

Agenda Item	6
Report No	N/8/18

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Nairnshire Committee

Date: 13 June 2018

Report Title: Nairn Links Scoping Report

Report By: Inverness City Area Manager

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report presents the Nairn Links Scoping Report which outlines options for the future of the Nairn Links. Members are asked to note and consider the contents of the report, including the background and work carried out to date on key projects, and in particular to agree the next steps for carrying out public consultation on future uses and opportunities for the Nairn Links.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. Consider the contents of the Scoping Report enclosed at Appendix A.
 - ii. Agree the proposal to take forward a consultation on the future development of the Links in August 2018.
 - iii. Agree that further reports be brought back to Area Committee as required and that a final plan is ready consideration by the end of 2018 / 19.

3 Introduction

- 3.1 The Nairn Links is an asset of the Nairn Common Good Fund (NCGF). The Links is held on the account of the NCGF and is managed by the Council on behalf of the Fund. The Council has a duty to ensure that Fund assets are managed efficiently and effectively.
- 3.2 Nairn Members have therefore prioritised the management of the NCGF in the Local Strategic Priorities which are also being discussed on this agenda.

4 Background

- 4.1 Discussion on the management and development of the Links area came to the fore in 2016 when Highlife Highland, who operate the paddling pool through a management agreement, advised the NCGF of the need for significant repairs to keep the pool open.

Over the years the structure of the pool has deteriorated, has required costly repairs and has also been subject to vandalism, all of which have led to interruptions to its operation. Members agreed to approve the repairs cost, but given the recognition that the paddling pool was essentially coming to the end of its operational life and that the repairs put in place (barring the unforeseen) would keep it in operation for two to three years, something had to be done. A Stage 1 briefing was provided to Members.

- 4.2 An Options Appraisal and Consultation were then commissioned in 2017 and the results of this work are set out in the Stage 2 report attached at Appendix B. However what also emerged from the consultation process was that in addition to the need to determine the future of water play at the Links, revitalising the broader Links area was equally a key priority.
- 4.3 Therefore instead of any decisions on the future of water play being made in isolation, Members agreed that it would be prudent to commission a Scoping Report to give an overview of the whole Links area and to outline a way forward. Sandy Anderson was engaged to carry out this assessment and a draft report was considered by Members February with the final draft being brought forward in May 18 – attached as Appendix A
- 4.4 In addition to consideration of the future of the paddling pool site, the Scoping report highlights current use of the Links and context to the town, the management and sustainability of the Links, potential developments and what the options are for a planned approach and creation of a decision making framework in the context of a development plan to:
- create a framework for individual projects on the Links by the NCGF and third parties
 - promote the integration of the Links with the town
 - build on the special nature of the area
 - add to the historic value of the Links to Nairn as a visitor destination
 - fit within the Common Good Fund's financial parameters and the plans of potential partners

5 Proposal

- 5.1 Having considered the Scoping Report Members are keen to advance the consultation process to further consider and explore options for each part of the Links, and to plan for this consultation to take place in August 2018.

5.2 Provision was made for Project Development in setting the NCGF budget for 2018 / 19 and it is proposed to utilise this budget to support the consultation process. Item 5.6 [file:///C:/Users/lizc/Downloads/Item 5 Nairn Common Good Fund Budget Setting for 2018 19 and Quarter 3 Monitoring Report%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/lizc/Downloads/Item 5 Nairn Common Good Fund Budget Setting for 2018 19 and Quarter 3 Monitoring Report%20(1).pdf) refers.

5.3 In this the Year of Young People, Members would look to involve local schools and youth groups. Key stakeholders and local groups, including Team Hamish, will also be an important part of the consultation process to ensure that all views are gathered and fairly reflected in a final plan.

6 Next Steps

6.1 The next steps for this work are highlighted in paragraph 6.4 of the Scoping Report and are outlined below:

- further developing the framework outlined in the scoping study
- carrying out consultation on the framework with stakeholders and potential partners
- further developing specific projects mentioned in the framework which might be led by the NCGF, such as the water feature play area
- carry out public consultation e.g. through workshops
- producing estimates for the costs of the initial projects
- producing an implementation plan which sets out phasing, timing and potential funding of the initial projects

6.2 Subject to Members approval of the next steps it is proposed to prepare a brief for a public consultation process to be undertaken on behalf of the NCGF and led by an independent facilitator. Support, specialist advice and guidance will be sought by the NCGF from Council officers as and when necessary, including the Planning and Environment Team and Community Services.

6.3 The process will be overseen by the Ward Manager with support from such officers on the feasibility, delivery and maintenance of options generated from public consultation.

7 Implications

7.1 Resource – There will be resource impacts including staff time. Project development costs have already been budgeted for as outlined at 5.2 above. The activities referred to above have been and will be essential in building Business Case(s) for delivering on any Action Plan which may be developed. The budget implications for the NCGF will be a primary consideration and once approved, the expenditure will continue to be reported to the Nairnshire Committee.

Legal – The Council will meet all its legal obligations under the terms of any contracts agreed and will comply with the Councils Financial Regulations and Contract Standing Orders.

Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – No implications

Climate Change / Carbon Clever – Opportunity to align with the Council's policies

Risk – No implication

Gaelic – No implications

Designation: Inverness City Area Manager

Date: 31 May 2018

Author: Liz Cowie, Ward Manager, Nairn and Badenoch & Strathspey

Background Papers: Appendix 1 – Nairn Links Scoping report Updated May 18
Appendix 2 – Paddling Pool Stage 2 Report December 17

Nairn Links



Source: Highland Council

Scoping report for Nairn Common Good Fund

February 2018
(updated May 2018)

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1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 This report has been commissioned to follow on from consideration of the future of the Nairn Paddling Pool site, including an options appraisal and a consultation exercise that took place through the summer of 2017. It addresses broader issues regarding how the paddling pool site fits into the Links and the future management and development of that wider area.
- 1.2 Various facilities are provided on the Links. These include children's play equipment, a paddling pool, an outdoor gym, a putting green, bandstand, cafés, toilets and car parking. Development at the Links has been organic, responding to opportunity and funding availability without relating to an overall vision or plan for the area. As a result there is a perceived lack of cohesion and a lack of any framework within which potential developments can be assessed. Opportunities to improve the area through comprehensive or staged development may be missed.
- 1.3 Proposals for the regeneration of the adjacent harbour area are being considered and the Common Good Fund is keen to explore the possibility of a complementary development plan for the Links. As an initial step it has commissioned this scoping study to look at the key issues involved in developing such a plan. The scoping study has largely been a desk exercise, with consultation limited to key stakeholders. It is expected that full consultation would be held at the next stage of plan development.
- 1.4 The scoping study aims to set out an outline framework for a future plan for development of the Links. It aims to:
- set the context of the Links and their importance to the town
 - review land ownership
 - state the rationale for a development plan
 - identify stakeholders to be consulted
 - outline current uses of the Links
 - review proposed developments in the area
 - identify the potential for additional income earning opportunities
 - report on initial consultation with key stakeholders
 - identify and explore preliminary options for a planned approach to future development
 - explore how the Links might be sustainable into the future, financially and physically
 - explore how the Links might add value to the Common Good Fund
 - set out the steps required to take forward a plan for the Links.
- 1.5 Findings will be reported back to the Nairn Ward Councillors at a Ward Business Meeting for consideration, review and agreement on next steps.

