
- Paisley's **cultural offer** is modest for a town of its size, but there are some worthwhile assets to build on
- Paisley's **architecture and townscape are key assets** but the **physical condition of the town centre has degraded**
- the town is generally well-connected, but **road access to the town is confusing and compromised**
- the **environment for pedestrians and cyclists is hostile and unwelcoming**
- **public transport infrastructure needs to be upgraded**



LEARNING FROM BEST PRACTICE

Paisley can learn from the experience of **comparable towns** such as Doncaster, Halifax and Scunthorpe. A review of best practice in these and other towns shows that they have faced many of the same challenges as Paisley. The strategies adopted by these towns display a number of common themes:

- reducing retail dependency by **diversifying and intensifying** town centre uses
- the key role of **mixed-use developments** to drive change
- capitalising on **educational, cultural and historical assets**
- regenerating **neglected and forgotten places**
- establishing a coherent, legible **urban form**
- investing in **public transport and access** measures
- working with the **market** grain
- building on **place distinctiveness**.

A VISION OF PAISLEY TOWN CENTRE IN 2016

The report sets out a **10-year strategic vision** for Paisley town centre:

Paisley town centre will emerge from a decade of transformation with a renewed sense of pride, optimism and purpose. It will be a living, working community: an exemplar for the reinvention

of traditional town centres in the 21st century, fulfilling a vital and valued role in the life of the community – and the wider metropolitan region – as an attractive historic riverside town which:

- *has a growing residential population enjoying the benefits of town centre living*
- *offers an attractive package of quality convenience shopping, restaurants, cafes and nightlife*
- *has a reputation for excellence in higher education and research*
- *is a centre for enterprise with a growing business base*
- *has a vibrant creative and cultural life*
- *is the local capital and administrative centre*
- *is welcoming, accessible and connected.*

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The strategy is based on eight **themes and strategic objectives**:

- **Theme 1: Living in the town centre:** to repopulate the heart of Paisley
- **Theme 2: Shopping and leisure:** to establish a viable and sustainable shopping and leisure offer
- **Theme 3: University town:** to make Paisley a real university town
- **Theme 4: Paisley for enterprise:** to increase knowledge-based employment

- **Theme 5: Culture and creativity:** to enhance the quality of the cultural offer, and grow the creative industries
- **Theme 6: Government and administration:** to consolidate Paisley's role as a centre of local government and administration
- **Theme 7: Accessible and connected:** to make Paisley a more accessible and welcoming place
- **Theme 8: Quality and style:** to discover, celebrate and enhance Paisley's distinctive townscape.

ACTION PLAN

The report sets out an action plan based on these eight themes, and comprising **eighteen priorities for action**.

Themes	Priorities for action
1. Living in the town centre	1.1 Eastern Arc residential development 1.2 Student housing
2. Shopping and leisure	2.1 Convenience shopping 2.2 Events, marketing and promotion 2.3 Winter lights
3. University town	3.1 Campus design strategy 3.2 Student quarter
4. Paisley for enterprise	4.1 Serviced business centre 4.2 Mixed use development
5. Culture and creativity	5.1 Cultural experience 5.2 Creative production
6. Government + administration	6.1 Public sector relocations
7. Accessible and connected	7.1 Road access and parking 7.2 Public transport hub 7.3 Walking and cycling
8. Quality and style	8.1 Urban form 8.2 Public space 8.3 Eastern Arc

The centrepiece of the plan is a proposal to transform the **Eastern Arc** – which stretches from Gilmour Street through Gauze Street to Cotton Street and Bridge Street – into a vibrant mixed use urban quarter. This project will change the face of Paisley town centre; other key outputs include:

- a **business centre** which will provide a home of knowledge based businesses, including university spin-outs
- continuing investment in the **public realm**, especially at town centre gateways and around the universities
- improvements to the towns **traffic management** and **transport infrastructure**, and
- investment in Paisley’s underperforming **cultural assets**.

The action plan will require **public sector expenditure in the order of £10m** over five years, and it will act as the catalyst for up to £50m of private sector investment.

DELIVERING THE ACTION PLAN

The regeneration of Paisley should be **private sector led** wherever possible. The resources of the public sector are finite, but the PVB partners have a key role to play in **laying the foundations** for private sector activity.

The partners will **champion the strategy** and the action plan and make sure that the regeneration of Paisley is on the market radar. However, public sector investment will also be required to **tackle market failure**, and **to ensure that the mix of uses and quality of development matches the new vision for Paisley**.

The report also recommends **an enhanced role and additional resources for the town centre team**. The team will play a key role in

coordinating delivery of the action plan, but it will also be charged with:

- introducing a **zero tolerance regime** to combat crime, litter, graffiti and vandalism
- designing and implementing a **year-round programme** of events, festivals and cultural activities
- developing a **marketing, promotion and PR campaign**.

We recommend that appropriate delivery arrangements should be agreed case-by-case. However, the Paisley Vision Board should direct and monitor progress, assisted by a dedicated town centre team. The Board’s **key responsibilities** will be:

- developing a 5-year **business plan**
- **championing** the new vision
- working with the **private sector** to deliver development
- mobilising **public sector resources**
- ensuring that complementary **infrastructure, public realm and cultural projects** are delivered
- **performance management**.