

# New era beckons as plans for city centre set to be revealed

REGENERATION PROPOSALS AIM TO ENCOURAGE BUSINESSES BACK TO CENTRAL AREA

BY LAURA PATERSON

Council officials will reveal their vision for the future development of Inverness city centre next week.

A draft plan has been drawn up, which singles out Farraline Park as a possible area for the creation of a business district with a high-rise section, alongside student accommodation and a student union and dedicated coach parking.

The Glebe Street area is also being earmarked for development and is envisaged as a gateway to the city, landscaped with seating in a similar vein to the Ness islands.

The draft plan also proposes that night-time restaurants and bars could be set up in the Victorian Market with an open space being created in the middle of the market.

Other plans include the possibility of relocating the tourist office to the former public toilets building at Inverness Castle and office property at Bridge Street being redeveloped.

The brief outlines proposals to create an indoor tourist attraction in the town, with the library, Victorian Market, castle and town house identified as potential sites.

The plan highlights a lack of civic and green space in the city centre and proposes the creation of civic hubs in Castle Street and Bridge Street.

The draft scheme calls for sensitive redevelopment of underused listed buildings



NEW FUTURE: Inverness bus station at Farraline Park, which could be redeveloped into a business district. Photograph: David Whittaker-Smith

and properties along the riverside, with the possible creation of two-way cycle lanes from the Old Town to the river.

The brief states: "Translating these opportunities, many of which face significant challenges, into achiev-

able plans is crucial for the future of Inverness city centre.

"Establishing a new dedicated business district would help encourage business back and regenerate a core part of the city centre that has been slowly deteriorating over the

last decade. A student hub could form an important feature of the city centre, present an attractive prospect for developers and kickstart adjoining development opportunities."

Mike Smith, of Inverness Bid, said: "We think it is fun-

damental that there is this draft brief for the future of Inverness city centre. The city is the anchor of the Highlands and one of the major attractions. This is a framework on which to strengthen the city's economy and strengthen the city centre."

A report, by council director of planning and development director Stuart Black, set to go before the Inverness City Committee on Monday, recommends the draft plan is put to the planning, environment and development committee for approval.