2. Context

- 2.1 Nairn Links is a large area of land between the town of Nairn and its Central Beach, with a row of cottages dividing it between the West Links and the central area. The West Links extend as far as the Nairn Leisure Centre, while to the east is the harbour at the mouth of the River Nairn and, beyond it, the East Beach, Lochloy Holiday Park and an area known as the Maggot leading on to the Culbin Forest and RSPB reserve.
- 2.2 The Links are in the ownership of the Nairn Common Good Fund. They are an important feature of Nairn's attraction as a tourist destination, provide local people with green space and leisure facilities and are home to Nairn Cricket Club, the Nairn Highland Games and other outdoor events. Part of the Links, from the car park to the harbour, is in the Fishertown Conservation Area.
- 2.3 The area is an important component of the green space in and around Nairn, as shown in the image below.



Source: Viewfield, Nairn - Policy Paper, Highland Council 2006.

- 2.4 With a population of 9,773 (2011 Census) the town of Nairn is the third largest settlement in the Highland Council area, behind only Inverness and Fort William. Nairnshire as a whole had an estimated population of 12,954 in 2013. The town has been a popular family holiday destination since Victorian times and its beach, seafront

- and links have been a large part of its appeal. At one time it became known as the Brighton of the North thanks to its claim to be the driest and sunniest part of Scotland and this reputation has continued to today.
- 2.5 Although family holidays by the British seaside are less popular now, tourism is still an important part of the town's economy, and the Links continue to play their part along with the town's reputation as a golfing destination. VisitNairn, the local destination management website, introduces the town by saying: *Nairn's greatest asset is its marvellous sandy beach and makes for the perfect family holiday: sand castles, promenade walks, putting green, leisure park and swimming pool along with wonderful views and a chance to see the famous Moray Firth dolphins.*
- 2.6 According to the Nairn Community Town Centre Plan, Nairn has 10 hotels and 28 B&B's and Guest Houses. There is also a large holiday park set by the East Beach, across the harbour and River Nairn, on land leased from the Common Good Fund. This has a range facilities for guests, including an entertainment area and a pool. The 2011 Census showed 12.2% of jobs held by people living in the Council Ward as being in the accommodation and food service sector, with a further 13.2% in retail and 6.4% in entertainment and leisure.
- 2.7 Close to Inverness Airport, Nairn is at the eastern end of what the Local Development Plan for the Inner Moray Firth designates the Inverness to Nairn Growth Area, a corridor along the A96 trunk road seen as one of the main drivers for growth in the Highlands. The corridor is seen as providing 18,350 new homes in the period to 2031. Most of these will be at the Inverness end of the corridor, but around 1,900 are seen as being in Nairn itself, with many more along the corridor, including in existing villages such as Ardersier, Croy and Cawdor and at a new town being developed at Tornagrain.
- 2.8 Alongside the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan, the Nairn Community Town Centre Plan has as one of its themes an ambition to improve walking and cycling links between the town centre and its surroundings. The Plan highlights a need to signpost and strengthen connections to the wealth of assets and attractions that lie within easy walking and cycling distance of the town centre, including the river, Fishertown, the museum, rail station, the Links, golf course, harbour, beach and campsite. Small improvements to the existing walking and cycling infrastructure to extend footpaths and cycle lanes and increase cycle parking are seen to have a big impact on increasing accessibility to and from the wider area.
- 2.9 Also relevant to the Local Development Plan is supplementary guidance issued on Green Networks. This takes forward the long term aspiration of Highland Council to connect Inverness and Nairn with a Coastal Trail. The Trail is seen as following the line of the coast between Inverness and Nairn and, in due course, connecting with the paths through Culbin Forest to link up with the Moray Coast Trail in Forres. It is seen as being accessible to walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Through Nairn the intention is to adopt the coastal path through the Links, across the river and on through the Maggot and the Lochloy Holiday Park to Culbin Sands as part of the trail. These paths are already recognised as core paths in the Highland Council's Core Paths Plan. The path through the Links does not meet the desired specification for the Coastal Trail

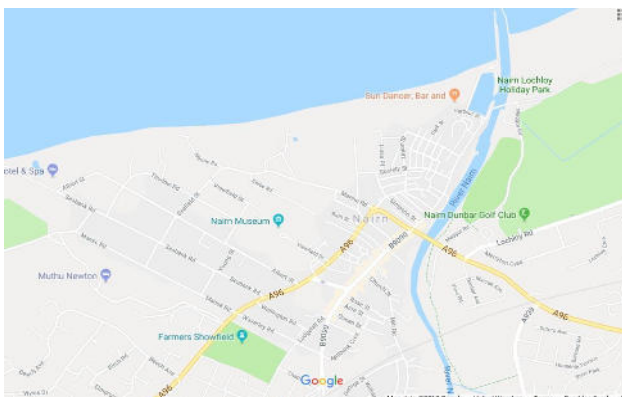
and would preferably be at least 3 metres wide to support dual use by walkers and cyclists.

2.10 A draft improvement plan for Nairn Harbour and waterfront has been produced and is being taken forward by a steering group. Nairn Harbour already has a pontoon system with space for 77 boats. An active sailing club has a clubhouse by the harbour and a separate boatyard, both on land leased from the Common Good Fund. The Harbour plan aims to improve the harbour basin, the surrounding buildings and the general harbour area to maximise its potential to support and enhance the overall town economy. Planned projects includes dredging of the harbour (now completed), expansion of the pontoon system, taking the capacity to 97 boats, and, in the longer term, the development of a watersports centre which would provide a home for the various water based activities in Nairn as well as facilities for visiting yachts.

