

Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Tourism Working Group** held in the Leader's Meeting Room, Council Headquarters, Inverness on Wednesday 18 April 2018 at 10.30 am.

Present

Mr Bill Lobban (Chairman)
Mr Gordon Adam
Mr Allan Henderson

Mr Duncan Macpherson
Ms Maxine Smith

Officials in attendance

Mr C Simpson, Principal Tourism & Film Officer, Development & Infrastructure, Highland Council

Ms C Pittendreich, Graduate Film and Tourism Officer, Development & Infrastructure, Highland Council

Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Service, Highland Council

MR B LOBBAN IN THE CHAIR

BUSINESS

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Dr I Cockburn, Mr C Fraser, and Mr J Gordon.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

There had been circulated Minutes of the last meeting held on 14 March 2018, the terms of which had been **APPROVED**.

4. Highland Council Tourism Action Plan

There had been circulated Report No TWG/03/18 dated 10 April 2018 by the Director of Development & Infrastructure which presented the Highland Council Tourism Action Plan for approval. The Plan described the tourism activities to be delivered by the Council or which required support from the Council and aimed to assist in improving locations and services currently under pressure from high volumes of visitors thus improving the visitor experience and supporting the tourism economy.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Concern was expressed regarding Action 3, which suggested a policy of removing waste bins and encouraging members of the public to take their waste away with them to dispose of responsibly, as it was felt that this

approach was not successful. It was suggested that it would be more effective to address littering by providing closed topped bins, which deterred fly tipping, and enabled waste to be disposed of. The Principal Tourism & Film Officer indicated that he would review the wording in regard to this action;

- Ms Smith informed the Working Group that she was currently in the process of seeking permission from Transport Scotland to have signs erected on the A9 within the Ross and Cromarty area advising of how many bins were emptied and the cost of this in a bid to reduce littering. She suggested that this initiative could be used as a pilot project and if successful could then be rolled out across the Highlands trunk road network;
- It was highlighted that visitor attractions normally closed at 5.00 pm and it was felt that they should be encouraged to extend their opening hours to later, e.g. 8.00 pm; and
- The potential benefits of a tourist tax were highlighted and it was also indicated that there was support for this from a number of industry representatives. Therefore, it was essential that the Working Group considered this concept in full and it was explained that it had been agreed at the last meeting that a report on this matter would be submitted to a future meeting.

Following discussion, the Working Group **APPROVED** the draft Highland Council Tourism Action Plan subject to Action 3 being reworded and VisitScotland being asked to encourage visitor attractions to extend their opening hours into early evening.

5. Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund

There is circulated Report No TWG/04/18 dated 10 April 2018 by the Director of Development & Infrastructure which explained the background to the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. This fund was expected to be used to support the delivery of Highland tourism projects including those in the Highland Council Tourism Action Plan and details of the application process and criteria had been appended to the report.

During a presentation, the Principal Tourism & Film Officer gave a brief overview of the Fund and application process and he explained that following a consultation process a list of potential projects had been collated and sorted into three main categories, namely suitable to proceed to the first stage Expression of Interest; potential project for Phase 2 of the application process; and project rejected as was not suitable/eligible and he went through these in detail. In doing so, he drew particular attention to the projects that best fitted the criteria, of which there were seven (car parking at Fort Augustus; car parking at Drumnadrochit; campervan facilities at Assynt; toilet and motorhome facilities at Mallaig/Morar/Arisaig; car parking at Glenfinnan; road enhancement at Bealach na Ba; and car/motorhome parking at Suidhe Viewpoint) and recommended that these be submitted as an Expression Interest (Stage 1) prior to the closing date of 27 April 2018. The Principal Tourism & Film Officer advised that there were a number of further projects yet to be added to the list, including the response to the consultation from the Skye wards.

