

The Highland Council

Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee 19 August 2015

Agenda Item	13
Report No	PDI/ 51/15

Major Event Funding

Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure

Summary

This report makes recommendations on the provision of funding support to forthcoming major events.

1. Background

- 1.1 Events and festivals, and in particular major events, play a positive role in enhancing the image and economic and social prosperity of the Highland area. Events also offer an opportunity to bring new visitors to the area, to showcase the Highlands and its attractions, and highlight its distinctive features and culture.
- 1.2 At the meeting of this committee on 18 February 2015 Members agreed to proposals on the future use of the Highland Major Events Fund. This report also included a commitment that financial support for future events of this type would be the subject of a report brought to this Committee for approval. The following sections of this report provide further details and recommendations on funding for three forthcoming events.

2. UCI Mountain Bike World Cup, Fort William

- 2.1 Fort William has hosted a round of the UCI Mountain Bike World Cup every year since 2002 with the exception of 2007 when it hosted the (more significant) UCI Mountain Bike World Championships. Over that period the cumulative economic impact on the Lochaber economy of hosting the event has exceeded £30million with the impact of the most recent event in June 2015 being £2.8m. Total spectator numbers continue to show an upward trend with attendance of 19,566 in 2015 despite very challenging weather conditions.
- 2.2 Whilst the UCI Mountain Bike World Cup in Fort William is one of a global circuit of events each local organiser is responsible for most aspects of the local event and crucially is responsible for attracting the funding to enable the event to proceed in that location. This includes a fee to UCI (who are the world governing body for cycling). The Fort William event has been and continues to be managed by a Scottish company, Rare Management Ltd who propose to bid for the rights to host the event for a further three year period. Bearing in mind the increased competition from other potential venues seeking to host an event, a three year agreement is preferred as this both secures the event and

gives savings with both costs and effort when compared to three separate annual bids.

- 2.3 As mentioned above the 2015 event faced some very challenging weather conditions which led to all the downhill racing being moved to the Sunday although other parts of the event such as the 4 cross races did still take place on the Saturday. To an extent some improvements to the existing infrastructure - for example to allow vehicles rather than the gondola for carrying bikes up the mountain, could allow a shortened course to be used were such weather conditions to arise again in future. Discussions on this are under way with both Nevis Range and other public sector partners but clearly an agreement that would secure the event for a three year period increases the justification for making such an investment.
- 2.4 The Highland Council has provided annual funding of £25,000 towards the event and it is proposed that this level of funding be continued for 2016/17. However, in recognition of the pressures on the Council budget it is recommended that negotiations on the level of future years' contributions are undertaken on the basis of reduced funding for subsequent years' events

3. Aberdeen Asset Management Scottish Open, Castle Stuart

- 3.1 The Scottish Open Golf Championships were first held at Castle Stuart golf course, Inverness in 2011 and returned in 2012 and 2013. The event has drawn crowds of up to 65,000 in 2013 while studies undertaken into the economic impact of the event showed expenditure of £2.7m in the immediate area and a further 200,000 elsewhere in the Highlands as well as attracting substantial international media coverage.
- 3.2 Since 2014 a three year agreement with the title sponsors Aberdeen Asset management has seen the event move to locations in the east and west of Scotland in 2014 & 2015 before returning to Inverness in 2016.
- 3.3 To date there have been no formal discussions with the European Tour, organiser of the Scottish Open but discussions with the national events agency EventScotland have suggested that these will commence shortly and are likely to be based around a partnership approach to securing the event similar to that in place when the event was previously held in Inverness. Initially this saw three agencies – EventScotland, Highlands & Islands Enterprise and the Highland Council contribute £33k each to secure the event but subsequent EventScotland support saw funding for this event rolled into a substantially larger package of funding that also included supporting events such as the Ryder Cup in 2014 and the British Open in 2015.
- 3.4 It is anticipated that a similar level of support will be sought from the Council for 2016 so it is recommended that the Council agree to contribute up to £33k from the Major Events Budget to support the 2016 event.
- 3.5 The European Tour also organise another gold event in the Highland area – the SSE Scottish Hydro Challenge at Spey Valley Golf Club in Aviemore. This

event which is part of the European Challenge Tour from which the top ranked golfers progress to the professional golf circuit takes place in late June each year and will return again in 2016. Whilst directly funding this event is not currently under consideration the proximity of this event both geographically and by time of year would suggest the Council should encourage the European Tour to improve the level of collaboration between the two events. When funding an event, the Council enters into a contract with the organisers that specifies services that the event should deliver for the benefit of the Highlands and the contract for funding towards the Scottish open Golf Championships should include a requirement to improve this collaboration.

4. Implications

- 4.1 Resources – the recommended funding awards would fully utilise all funds in the anticipated major Events budget for 2016/17. Future recommendations which include reduced funding to the Mountain Bike World Cup can be accommodated from anticipated Development & Infrastructure Service budgets in 2017/18 and 2018/19.
- 4.2 There are no Legal; Equalities; Climate Change/Carbon Clever; Risk, Gaelic and Rural implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to approve funding allocations from the Highland Major Events Fund up to the amounts detailed in sections 2.4 and 3.4 of this report.

Designation: Director of Development & Infrastructure

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