2.11 A Nairn BID (Business Improvement District) is currently in preparation. A BID is a business-led initiative where businesses work together and invest collectively to improve their own business environment. If approved in a ballot expected in August 2018, funding for the BID would come from a levy paid by businesses in the area. BIDs focus on what is a priority for their town or area and some of the ideas that are seen as potentially worth considering as part of the Nairn BID include projects that would help in:

- Putting the town back on the tourist map
- Improving the look of Nairn
- Savings on buying costs
- Year long event calendar
- Welcome and orientation signs
- Business training support.

2.12 Plans are also being progressed by Transport Scotland for the dualling of the A96 trunk road, including the building of a Nairn bypass. Preparatory work is ongoing and while no construction contracts have yet been let the bypass is seen as happening in the relatively short term. As can be seen in the map below the current A96 effectively cuts off the Links area, the harbour and the Maggot from the town centre; to reach them pedestrians must cross a very busy trunk road. In the future this will not be the case.



Source: Google Maps

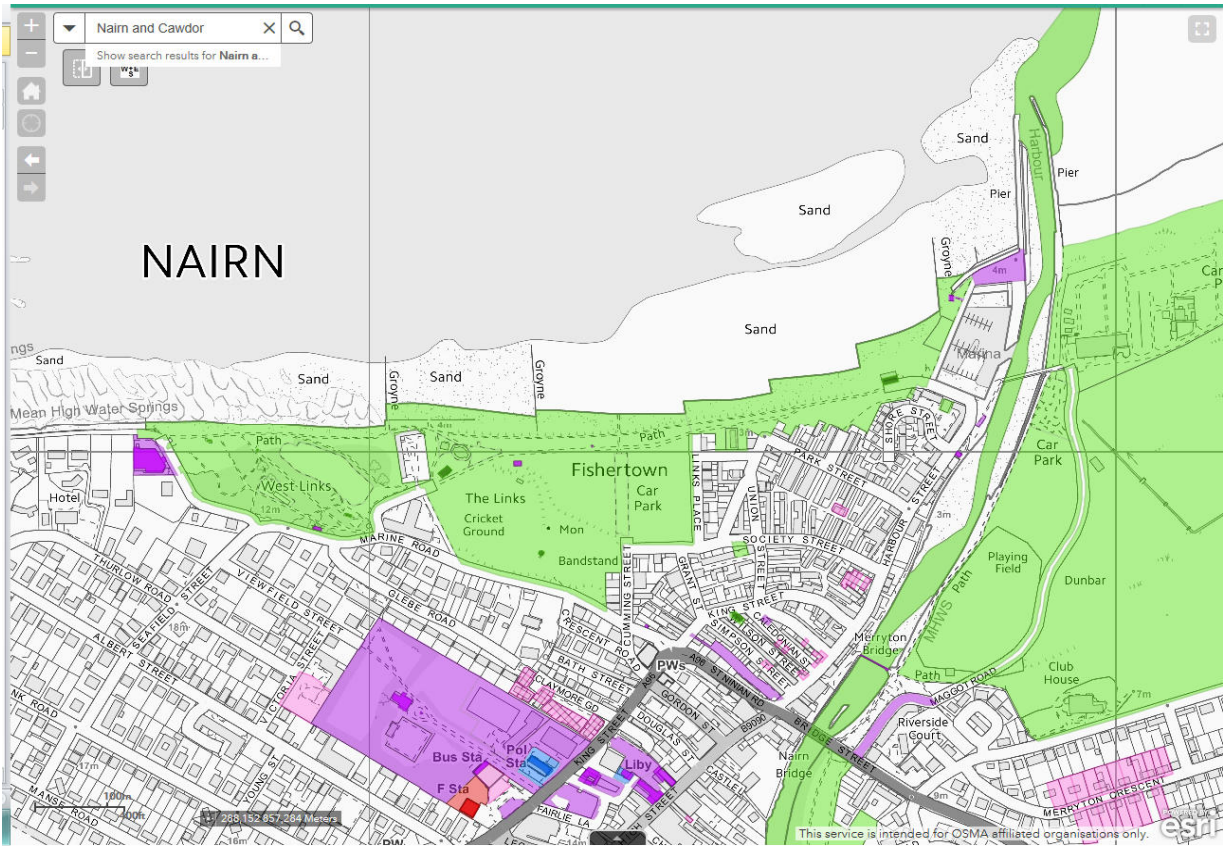
Rationale for a plan to improve the Links

- 2.13 Given this context the rationale for a plan for the development of the Links is clear. The Links and the beaches are key elements in Nairn's attraction to visitors. With the coming of the Nairn bypass possibilities of joining up the Links and the town open up. Plans for other aspects of Nairn - the town centre, the harbour and the business district - are in place or in preparation. A plan for the Links would complement these and help form an overall plan for the improvement of Nairn for local people and for visitors.

3. Use of the Links

Current uses

3.1 In the map below the land in Common Good ownership in and around the Links is shown in green.



Source: Highland Council

3.2 There are various agreements and leases in place for land and properties in this area, as below:

Property / Site	Tenant
Harbour - Boatyard & Clubhouse	Nairn Sailing Club
Harbour - Coastguard Hut	The Highland Council
Restaurant Site Ground lease	Sun Dancer
Cricket Pavilion and Cricket Pitch	Nairn County Cricket Club
Tearoom and Tearoom store	Links Tearoom
Kiosk and Marine Road Property	James's Café
Lochloy Caravan Park	Parkdean Holiday Park
Athletics track, Maggot	Nairn Athletics Club
Nairn Dunbar Golf Club & practice ground	Nairn Dunbar Golf Club
River fishings	Nairn Angling Association

- 3.3 In addition there are regular lets of parts of the Links, especially for trading associated with the annual Highland Games and for visits by the "Showies" - the travelling funfairs and fairground rides.
- 3.4 The Common Good Fund owns various other buildings and facilities on the Links, including the bandstand, the putting green, the paddling pool, the play area and various other play installations, and car parking. There is also a path network, interpretive panels and information boards. An outdoor gym has been installed on the West Links close to the Leisure Centre. The Council owns and maintains the toilet block by the play area.
- 3.5 In the summer of 2015 Nairn hosted the World Orienteering Championships. The opening ceremony was at the Links and the first sprint race included much of the Links and Leisure Park area. Inverness Orienteering Club has adapted one of the championship courses to set up a semi-permanent orienteering course at Nairn Links. Maps of the course are available from British Orienteering as well as from Nairn Leisure Centre and James' Café.
- 3.6 Management of the paddling pool, putting green and crazy golf on a day to day basis is carried out through an agreement between the Common Good Fund and High Life Highland (which also operates Nairn Leisure Centre). This includes the provision of staff to supervise the operation of the paddling pool. High Life Highland also manages the submission of the Beach Award annually. A management fee is paid to High Life Highland, which offsets the cost by retaining the income from the putting green.

