

## Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Tourism Working Group** held in Committee Room 2, Council Headquarters, Inverness on Wednesday 13 June 2018 at 10.30 am.

### Present

Mr Bill Lobban (Chairman)  
Dr Ian Cockburn  
Mr Craig Fraser

Mr Duncan Macpherson  
Ms Maxine Smith

### Officials in attendance

Mr C Simpson, Principal Tourism & Film Officer, Development & Infrastructure, Highland Council  
Ms L Joiner, Tourism Projects Coordinator, 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 G Adam, Mr J Bruce, Mr J Gordon and Mr A Henderson.

#### 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 18 April 2018, the terms of which had been **APPROVED**.

Arising from the Minutes, the following points were raised:-

- Item 4: A9 litter signage: Ms Smith advised the Group that a report on this matter would be considered at the next meeting of the Ross and Cromarty Area Committee with a view to approval being granted of £1,000 being allocated from each local area ward discretionary budget and that this be match funded by Transport Scotland to meet the costs of the signage. An update on the outcome of this would be reported to a future meeting;
- Item 4: Action 3 had been reworded as follows "*The Council will rationalise waste disposal and recycling facilities – improving facilities such as providing facilities for recycling at sites where conditions and collection arrangements allow this while also encouraging good practice such as taking waste away where facilities don't exist on site.*";
- Item 6: it was felt that there was a need for local area 10 year strategic tourism masterplans to be developed which would map out existing destination assets, opportunities for growth, and areas for future investment,

particularly in regard to infrastructure, and how this could be delivered through collaborative working with partner organisations. The masterplan would dovetail with other documents such as the local tourism strategy;

- It was queried why the City of Inverness did not have Purple Flag status (which was an accreditation similar to Green and Blue Flag awards which allowed members of the public to quickly identify town and city centres that offered diverse and safe entertaining nights out) and it was suggested that contact be made with the Inverness Events Manager with a view to investigating and taking this forward; and
- The need for Inverness Town House to be fully exploited as both a tourist and corporate venue was emphasised. It was felt that the building tour service of one day per week which was currently available was not sufficient and that the civic rooms should be better promoted for hire for corporate events and private functions. It was further highlighted that the Chamber at Headquarters should also be promoted for conference hire. It was recommended that this be progressed by the Commercial Board

Thereafter the Working Group **NOTED** the update and **AGREED** that:-

- i. local area strategic tourism masterplans be developed;
- ii. contact be made with the Inverness Events Manager to investigate the feasibility of the City of Inverness achieving Purple Flag accreditation; and
- iii. a recommendation be made to the Commercial Board that the potential of Inverness Town House as a tourist and corporate events venue and the Chamber at Headquarters as conference venue be fully exploited.

#### **4. Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund**

There had been circulated Report No TWG/05/18 dated 6 June 2018 by the Director of Development & Infrastructure which provided an update on the recent Expressions of Interest that had been submitted to the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was explained that estimated prices had been compiled in respect of each of the projects;
- Responding to a question, further information was provided in regard to progress of the Clava Cairns project and how this would be developed with a view to submitting the project for the second round of the application process;
- The need for projects to be developed and ready for submission to the second round of the application process was emphasised and confirmation was provided that there were a further 40 potential projects which would continue to be progressed with a view to suitable projects being submitted at the appropriate time; and
- Although it was acknowledged that no allocations had been made in the Council Capital Programme towards the cost of the tourism projects submitted to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, it was highlighted that if successful, this would be a grant award of 70% from the Scottish Government and it was therefore essential that the Council identified the remaining 30% of funding to bring the project to fruition for the wider economic benefit of the area.

Thereafter, the Working Group:-

- i. **NOTED** the expressions of interest that had been submitted to the first round of the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund; and
- ii. **AGREED** the types of projects that might form future applications to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund in future.

## 5. Tourism Industry Barometer

There had been circulated Report No TWG/06/18 dated 6 June 2018 by the Director of Development & Infrastructure which gave an update on the recent rollout of a Highland Tourism Industry Barometer designed to give more immediate evidence of how tourism in the area was performing.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- There was a need for the survey sample size to be increased and for consistency in regard to the collation of the same statistical information to allow for year on year comparisons;
- It was highlighted that responses might be skewed in a bid to attract further investment;
- The survey made reference to the bad winter but it was highlighted that snow was also beneficial to the tourism industry with many visitors coming to the Highlands to undertake winter activities in specific conditions;
- It was felt that there was a need for the survey to be reported in a more positive light and this should be raised with VisitScotland. It was suggested that VisitScotland could be invited to a future meeting to present the findings of the subsequent survey at the conclusion of the summer season and this was welcome;
- It was clarified that a separate survey was conducted in regard to occupancy levels for accommodation businesses and this enabled more detailed information to be ascertained on visitor numbers;
- Implementation of a transient visitor tax needed to be progressed. Many European countries had a tourist levy therefore visitors were familiar and supportive of this model, recognising the revenue generated would be invested in local infrastructure to enhance the visitor experience; and
- In response to the suggestion of entrance charges being introduced at the Highland Folk Museum, it was reported that it had been evidenced at the Cromarty Court House that more income was generated by voluntary donations than through prescriptive charging.

Following discussion, the Working Group **NOTED**:-

- i. that the rollout of a Highland Tourism Industry Barometer had recently commenced; and
- ii. the business outlook that the first report described and **AGREED** that a request be made to VisitScotland that future results of the Highland Tourism Industry Barometer be reported more positively and that a representative be invited to a future meeting to present the results of the survey at the conclusion of the summer season.

The meeting was closed at 11.30 am.

