

**The Highland Council  
City of Inverness Area Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Inverness City Arts Working Group** held in the First Floor Committee Room, Town House, Inverness on Thursday 14 April 2016 at 9.00 am.

**Present:**

Mrs H Carmichael  
Mr K Gowans  
Mrs B McAllister  
Mr T Prag  
Mr G Ross

**In attendance:**

Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager  
Mr J Kelman, Principal Project Manager, Development and Infrastructure Service  
Ms N Drummond, Team Leader, Development and Infrastructure Service  
Ms C Shankland, Exhibitions Officer, High Life Highland  
Mr S Carr, Principal Policy Officer, Chief Executive's Office  
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Corporate Development Service

**Mr K Gowans in the Chair**

**Business**

**1. Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

The Working Group **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 5 – Mr K Gowans (financial and non-financial) and Mr G Ross (non-financial)  
Item 6 - Mr K Gowans (financial) and Mr G Ross (non-financial)

**3. Exclusion of the Public**

The Working Group **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50(A) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public should be excluded from the meeting during discussion of the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

**4. Action from Previous Minutes**

There had been circulated Minutes of the Working Group held on 11 February 2016.

The Working Group **NOTED** the Minutes.

## 5. River Ness Flood Alleviation Scheme Public Art Project – Public Consultation – Responses and Options

### Declaration of Interest:

**Mr K Gowans declared a financial interest in the Children’s Feature project on the grounds of being an employee of the University of the Highlands and Islands and a non-financial interest as a member of the Ness Fisheries Board but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that his interests did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

**Mr G Ross declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds of having a close relative who was a local artist, but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No ICArts/4/16 dated 7 April 2016 by the Inverness City Area Manager which detailed the responses received to the Public Consultation which was undertaken between 23 January and 29 February 2016. Options were also provided on how to move the Project Programme forward.

Prior to discussion, a presentation was provided analysing the 445 responses received. In particular, it was highlighted that those who completed a hard copy of the survey were generally more positive in their feedback than those who completed the survey online. Furthermore, the conditions of the grants received from Creative Scotland and Highlands and Islands Enterprise were drawn to Members’ attention and Members were reminded that this funding had been given with the primary focus centring on the Gathering Place. Any deviation from this would require these bodies to review the proposal and how they could support the Art Project.

Members were offered potential options, together with an analysis of benefits and risks, as follows:-

Option A – Retain all the projects and proceed with delivery of all

Option B – Proceed with the Project Programme with the exception of the Gathering Place

Option C – Proceed with the Project Programme with the proviso that an extra stage was built into the consultation process in respect of the Gathering Place

Option D – Same as Option C with the addition of a contemporaneous reconsideration of other possible sites with the proviso that funders’ agreement was sought to location of the Gathering Place outwith the immediate City centre

Option E – Proceed with project programme with the exception of the Tilting Pier concept, subject to the agreement of external funding partners. Re-visit project proposals for the Gathering Place in line with financial regulations and Contract Standing Orders

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- the clear distinction between the two types of responses was marked with those submitted electronically being predominantly negative. It was believed that these had been influenced by the negative social media surrounding the proposal. Surveys generally attracted polarised views as opposed to “vox pop” approaches and when face-to-face methods had been used during the exhibition at the Eastgate Centre comments had been more favourable;
- there had also been concerns around design, cost and maintenance and, while these issues could be addressed, there was a question about how this could be communicated. Given the majority of concerns related to costs, it was likely that these would remain regardless of the location. Concerns surrounding financing such a project were to be expected in the current economic climate;
- the strength of feeling of Community Councils affected by the Gathering Place was significant and it was important cognisance was taken of this;
- generally public opinion was not in favour of the project and this would be difficult to overcome. In particular, the Tilting Pier element had proved to be controversial and it might remain unpopular wherever it was located;
- the consequences of dropping the Gathering Place entirely were significant and to do so at this stage would not be appropriate as it might put funding of the entire Public Art Project in jeopardy;
- relocating the Gathering Place elsewhere was considered. It was accepted Friars Shott was not a suitable location but, in considering alternatives, it was important to take into account the impact the project would have on residents in terms of amenity and privacy and that it should not have any detrimental effect on the flood alleviation work. The artist too should be asked as to what the criteria they envisaged the Gathering Place (Tilting Pier) required as this would impact on the choice of location;
- in considering potential alternatives there was a real danger that some of these, while suitable for such a project, would attract more concerns;
- if the option of creating a focus group was pursued, the outcome might be that there was no suitable location for the Gathering Place/Tilting Pier along the riverside. However, it was inappropriate to reject the concept of the Tilting Pier solely on the outcome of the survey. While taking cognisance of its outcome, the issues needed to be examined in greater detail;
- if there was no alternative location, it would be feasible for the Gathering Place project to be reviewed. Funders would be consulted and hopefully recognise that the Council had taken into consideration all factors;
- the focus group should also consider the cost consequences of rejecting the Project;
- if it was decided to progress with the Gathering Place, regardless of exploring alternatives, it would give the impression that the Council was not listening to public opinion and this would undermine any new project. The establishment of a focus group would safeguard the Council’s reputation in this regard;
- the focus group should involve all key community representatives. In consideration of its membership the view was it should involve:-
  - the Chair and Vice Chair of the Working Group
  - the Provost and Leader of Inverness and Area
  - the Lead Artist
  - a member of the Artist Evaluation Panel
  - a representative from the Artists
  - a representative from the Inverness City Heritage Trust
  - a representative from both the Inverness BID and Inverness Tourism BID
  - a representative from both the Planning and Project teams