Project proposals

- 3.7 There are a number of projects recently undertaken, planned or proposed for the Links and the facilities in the area. Initial discussions have been held with the proposers of these projects to inform this scoping study.

Paddling pool

- 3.8 As mentioned in para 1.1 above, this scoping study leads on from the Common Good Fund's consideration of the future of the paddling pool. Public consultation showed the strongest support for replacement of the paddling pool with an alternative form of water play. The consultation highlighted public concern that the replacement should be open more often and more regularly, that it should be well maintained and that it should suit all abilities and all age groups. The paddling pool has been a feature of the Links for many years and there is a desire for a replacement to be equally special and add to the attractions of Nairn.

Links Tearoom and James' Café

- 3.9 The lessees of both the Links Tearoom and James' Café have put forward proposals to improve their facilities. Improvements at the Tearoom are largely internal but at the Café there is a proposal to build an additional external structure as a shelter. The Café operator has also suggested that he could take on the management of the putting green/crazy golf area, perhaps extending it to create a boule area. Both these

proposals would require re-negotiation of the lease arrangements, but they offer the possibility of improving the facilities at the Links at no cost to the Common Good Fund.

Athletics Club

- 3.10 Nairn Athletics Club has a running track on the Maggot. The Club has been exploring improvements to the area for some years and currently is looking to follow guidance received from sportscotland and scottishathletics, taking on the concept of a Compact Sports Facility. Essentially this concept looks to scale down full-sized facilities to suit the site available. The Club would not replace the existing grass running track but would install synthetic surfaces for particular disciplines such as long jump and other field sports. The intention would also be to upgrade the fencing round the site and to install lighting to make the facilities usable in the evening. In due course an indoor facility would be added for indoor training, meetings etc. The club also sees the potential for use of the athletics facility by other groups, including, for example, social exercise by older people. The Club's proposals feature in scottishathletics facilities strategy published in November 2015 and discussions with Highland Council on the lease of the area are underway.

Team Hamish

- 3.11 Team Hamish has been set up to create a lasting legacy for a young boy in Nairn who sadly passed away in 2017 following a long and brave struggle against illness. Established to thank the people of Nairn for the support they have given the family, Team Hamish has become a focus for fundraising in the town and has successfully raised a significant sum. Team Hamish has recently affiliated with NICE (Nairn Improvement Community Enterprise) but their intention is to invest the funds raised to create lasting and special places for the town.

Keeping Nairnshire Colourful

- 3.12 Keeping Nairnshire Colourful has developed a proposal to enhance the seasonal flower bed at the putting green on the Links through perennial planting with an orienteering theme, a central metal figure based on the British Orienteering Club logo and large rocks with metal inserts to show the four compass points. Their proposal also includes an information board showing the orienteering map mentioned in para 3.5, local orienteering information and maps of the path network for the partially sighted.

Leisure Centre

- 3.13 Nairn Leisure Centre is a popular and well used facility. High Life Highland have a proposal to extend the facilities at Nairn Leisure Centre by building on a dance studio. This is a high priority for High Life Highland but its timing will depend on the availability of capital funding.

Harbour

- 3.14 The proposed improvement plan for the Harbour and waterfront is discussed in para 2.9 above. The proposed developments include the building of a watersports centre which would also incorporate facilities for visiting yachts, a replacement harbourmaster's office, a booking office for commercial boat trips from the harbour etc. This is a long term aim, but it would be developed on Common Good land, between the existing boatyard and the beach.

Coastal trail

- 3.15 The coastal path is mentioned in para 2.8 above. In Nairn the intention is to take the trail through the Links, across the river and on through the Maggot and the Lochloy Holiday Park to Culbin Sands. This could use the existing path network, although the existing paths do not meet the full specification for the coastal trail. The trail would encourage cyclists along the route (and, potentially horse riders) and for that to fit with use of the Links a wider path avoiding spaces for young children may be required.

Lochloy Holiday Park

- 3.16 The area leased by Lochloy Holiday Park has been extended recently to take in part of the car park at the far end of the site, at the RSPB Culbin Sands reserve, as far as the toilet block. The Holiday Park has taken over responsibility for the toilet block although it will remain open to the public. This extended area will improve the facilities available for campervans.

Lido

- 3.17 A proposal has been developed to create a Lido on the Links and Beach, adjacent to the paddling pool site. The Lido would be a 3 storey building with an open air pool on the top floor and spa facilities on the first floor. Energy would be provided through an innovative marine heat pump system. The proposers of the Lido also look to take over Nairn Leisure Centre, replacing the roof over the swimming pool with glass, to create a training and competition facility to complement the Lido. This has not been fully explored with the pool owners, Highland Council, or the operators, High Life Highland who have a 25 year lease on the building. The Lido proposal has been inspired by the Thermae Spa in Bath and is hugely ambitious in its scale, in its projections of use, in the anticipated income and in its proposed technology. It would have a big impact on the Links, not only visually but also, for example, in the need for car parking for its customers. Given the challenges the project raises and the impact it would have on other aspects of the Links it is difficult to see it as a realistic proposal.

Community orchard

- 3.18 A little way away from the Links, Nairn River Enterprise (operating as Green Hive) has established a community orchard in an area of Viewfield. 16 fruit trees have been planted, along with a fruit and berry hedge and picnic tables. The orchard will be

open to the public and will be a space for community events and activities such as apple harvest days as well as workshops about growing and caring for fruit trees.

NICE

- 3.19 NICE (Nairn Improvement Community Enterprise) was formed in 2010 as a company limited by guarantee to facilitate the regeneration of Nairn Town Centre and its surrounding areas. The group has joined with Team Hamish to act as the conduit for the funding raised through that initiative. As a charity NICE is well placed to add value, through for example, applying for gift aid.
- 3.20 NICE sees the creation of a development plan for the Links as timely given the other plans being put in place. It sees the seafront as a prime asset for Nairn and its development as key to improving its attractiveness for local people, tourists and day visitors. Quality, design and sustainability are seen as essential components of any development with ongoing maintenance of key importance.

