

Agenda Item	<b>11</b>
Report No	<b>RC/030/16</b>

**Invergordon Brownfield Regeneration**

**Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure**

**Summary**

The Report updates members on Vacant and Derelict Land Fund (VDLF) brownfield regeneration activity in Invergordon and outlines future proposals.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 Previously used land, often referred to as brownfield land, is land that was developed but is now vacant or derelict or land currently in use with known potential for redevelopment. Such land may previously have been subject to a use which has resulted in land contamination and can be located within both urban and rural areas (Highland Wide Local Development Plan, April 2012).
- 1.2 Invergordon has a number of prominent brownfield sites within the settlement boundary:
1. Seabank Tank Farm
  2. Cromlet
  3. Former Railway Sidings
  4. Former Victoria Garage
- 1.3 In recognition of the volume of brownfield land within the Highland Council area and the prohibitive costs associated with its development, the Scottish Government has awarded the Council (along with four other local authorities) an annual grant since 2008 in an effort to:
- Tackle long term vacant and derelict land.
  - Stimulate economic growth and job creation.
  - Develop a diverse sustainable environment with a focus on either permanent or temporary greenspace.
- 1.4 Unfortunately 2015/16 was the last year the Council received the VDLF grant due to a strategic review of the Fund by the Scottish Government, COSLA and a local authority working group. In the eight years of benefitting from the VDLF, the Council has made significant progress in moving forward the four key brownfield sites in Invergordon.

The following paragraphs provide a short update on each of the four key brownfield sites in the town:

## **2. Seabank Tank Farm**

- 2.1 In March 2011, Drivers Jonas Deloitte completed an options appraisal and remediation strategy for the site. The options appraisal explained that there was no one preferred end use for the site. At that time, the uncertainty in all market sectors, but particularly residential and storage and distribution sector made it difficult to say with any certainty which uses or uses would be viable in Invergordon and particularly on the Seabank site in the short to medium term (< 5 years).
- 2.2 In addition to the lack of market interest in the site, remediation costs were estimated to be anything between £1.3m and £3.6m.
- 2.3 Since commissioning the study, there has been positive economic growth in Easter Ross with the reopening of Nigg and the expansion of the Invergordon Service Base. As a result of this activity, the Council obtained Scottish Government approval in 2015/16 to invest additional VDLF monies to refresh the options appraisal and undertake exploratory work pertaining to the removal of the tanks. The possibility of a demonstration area was also agreed which would involve the demolition of 4 tanks and the planting of trees or bioremediation. The planting of trees are known to be effective at stabilising contaminated land by reducing soil erosion and off-site particulate migration. They can also promote the microbial breakdown of many organic contaminants, thereby reducing the transfer of contamination and potential exposure to humans and the environment.
- 2.4 Unfortunately the landowner did not respond to correspondence regarding the aforementioned proposal and therefore it was not possible to award a VDLF grant by the 31 March 2016 deadline. The Council remains committed to advancing the project and is actively seeking to secure permission from the Scottish Government to carry over the Seabank allocation into 2016/17. Every effort will be made to engage with the landowner to take advantage of this opportunity. As the Council is no longer the recipient of the VDLF grant it is anticipated that the Scottish Government will be keen to see the grant invested in a timeous fashion.

## **3. Cromlet**

- 3.1 This site has a protracted history that predates the VDLF. However the availability of the VDLF provided an opportunity for the Council to proactively engage with the landowner with a view to better understanding the ground conditions of the site and moving it towards a developable site.
- 3.2 The Council first obtained Scottish Government approval to invest VDLF in the site in 2012/13. Due to a lack of progress on the landowner's part it was necessary to obtain Scottish Government permission to carry over the allocation into 2013/14 and 2014/15. Early in 2015 a generous grant offer was made to the landowner to undertake Phase II Intrusive Site Investigations (strategy commissioned by the Council and has been accepted by SEPA and the Council's Contaminated Land Unit) which is necessary to inform any

future planning application. Regrettably this offer was declined and it was necessary to reallocate the budget elsewhere. Council Officers remain in contact with the landowner and continue to explore ways forward.

#### **4. Former Railway Sidings**

- 4.1 This site formed part of the Council's 2011/12 VDLF Delivery Plan and an indicative budget allocated to assist the Cromarty Firth Port Authority (CFPA) with demolition works and intrusive site investigations.
- 4.2 Whilst no formal offer of grant was made to the CFPA the site clearance works were implemented regardless. Therefore the site is in a more developable state now and a greater knowledge of the ground conditions obtained which will assist in any future redevelopment.

#### **5. Former Victoria Garage**

- 5.1 The former Victoria Garage site was an approved 2008-11 VDLF substitute project and also an approved 2013/14 VDLF project. Unfortunately the project did not proceed in the 2008-11 delivery plan period as the landowner decided against selling the site to the Council at a very late stage of the transaction. In December 2012 the landowner indicated that they were receptive to an approach from the Council to acquire the site. However, dialogue stalled during the 2013-14 delivery plan period. The Scottish Government again approved the project in 2015 and in March last year the site was purchased by the Council using VDLF.
- 5.2 In February 2016, planning permission was granted for the erection of 3 houses and 16 flats, including 4 wheelchair accessible houses.

#### **6. Implications**

- 6.1 **Resource:** As the VDLF is grant funding from the Scottish Government there are no resource implications for the Council albeit if the full VDLF allocation is not utilised, any unspent funds may require to be returned to the Scottish Government.
- 6.2 **Equality:** Equality issues are considered for each project as an integral part of the project management process.
- 6.3 **Rural Impact:** There are no rural implications arising from this report.
- 6.4 **Risk:** Risk implications vary due to the wide range of projects undertaken and consideration of risk is an integral part of the project management process. There are no specific concerns regarding VDLF projects. If significant risks are foreseen, these are reported to Senior Management for inclusion as appropriate in the Service Risk Register.

6.5 **Legal, Climate Change/Carbon Clever:** Issues are currently addressed as required as an integral part of the project management process.

**Recommendation**

The Committee is asked to note progress on Vacant and Derelict Land Fund (VDLF) brownfield regeneration activity in Invergordon.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

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