During discussion, the following key points were raised:-

- Disappointment was expressed at the lack of response to the consultation from Community Councils and Ward Managers in some areas and Members raised a number of other potential projects, including car parking for cruise coaching at Invergordon and increased parking at Clava Cairns, Inverness and requested that these be added to the list for future consideration;
- It was also requested that the provision of toilet and waste disposal services located on the North Coast 500 and the footpath from the car park to visit the Standing Stones and viaduct at Clava be submitted as an Expression of Interest;
- It was highlighted that the timescale for submission of Expressions of Interest was very tight therefore it was important that projects were ragged to ensure the projects with the best chance of success were submitted. It was further indicated that it was important that projects were located across the whole of the Highland region and not clustered in one or two wards;
- Responding to a question, it was confirmed that two projects in Skye had already received funding of £100,000 as part of a Scottish Government pilot project for the fund and on this basis it was felt that there were other areas/projects within the Council that should be prioritised; and
- It was recommended that the project list should be updated and emailed to the Working Group to approve the final list of projects to be submitted as an Expression of Interest prior to the closing date of 27 April 2018.

Prior to concluding discussion, the Principal Tourism & Film Officer advised that following advertisement, 11 applications had been received in respect of the Tourism Project Co-ordinator post which would replace the Graduate Film and Tourism Officer post currently held by Ms Pittendreigh at the end of May 2018. On behalf of the Group, the Chairman expressed appreciation to Ms Pittendreigh for all her support and wished her well with her future career. It was suggested that a Press Release should be issued once a successful candidate had been appointed to the new post of Tourism Project Co-ordinator.

Following discussion, the Working Group:-

- i. **NOTED** details of the Scottish Government's recently announced Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund which the Council intended bidding to in order to support delivery of Highland tourism projects;
- ii. **NOTED** the approach taken to prioritise activities to be included in an Expression of Interest and subsequent application to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the project list be updated and ragged accordingly to incorporate the aforementioned suggestions made by Members and to include the response from the Skye wards. Once updated, the project list should be emailed to the Working Group to approve the final list of projects to be submitted as an Expression of Interest prior to the closing date of 27 April 2018.

6. Marine Tourism Opportunities

The Principal Tourism & Film Officer gave a presentation on Marine Tourism opportunities during which he made reference to a strategy “Awakening the Giant” which was a framework for developing Scotland’s marine tourism sector. He explained that the vision was very closely aligned with the national tourism strategy and their vision was to increase the value of the marine tourism sector to over £450m by 2020. Continuing the presentation, he outlined the key markets and marketing strategy; outlined the cruising areas; explained the three core themes, namely providing authentic experiences, improving the customer journey, and building our capabilities that would be used to deliver the vision and mission.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Working Group welcomed the presentation and noted the opportunities that marine tourism presented;
- it had previously been suggested that a marine route should be developed similar to that of the North Coast 500, and although welcome, it was highlighted that this would require capital investment;
- it was highlighted that the level of spend by marine tourists was high and that this valuable spend normally occurred in remote and rural areas;
- there was a need for VisitScotland to ensure that cruising areas and potential routes, which needed to be strategic but not necessarily far apart in distance, i.e. could be sailed to within one day, were fully promoted; and
- marine tourists strategically planned their sailing routes and travelled to destinations based on the facilities they provided. Therefore, there was a need for strategic investment to ensure that essential onshore facilities were provided.

At this point, Ms M Smith left the meeting (11.55 am).

The Working Group **NOTED** the presentation.

7. Any Other Business

Mr MacPherson advised that he had received a number of approaches from local tourist providers and he sought advice on what was their best method of engagement for their tourism matters. It was explained that the Tourism Working Group was not the correct forum for this and it was suggested that the tourist providers should consult with their local Destination Management Organisation and that commercial advice could also be provided through Business Gateway. The Principal Tourism & Film Officer advised that he could provide further advice on this outwith the meeting.

The Working Group **NOTED** the position.

8. Future Meetings

The Working Group **AGREED** that meetings for the remainder of the year be scheduled as follows:-

- June
- September
- December

The meeting was closed at 12.05 pm.