4. Management and Sustainability of the Links

- 4.1 The Links are an asset of the Nairn Common Good Fund. The Common Good Fund has no separate legal existence. Its assets are managed by the Highland Council and all Highland Councillors are responsible in the same way as Trustees would be for ensuring that the assets work for the Residents of the Burgh of Nairn. Within the Council the Common Good assets and budgets are ring fenced accordingly and managed by the Ward Manager.
- 4.2 Over many years different arrangements and leases have been agreed for areas of the Links. Working with Property Services the current Ward Manager has disentangled many of these arrangements to give a clearer picture of the situation, to formalise agreements with users and to proactively manage Common Good assets. Some of the historic agreements lead to costs which cannot be recovered from the tenant. For example, the Common Good Fund pays a levy to the Fisheries Trust which is not reflected in the payment by the Angling Association; the Common Good Fund is charged for grass cutting and grounds maintenance which is not fully reflected in the payments by the Cricket Club for the pavilion and use of the cricket pitch or the Athletics Club for the running track; no charge is made to the Nairn Highland Games for use of the Links, and indeed the Common Good Fund has been making a contribution each year towards the cost of the Games.
- 4.3 Major costs falling to the Common Good Fund are a payment to the Council's Community Services for maintenance of the grounds, including inspection of play equipment; a payment to High Life Highland for management of the paddling pool, the putting and the Beach Award; costs for electricity, rates and water charges, insurance, the River Fishing Licence Fee and legal costs. There are also one off costs for any repairs necessary, for example to the paddling pool, for any new equipment or works undertaken and for any additional grants agreed.
- 4.4 Income for the Common Good Fund is made up of rental payments related to the various leases and short term lets of land and buildings. There is also some investment income, although that has fallen in recent years due to low deposit rates in the current economic climate. Income from the putting green is retained by High Life Highland in addition to the management charge levied.
- 4.5 Excluding one off costs the Common Good Fund can operate at a surplus each year, allowing investment in facilities and/or a contribution to balances. The annual amounts are limited however - in the range of £20-30,000 - and quickly eroded if substantial works are required.
- 4.6 Balances held are also relatively modest, with the position at March 2017 (as reported to the December 2017 Nairnshire Committee) showing usable revenue reserves of £413,765. This position may change if further deficits accrue or if additional income comes into the Common Good Fund through asset sales, such as at the Sandown Lands. Income from investments has been minimal in recent years, although a new investment strategy was adopted in December 2016. This has now been implemented and has potential to grow the returns from the cash balances.

- 4.7 The potential to increase income to the Common Good Fund otherwise is limited, although the current work to proactively manage the property assets may produce further benefits. If new facilities are created, such as the suggested watersports centre, then that would lead to additional lease income. Some other possibilities are mentioned in the next section for developments that could be taken forward either by the Common Good Fund or by a third party making licence or lease payments.
- 4.8 Reducing the need to supervise the paddling pool could also reduce expenditure on the contract with High Life Highland. Alongside that, improvements to the putting area might increase income. Income is currently retained by High Life Highland as part of the agreement, but it should be considered whether that arrangement should be reviewed and an agreement made with the adjacent café or another arrangement is introduced.
- 4.9 Consideration of how to deal with ongoing maintenance will be a key issue in any development plan. Respondents to the paddling pool survey supported the creation of a new water play feature to replace the pool, but they saw longer and more regular opening hours and prompt attention to any maintenance issue as highly important. The same would be true of other facilities on the Links if they are to be seen as a high quality offering. If funds become available it may be worth considering options to appoint a Links Officer to undertake such duties (perhaps on a part time or seasonal basis), either directly or through a contract with, for example, High Life Highland. Such an appointment may replace the current contract with High Life Highland, reducing aspects such as supervision of the paddling pool while increasing the oversight of the Links and ensuring a speedy response to any issues that arise.

5. Potential developments

5.1 People going to the Links and the beach in Nairn might expect:

- parking
- transport
- refreshment/food and drink
- interesting walks
- information and interpretation
- nice spaces to linger
- somewhere to sit
- things to see
- things to occupy the children
- entertainment
- activities
- somewhere to go if it rains
- toilets

5.2 Parking is available at the Links and at the harbour, both of them free of charge. Those arriving in campervans can be encouraged to use the extended space and facilities at Lochloy, although many use the harbour car park. This needs to be managed, especially if, as currently can happen, there is disposal of waste in the public toilets nearby.

5.3 Other than driving to the Links, people would generally walk as there is no public transport to the beach area. Neither is there any transport within the Links. There may be an opportunity to operate a land train type tourist train in the summer months, taking people round the Links, the harbour, Viewfield and Fishertown.



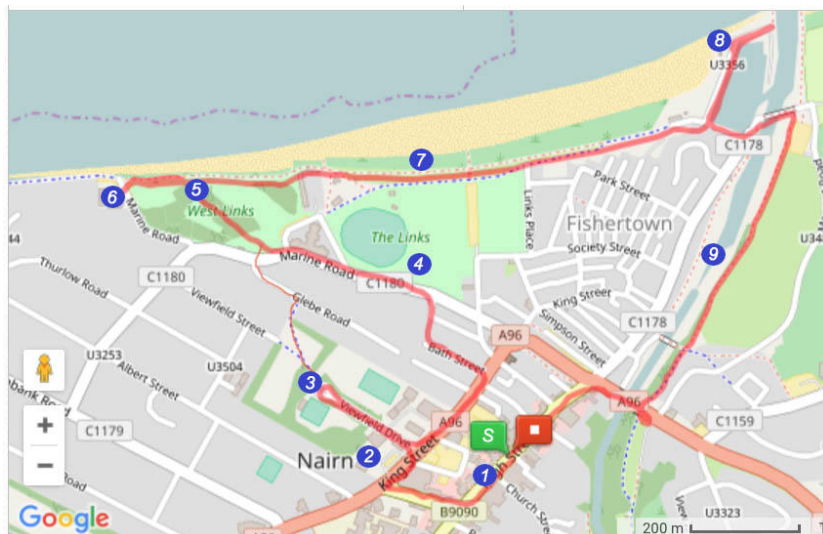
Source: www.englishriviera.co.uk

Alternatively there may be potential to develop a miniature railway, of the type used at Whin Park in Inverness.