- Community Councils would be consulted if and when the focus group identified alternative possible locations. If there were others the focus group felt they needed to consult then it would be appropriate for them to be involved;
- the artist had not been involved in the consultation to date. As they would now be part of the focus group it would provide an opportunity for them to meet people with concerns about the design/content of the project. Local Members would also be kept apprised;
- the focus group should meet quickly and concluded its deliberations within a 4-6 week timescale. The costs of establishing the focus group was minimal in relation to dropping the concept of the Tilting Pier at this stage in terms of fees etc;
- there was a danger if the Gathering Place Brief was changed too much, in an attempt to make it acceptable to all, what would be left would be bland. Public art tended to be controversial given its modern and contemporary nature and the focus group would therefore have to take into consideration how much the project could be varied and if the artist could amend the concept suitable to other alternative sites etc. The Working Group were still committed to delivering an ambitious project even if this element was withdrawn/amended; and
- while the Gathering Place project was aimed at both improving amenity for residents and tourists, it was important that it met the needs of the local population who would live with this Art Project all year round.

Thereafter, Mr Carr and Ms Drummond having been thanked for their advice, the Working Group:-

- NOTED** the results of the Public Consultation as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report;
- NOTED** the arrangements for governance in place and that the process to date was within the powers delegated to the ICArts Working Group;
- AGREED** to instruct the Inverness City Area Manager to proceed with Option D, as detailed within the report with the membership of the focus group being amended as per discussion;
- AGREED** that the focus group meet as soon as possible and conclude its deliberations within 4-6 weeks;
- AGREED** that the Working Group being kept informed of progress; and
- NOTED** that appropriate Public Relations messages would be drafted in line with the agreed Protocol.

## 6. River Ness Flood Alleviation Scheme Public Art Project

### Declaration of Interest:

**Mr K Gowans declared a financial interest in the Children's Feature project on the grounds of being an employee of the University of the Highlands and Islands but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

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There had been circulated Report No ICArts/5/16 dated 7 April 2016 by the Inverness City Area Manager which highlighted the progress made since the last meeting in respect of the River Connections and the next steps planned for Community Engagement and project progress.

### **Sculptural Destination**

The artist had visited the proposed location and, subject to litter bins being relocated, was satisfied that the site was still suitable. It had been feared that a box storing a pump, installed as part of the Flood Prevention works, would cause a problem but the box had been painted black and was now less conspicuous. As a result, work could now commence in relation to the making of the necessary casts.

### **Children's Feature**

Following publication of the Brief, 7 expressions of interest had been received. The Evaluation Panel had narrowed these down to 3 and would shortly be considering them in more detail with a view to making a recommendation to the Working Group. Student engagement was an important part of the project and students had visited Inverness Museum where the project was explained. The students had been enthusiastic about the project and had indicated a willingness to shadow the work of the Evaluation Panel and to understand the selection process.

In discussion, it was suggested that the Focus Group set up to consider the Gathering Place and Tilting Bridge could also be used at some point in the future to look at potential locations for this art work.

### **River Connections**

It was hoped this project would be completed and installed by the end of April. The artist's work was commended and, as it would be well received; Members suggested that it also offered a good opportunity to generate some positive PR.

Generally, as most of the projects had been put on hold until the outcome of the consultation regarding the Gathering Place, it would be necessary to re-evaluate the programme, from a programme management perspective. Once completed the revised programme would be re-circulated to the Working Group. In response to questions regarding costings, it was confirmed that all were within budget and if any underspends arose they would be used as contingency funding or to augment other projects.

The Working Group **NOTED:-**

- i. the development work being undertaken on all projects; and
- ii. the need for Maintenance Plans and that a draft composite plan together with options for meeting any maintenance costs would be provided as soon as possible once the detailed design phase was concluded.

## **7. Financial Monitoring**

There had been circulated Report No ICArts/6/16 dated 6 April 2016 by the Inverness City Area Manager which set out the revenue monitoring position for the period to 29 February 2016 and showed the actual expenditure to date.

The Working Group **NOTED** the content of the report.

## 8. Press Relations and Forthcoming PR Opportunities and Risks

Members were provided with a verbal review of the PR to date and media opportunities.

In discussion, there was a consensus that the outcome of the consultation should be made available on the Council's website. In this connection, it was important to point out the variances of the responses received online compared to those returning a paper survey. On a positive note, there was also an opportunity to promote the seating element of the River Connection project which was to be installed imminently.

The Working Group:-

- i. **NOTED** the position;
- ii. **AGREED** to a Press Release outlining the Working Group's deliberations regarding the Gathering Place and the Tilting Pier at Friar's Shott and the installation of the seating element of the River Connections Project; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the outcome of the consultation be made available on the Council's website.

## 9. Nessie – on the Ness Islands

Members were informed that approximately 10 years ago a fallen log was transformed by a local artist on the left bank of the North Island. 'Nessie' had become a feature often climbed on by Children. Unfortunately, rot had set in and the log was now no longer safe for climbing. It was also damming up the River and was contributing to erosion of the River Bank.

The Working Group:-

- i. **NOTED** the position; and
- ii. **AGREED** to consider a "Nessie" replacement as part of the River Connections Project Programme.

## 10. Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group **NOTED** that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday 22 April 2016 at 9.00 am.

The meeting concluded at 11.20 am.