

The Highland Council
Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee
23 September 2014

Agenda Item	7
Report No	CS/ 24/14

Caithness and Sutherland Tourism and Presentation from Venture North

Report by Director of Development & Infrastructure

SUMMARY

This report updates Members on the development of a Highland Tourism Action Plan and the Council's work with the North Highland Initiative. The report also provides some strategic context to accompany the presentation being given by Mrs Ellie Lamont of Venture North on their work to develop tourism in the Caithness and North Coast Sutherland area. The activities incorporated in the Highland Tourism Action Plan and those undertaken by the North Highland Initiative and Venture North all support the Council's commitment "*Working with the Scottish Government, Highlands & Islands Enterprise and private sector partners, the Council will maximise the tourism potential of the Highland area.*"

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Tourism is identified as one of Scotland's key growth sectors in the Government's Economic Strategy and is one of the most important industries for the Highlands with latest full year figures (2012) showing tourism to be worth £90m to the Caithness & Sutherland economy.

2. Tourism Strategies/Action Plans

- 2.1 In a report to this Committee on 18th November 2013, Members were informed that a new National Tourism Strategy "Tourism Scotland 2020" had been developed by the tourism industry and that further work was underway at a Highland level by the Highland Tourism Partnership to develop a Highland Tourism Action Plan.
- 2.2 The Highland Tourism Action Plan was completed in early 2014 and details a range of activities that members of the Highland Tourism Partnership will undertake in order to deliver the national strategy in the Highland area. The plan was presented to the Council's Planning, Environment and Development Committee on 12 February 2014 and approved, for the Council's interest, as the strategic document that outlines the priorities and activities that will be undertaken to grow tourism in the Highland area between 2014 and 2020. A copy of the Highland Tourism Action Plan is available at http://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/10940/highland_tourism_action_plan.
- 2.3 Following the presentation on Tourism to this Committee on 18th February 2013 members suggested the preparation of an action plan for Caithness & Sutherland in conjunction with the North Highland Initiative (NHI). However, in recognition of the fact that there were already both National and Highland plans in place and that NHI were developing a business plan for the wider Caithness, Sutherland & Ross & Cromarty area subsequent work has concentrated on detailing specific activities in the NHI business plan and in the Council's Service level agreement with NHI rather than producing a further action plan.

3. Working with Local Tourism industry groups

- 3.1 The North Highland Initiative has been considered by the Council to be the main Destination Management Organisation (DMO) for the Caithness & Sutherland area and, in keeping with the Council's agreed approach to supporting DMOs, the Council has entered into a Service Delivery Contract with NHI for 2014-15 which includes the Council contributing £10,000 of funding towards NHI activities. A summary of these activities being supported are included as Appendix 1.
- 3.2 Following the presentation to this Committee by the Chief Executive of NHI, the Committee agreed that a further meeting between Members and the Chief Executive of the North Highland Initiative be arranged to enable further discussion on opportunities to develop tourism in the area. This meeting took place on 7th August 2014 when Members were given more details of NHI projects, most notably the proposal to develop a touring route around the area – an initiative to which the Council plans to provide further support.
- 3.3 The other significant tourism group operating in the area is Venture North. With the decommissioning of Dounreay, Highlands & Islands Enterprise began working with partners to diversify the economy in Caithness and North Sutherland (Dounreay Travel to Work area). This work, which included the publication of the plan "Ambitious for Tourism - Caithness and North Sutherland", identified tourism as a sector with growth potential for the area. This in turn identified a need to bring together public and private businesses and encourage partnership working through a destination development approach, with an element of this being the formation of the industry-led group Venture North.
- 3.4 Venture North is a group of small businesses dedicated to growing the Tourism Sector for Caithness and Sutherland, drawn together in late 2012 through a project run by the Institute of Design Innovation, part of the Glasgow School of Art. The presentation to the Committee being given by Mrs Ellie Lamont of Venture North will detail how Venture North proposes to build a better tourism industry for the region by growing as a group, supporting one another and increasing collaboration.

4. Implications

- 4.1 There are no Resource, Legal, Equalities, Climate Change/Carbon Clever; Risk, Gaelic or Rural implications arising directly from this report.

5. Recommendation

- 5.1 The Committee is invited to note:
- i. the approach that has been taken to produce tourism strategies and agree actions to develop tourism across both the Highlands and the Caithness & Sutherland area;
 - ii. that the Council has entered into a service delivery contract with the North Highland Initiative to assist their work to develop tourism in the Caithness & Sutherland area;
 - iii. the presentation given by Venture North.

Designation: Director of Development & Infrastructure

Date: 2 September 2014

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Appendix 1: Activities detailed in the Service Delivery Contract with the North Highland Initiative for 2014-15

Under this agreement NHI Tourism has agreed to deliver the following services and projects for the benefit of tourism in the local area:-

Improving the tourism product

- Assist tourism businesses in accessing business development opportunities, sharing best practice, keeping up to date on tourism developments and accessing market intelligence and advice.
- Undertake a series of destination development projects including a North and West Highland touring route, the continued rollout of the dark skies initiative and seeking funding opportunities for the John o' Groats Mill project.
- Coordination of a "Wild North" festival.
- Coordination of the North Highland element of the wild flower Europe festival.
- Support the smaller scale initiatives of local tourism groups with administrative or project management support.

Marketing

- Continue destination marketing activity for the North Highland area, collaborating with VisitScotland, local groups and stakeholders to ensure coordinated activity. Activity will be as described in the Marketing communications plan.
- Management of a North Highlands website to promote the area.
- Undertake social media activity as per the Marketing communications plan to promote the North Highlands as a destination and to maintain visitor engagement with the area and its businesses.
- Undertake PR activity as per the Marketing communications plan - including issuing press releases about the area and, if required, assisting press trips.
- Promotion of local produce at events through the "Highland bothy".

Advocacy

- Continue to operate a North Highland Tourism Project Board that is representative of the different regions of the North Highlands
- Represent the interests of the local tourism industry on the Highland Tourism Partnership and, when appropriate, by engaging with other groups such as the Scottish Tourism Alliance and responding to consultations on proposals that might affect tourism. This will include cooperation with other Highland destinations on the proposed Highland area at VisitScotland Expo 2015.