Source: www.nesislandsrailway.co.uk

- 5.4 Both of these options would be likely to be delivered by a third party operator and would depend on someone willing to make the necessary investment. The Common Good Fund could expect to charge for the right to operate, and for any storage facility on the site.
- 5.5 The need for food and drink is currently well catered for. Ice cream, food and drink and refreshments are available at the café, tearoom and Sundancer restaurant on the Links. There is also a café at the harbour and a range of providers nearby in hotels and restaurants.
- 5.6 Walking and strolling round the Links is popular, and there is a network of paths, including elements of the Nairn core path network. Mentioned above is the ambition to develop an Inverness to Nairn coastal path which would include the seafront walk along the Links to the harbour and on to the car park on the Maggot. The walks on the Links are fairly limited however and various enhancements are suggested below for consideration. Signing of walks is also important. Walk Highland includes only a few walks in Nairn, including a River Nairn circuit. The Visit Nairn website extends that walk to take in a walk incorporating the Links, the riverside and the town centre, as below:



Source: <http://visitnairn.com>

- 5.7 Formalising, and waymarking, this walk to include the path through Viewfield and the community orchard in the grounds, would provide a round Nairn walk which would be of much interest to visitors and would help to bring the Links and the town centre together. A digital tour, perhaps to be downloaded as a podcast, would also add value.
- 5.8 A round Nairn walk such as this would also provide a focus for information and interpretation. There are already a few interpretation boards and information panels on the Links, but they are tired and lack focus. Linked to the walk they could be remodelled to give a better picture of the natural and built heritage of the town.
- 5.9 The walk would also provide a focus for some of the other expectations people have - for somewhere to sit, nice spaces to linger and something to see. Interpretation would point out what there is to see, and give background information. Along the seafront coin operated telescopes could be built into viewing platforms, with accompanying seating, allowing people to see the dolphins in the firth as well as the Black Isle opposite. People taking part in watersports also create interest, and this would grow if the proposed watersports centre by the harbour came to fruition.
- 5.10 Spaces could also be created at other points in the walk, at the community orchard and the riverbank, among the trees in the West Links and by the replacement water feature. These spaces could be made special by incorporating artworks, like the installations created on the Ness Islands in Inverness.
- 5.11 The provision of spaces in the beach area could incorporate the provision of beach huts. These could be installed by the Common Good Fund or by a private developer, either for sale or for rent. These were once popular in Scotland, when seaside holidays were common, but most have disappeared. They are coming back into fashion however. At Hopeman on the Moray coast 44 huts have survived and are in demand from local people. Closer to Nairn, at Findhorn, Moray Council recently approved the installation of up to 30 by a private developer. Each hut is 5 square metres and the sale price is £25,000.
- 5.12 For children, there is already a play area at the Links, with play equipment mostly around the paddling pool but also some installed on the West Links. Following the public consultation the paddling pool will be replaced by a different water feature - perhaps based on water jets as in the installation below in Southend which includes colour changing lighting. The actual installation would depend on design, cost and funding availability.



Source: www.ustigatwaterplay.co.uk

- 5.13 The plan for the future might involve a redesign of the play area, using existing and replacement equipment and improved surfacing to better designate the spaces within it. Again, seating and artwork could be incorporated, making the whole area a feature.
- 5.14 There are activities and entertainment at the Links during the summer, including the Highland Games, cricket matches and one off events. Nairn Book and Arts Festival has also extended its programme to include activities and events on the Links and these have proved popular. However there is room to further stimulate the number of events taking place, perhaps by encouraging local groups to host activities on the Links. This could involve demonstration days and workshops by existing groups in the Nairn area and encouraging the formation of new groups (such as a kite flying club). The bandstand is used occasionally, including for weddings, but local groups could be encouraged to play music there in the summer. It could also be used for small scale events such as storytelling or puppet shows. Promotional events showing people how to benefit from the equipment and encouraging use of the outdoor gym could also be held by High Life Highland.
- 5.15 There is an 18 hole putting and crazy golf course on the West Links, by James' Café. The café operator has suggested complementing this with a boule court, and certainly there is scope to improve the area. It also seems likely that, if the equipment is available on site, from the café rather than the Leisure Centre, use may increase, although it would be important to look at the overall benefits to the Common Good Fund of any arrangement.
- 5.16 There are some shelters on the Links, but little in the way of indoor alternatives other than the tearoom and the Sundancer. There is the Leisure Centre, including swimming pool, and if the proposed extension goes ahead it may be possible to make some provision for indoor play - for example some Leisure Centres in the Highlands hold soft play sessions. Further afield, but close to the Links at Viewfield, there is the Nairn Museum.
- 5.17 Implementing these improvements would require leadership from the Common Good Fund. However local groups will also be involved and have already developed projects that could fit with this framework either within or close to Common Good land. These include the community orchard at Viewfield and the orienteering themed flowerbed on the West Links proposed by Keep Nairn Colourful. Other local groups could also be involved, perhaps adopting spaces on the round Nairn walk, developing them and committing to maintain them in the future. Team Hamish is also developing a range of ideas that could fit within an overall framework. To give a cohesion to such developments each space could incorporate a particular theme chosen to represent Nairn - suggestions made include dolphins and rainbows.
- 5.18 In Aberdeen in 2014 the Wild Dolphins project saw 50 life-sized fibreglass sculptures of bottlenose dolphins decorated by artists, sold in a charity auction for £530,000, and installed round the city. One golf themed dolphin (shown below), signed by golfers taking part in the AAM Scottish Open at Royal Aberdeen Golf Club, was sold for £55,000. This project was led by Wild in Art, which specialises in such public and

school art events, and can supply blank dolphin sculptures (1270mm or 700mm high) for decoration, as below. It may be worth exploring such an event, on a smaller scale, for Nairn, involving local artists, schools, community and youth groups. Such a project could be kept relatively local or could be supported through funding channels such as LEADER and the lottery.



Source: www.wildinart.co.uk



Source: www.wilddolphins.org.uk

- 5.19 Local businesses can also be involved. The Links Tearoom and James' Café have already approached the Common Good Fund to explore developments relating to their own businesses. A project such as that mentioned above might be attractive to local business sponsors or to the BID group. Businesses may also wish to get involved in creating their own spaces along the town trail.

6. Next steps

- 6.1 This scoping study suggests that the time is ripe for a Development Plan for the Links in Nairn. It suggests that the plan should provide a framework for development, receptive to new ideas as they come forward rather than setting out a definitive list of specific projects to be developed. The suggested framework builds on a trail round Nairn, from the Links, through Viewfield and the town and along the riverside to the harbour and back to the Links. Along the trail there will be a series of spaces, each giving cause for people to linger, to learn about Nairn, to take part in an activity and/or to enjoy their surroundings. To provide a coherence to the trail and mark Nairn's identity, each space will incorporate a theme, with a dolphin theme being an initial suggestion for consultation. Some of the spaces might be adopted by a local group or business which would, as part of the design, decorate a dolphin sculpture. Together the sculptures would both mark the way and be a feature round Nairn.
- 6.2 Round the trail would be certain facilities which will be improved as time and resources allow. Among the first would be the paddling pool area, replacing the current pool with a water feature based on water jets which children can run through but which could also be lit up in different colours.
- 6.3 Other projects can also be taken forward within the framework. For example, discussions with the current café and tearoom operators, Team Hamish and Keep Nairn Colourful would explore how their developments could fit within its parameters.
- 6.4 To take this forward the following would be the next steps:
- further developing the framework outlined in this scoping study
 - carrying out consultation on the framework with stakeholders and potential partners
 - further developing specific projects mentioned in the framework which might be led by the Common Good Fund, such as the water feature, play area
 - carrying out public consultation eg through workshops
 - producing estimates for the cost of the initial projects
 - producing an implementation plan which sets out phasing, timing and potential funding of the initial projects
- 6.5 It is suggested that the further work and consultation is carried out relatively quickly so that a plan is ready for consideration by the end of 2018/19. This would allow for project planning for the paddling pool replacement (and potentially other projects currently being developed) to start happening in 2019/20.
- 6.6 Such a timetable is seen as important to replace the paddling pool within its estimated life and to keep the momentum from the consultation already carried out. It is also seen as important to begin implementation as soon as possible, so that the community sees this process as leading to more than a plan, but as a precursor to action.



Nairn Paddling Pool

**Option Appraisal
and consultation
for
The Highland Council**

Stage 2 report:
Consultation
December 2017

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1. Introduction and background

1.1 This report was commissioned to explore the options for the future of the Nairn Paddling Pool site. The first stage set out the background to the current situation, explored solutions put in place by other areas when faced with similar issues and identified a number of options as the basis for consultation with the community. This Stage 2 report should be read in conjunction with that first stage, but among the issues raised were:

- The condition of the paddling pool. The structure of the pool has deteriorated badly. The pool has required costly repairs in recent years, leading to interruptions in service. Further repairs were carried out in 2016 which are thought to last some 3 years, but by then the pool will have reached the end of its life.
- The use of the paddling pool. The paddling pool is open through the months of June, July and August - a total of around 90 days. In practice this number is rarely reached. In 2017 it was open for 64.5 days and was used by 2,134 people.
- The changing health and safety climate. In recent years health and safety guidance has changed, so that the size and design of the Nairn Paddling Pool means there is a need to provide a lifeguard and supervise its use.
- The operating costs of the paddling pool. High Life Highland is contracted to provide supervision of the paddling pool. There is also the cost of chemicals and utilities. The annual running costs (excluding repairs) are some £11,000 - more than £5 for each user.
- The importance of tourism to Nairn's economy. Nairn is a popular family holiday destination and the beaches and the links are among its main attractions.
- The importance of the paddling pool to many local people. The paddling pool has been in place for some 50 years. Many local people have childhood memories of using the paddling pool and many are now taking their own children and grandchildren to enjoy it.
- Across the UK almost every original paddling pool has been the subject of debate as their future is considered. Some authorities have spent considerable sums renovating or replacing paddling pools and complying with health and safety guidance while others have simply closed the facility despite local lobbying and protest. Others have replaced a paddling pool with alternative play or water play features or – where finance is available – taken the opportunity to carry out a major refurbishment of public open space.

1.2 After consideration of the options available the Nairn Councillors highlighted 3 options to go forward for consultation with the public. These are to replace the current paddling pool with:

- a. a play area
- b. a replacement paddling pool
- c. an alternative water play area

1.3 A survey was designed and on-line links were publicised through a press release (shown in Appendix 1) and social media. Paper copies were also made available at the Highland Council Service Point and at Nairn Leisure Centre. A copy of the survey is shown at Appendix 2.

2. Survey results

2.1 A total of 419 responses were received. 237 (57%) were from people with children and 220 (53%) had used the paddling pool this year (clearly there is a cross-over between these two categories). 127 (30%) said they had no children - 55 respondents gave no reply to that question. Respondents were also asked for their postcode and 334 people provided at least a partial postcode. Of those, 275 gave an IV12 postcode; only 14 gave a postcode outside the IV area, which suggests that relatively few tourists responded, although some of those from outside the area were former Nairn residents either on a visit or replying to the survey from a distance - including 1 respondent who now lives in New Zealand

2.2 The first three questions asked respondents to score the 3 options identified from 1 to 5. The weighted average scores for each of the options were:

	Play area	Paddling pool	Water play
All respondents	2.56	3.00	4.06
With children	2.77	3.00	4.22
Without children	2.32	2.94	3.96
Paddling pool users	2.44	3.28	4.15

weighted average score is calculated by adding 1 for each 1* score, 2 for each 2* etc, then dividing the total by the number of respondents.

2.3 Water play emerges as the most favoured option. All categories of respondent score it on average higher than the other options. Those with children and those who currently use the paddling pool were most supportive of water play. Those who said they had no children scored every option lower than the other categories of respondent.

2.4 Looking at those who scored each option at either extreme (1*=very poor option, 5*=very good option) gives the following results:

Water play	Play area		Paddling pool		Water play	
	1*	5*	1*	5*	1*	5*
All respondents	40%	21%	25%	26%	12%	60%
With children	35%	26%	25%	26%	8%	65%
Without children	46%	18%	28%	26%	13%	59%
Paddling pool users	44%	20%	18%	31%	10%	65%

2.5 Again, water play can be seen as the most favoured option to replace the existing paddling pool. More than twice as many respondents see it as a "very good" option as either of the other two options. Those who currently use the paddling pool were more likely to see a replacement pool as a "very good" option, but more than twice as many saw a water play feature as the best option.

2.6 Noticeably, replacing the paddling pool with an all weather play area is consistently the least favoured option, although those with children score it as "very good" more frequently than they score a replacement pool as such. There already is a play area

adjacent to the paddling pool and it would seem that people see the benefit of it complementing rather than replacing water based play.

2.7 165 respondents took the opportunity to make additional comments, covering all shades of opinion.

2.8 Around 25% of the comments are fully supportive of maintaining the existing paddling pool, typically seeing it as an iconic feature in Nairn. Examples are:

- The paddling pool is an iconic part of Nairn Links and has given pleasure to hundreds of children for very many years.
- The pool is a great asset to the town, part of the reason we moved to the town, I know lots of people who travel to the town to use this facility in the summer and it would be devastating to lose it.
- Too many of these paddling pools and lidos have been gotten rid of. My girls have loved using Nairn paddling pool over the years and it should continue for generations to come.
- I'm not from your area but visit often! Believe me, this pool is a bonus to the quaintness of Nairn!
- The paddling pool in Nairn is a fantastic thing that many other seaside towns do not have or have lost. It would be a great shame to lose such a nice and enjoyable asset.
- Do not get rid of the paddling pool its part of Nairn's heritage.
- People can get those fancy play parks anywhere....the paddling pool is iconic ..and why people like Nairn links for their children.

2.9 Alongside these are comments which see the paddling pool as dispensable, despite its past:

- Paddling pool costs too much for the time it is open.
- The paddling pool is not used very much at all really.
- The pool is built on sand and will cost forever.
- Sad to see pool go, but it does need some new ideas.
- Something must replace it sooner rather than later.
- Think the pool is a waste of money.
- The paddling pool is a fantastic feature of Nairn's seaside and I would love it to stay. However, I understand that staffing and maintaining it must be very costly. A splash pad would mean that there wouldn't be a need for a life guard but still lots of water/splashy fun for kids. I would be very sorry to see the pool go though.
- I think water play is excellent for young children but as the pool is expensive to maintain and referee a splash like the above might be the better option.

2.10 The idea of a splash pad draws some enthusiastic responses

- A splash park would become an attraction in itself an increase visitor numbers to Nairn.
- Splash park idea is Great!
- A Splash Pad would be a great unique feature and would draw people to the area.

- The splash area would be more safe and attract more children of other ages above 5 years. Also save on the cost of employing a lifeguard. Don't use existing pool as not open enough, also find it dangerous for small children with the sharp edges round pool.
- I think the splash pad idea would be lovely as it means more of the disability community would be able to use this too.
- A splash/fountain area would be a decent compromise. We need an accessible area at the links for young children and people with limited mobility. This option would serve both sets of needs. We must retain a water based play area.

2.11 A number of comments point out facilities elsewhere as potential models including:

- Falkirk Wheel.
- Park View Lytham.
- Ardersier.
- Montrose.
- Arbroath.
- Broughty Ferry.
- Carnoustie.
- Brighton.
- Hull city of culture new installation.
- Manchester city centre water jets.

Most of these, it should be noted, were relatively expensive installations. For example, the water play features at the Falkirk Wheel cost £430,000, largely funded through landfill funds.

2.12 Although the comments cover a wide spectrum of opinion, there are some views that get a degree of consensus. These include:

- a desire for any replacement or new feature to be available longer (through the day and through the year) than the current paddling pool;
- the need for any facility to be properly maintained;
- a need for all age groups and abilities to be catered for - toddlers, young children and teens;
- a need to retain some form of water play;
- the potential to combine water play with some form of paddling pool which wouldn't need supervision;
- the need to maintain the attraction and facilities of the links for local people and visitors.

2.13 Clearly for many people the links are seen as part of what makes Nairn special and the paddling pool is part of that. However reluctantly many people do see it as a time for change. This is best reflected in comments such as:

- I would be happy with any option that breathes new life into the area. Well done for taking positive action.
- Whatever you create, I think it should be something truly unique and special to Nairn...something that will bring visitors here and make it a brilliant place to visit

.....please take your time and really consider what would work longterm and have the most appeal.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 From the consultation it is clear that the public in Nairn favour the retention of some form of water play at the Links. Although there is a strong sentimental attachment to the paddling pool, for most the more important consideration is that Nairn has a high quality facility which can be open as long as possible and which local children and those in the town on holiday can enjoy.
- 3.2 Replacing the paddling pool with some form of water play would have a number of advantages. Supervision might only be required at peak times to prevent overcrowding, although regular inspections would be undertaken through the day. Chemicals and a plant room would still be needed and there would be a need to commission the facility at the beginning of the season and decommission at the end. Reports suggest water play equipment is relatively robust but it could be subject to vandalism and misuse out of hours. A system of ground level water jets would remove that issue.
- 3.3 A new water play facility would also be easier to find external funding for rather than a simple replacement of the paddling pool. For example, LEADER may be willing to provide 50% funding, especially if the facility is seen as part of a wider strategy to develop the Links area. The application would be made by the Highland Council in association with the Common Good Fund. Charitable Trusts with a local connection such as the Davidson (Nairn) Charitable Trust and the Crerar Hotels Trust may also be worth approaching for support, as would Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Tourism is one of its priority sectors and if the project is seen as potentially transforming the attractiveness of Nairn Links, then HIE may be able to support it.

Appendix 1

Press release

The popular Paddling Pool at Nairn Links has been used and enjoyed by local people and visitors for many years. In recent years, though, the service has been disrupted with the pool closed for part of the summer. Due to its age the structure of the paddling pool has been deteriorating badly and repairs have become more difficult and more expensive. In 2016 repairs were made which will keep it in operation through this summer and, barring the unforeseen, another two or three years. For the future beyond that there is a need to make decisions now, and the Nairn Ward Councillors would like to get your views on the best way forward.

Tom Heggie, the chair of the Nairnshire Committee, says: "We want to revitalise this area of the Links and make sure that it can be a focus for families to enjoy the seafront. A major question is whether water play should be a central feature of any replacement, and if so whether it should be a traditional paddling pool like we have now or the kind of splash park being installed in many parts of the country.

Alternatively the site could become the centre of an improved play area with a wider range of play equipment aimed at a variety of age groups – perhaps a toddler area within the current fenced area with equipment for older children surrounding it.

Unlike a water play area this would be open all year round."

A short survey has been launched to gather views and we want to know what you - and especially parents and young people - would like to see on the site. Paper copies of the survey are available at the Nairn Service Point and the Nairn Leisure Centre, or you can access it online from the Leisure Centre website at <http://www.highlifehighland.com/nairn-leisure-centre> (external link) or its Facebook page


<https://en-gb.facebook.com/NairnLeisureCentre> (external link). The survey will run through until 8th September.

Survey form

Nairn Paddling Pool and Play Area


The Paddling Pool at Nairn Links has been deteriorating for some time and we need to make decisions now about the future of the area. Please take time to answer these questions and let us know what you think.



1. We could expand the play area at the Links, providing a year round play facility for toddlers and young children rather than a paddling pool. Please give this option a rating from 1 to 5, where 1 is very poor and 5 is very good. 

1 2 3 4 5




2. We could replace the Paddling Pool with a similar traditional pool, open for around 8 weeks in the summer. Please rate this idea from 1 to 5 where 1 is very poor and 5 is very good. 

1 2 3 4 5


★ ★ ★ ★ ★



3. We could install a Splash Pad type water play facility which might be open from May to September. Please rate this idea from 1 to 5 where 1 is very poor and 5 is very good. 

1 2 3 4 5

4. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?



Nairn Paddling Pool and Play Area

About you

5. If you are responding for an organisation could you say which? You don't need to answer the questions below.

6. Do you use the existing paddling pool?

- Yes
- No

7. How often might you use it this summer?

- Never
- Once
- A few times
- At least weekly

8. How many people your household are under 12?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3 or more

9. What is your postcode?

Prev

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