

Agenda Item	6
Report No	TC/01/20

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Tourism Committee

Date: 16 July 2020

Report Title: Future Tourism Strategy

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report describes for Members the current situation regarding Scotland's new National Tourism Strategy and outlines the current proposals in Highland that include a suite of Destination Management Plans that identify the tourism priorities across the different areas of Highland.

2. Recommendations

3.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the current situation regarding the National Tourism Strategy and
- ii. Note the proposals for strategies and destination plans that will identify tourism priorities in Highland.

3. Implications

3.1 There are no resource implications arising directly from this report. However, where the Council agrees to implement any Council led activities defined in any local tourism strategies, there will be resource implications which will require to be considered by the services concerned.

3.2 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report

3.3 There are no community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) implications arising directly from this report. However, the approach to developing tourism strategies and plans described will require there to be a degree of community input.

- 3.4 There are no Climate Change / Carbon Clever implications arising directly from this report. In broad terms the national tourism strategy has been developed with climate change implications in mind and it is anticipated that this will also be the case with local strategies thereby helping to reduce climate change impacts.
- 3.5 There are no risk implications arising directly from this report.
- 3.6 There are no Gaelic implications arising directly from this report.

4. Introduction

- 4.1 Across Scotland the strategic direction for tourism has largely been defined by the tourism industry but with the support of the Scottish Government and the wider public sector – including local authorities. In recent years this has seen the National Tourism Strategy complemented by a series of regional strategies or action plans including a Highland Tourism Action Plan. Both national and Highland plans had an end date of 2020.

5. Current situation with National and Highland Tourism Strategies

- 5.1 Following on from “Tourism Scotland 2020”, the Scottish Tourism Alliance have prepared a new national strategy – “Scotland Outlook 2030”. This strategy, outlining priorities for the next decade was launched on 4th March 2020 following input from over 2500 tourism leaders and stakeholders from Scotland’s tourism industry. This strategy focusses on four key priorities to realise Scotland’s tourism ambition: -
- Our passionate people
 - Our thriving places
 - Our diverse businesses
 - Our memorable experiences

The strategy is available at <https://scottishtourismalliance.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Scotland-Outlook-2030.pdf>

- 5.2 Complementing the national strategy, a Highland Tourism Action Plan for the period to 2020 previously identified the priority areas for Highland so this also requires to be replaced.
- 5.3 Even prior to the current Coronavirus pandemic, it had already been recognised that economic circumstances had changed quite significantly since 2012 and this was reflected in the new national strategy. In particular the period leading up to 2012 was characterised by a challenging economy after the banking crisis with features such as high youth unemployment. As such, the focus was very much on marketing, achieving growth and areas such as skills. Since then factors such as a high international profile for Scotland and a favourable exchange rate saw tourism grow and the focus of the new national strategy reflected this.
- 5.4 Clearly the Coronavirus pandemic has again changed the economic circumstances and while some elements of tourism are “restarting” at the time of writing this report there is still a large amount of uncertainty around how quick the recovery will be and what tourism might look like in the “new normal” situation that emerges.
- 5.5 At a national level, evidence is already emerging that the underlying principles of the new national strategy are still valid and that as a longer-term strategic document “Scotland Outlook 2030” still has considerable value. There is however also a

recognition that elements of it may have to change in response to the current situation and the underlying situation may also change – for example the emphasis on different markets may change depending on health and economic circumstances in other countries.

6. Future Highland Tourism Strategy / Strategies

6.1 Previous Highland Tourism Strategies including the most recent Highland Tourism Action Plan have been produced by the Highland Tourism Partnership (HTP) – a partnership of the key business and public sector organisations involved in Highland tourism. HTP members are: -

- 7 Destination Organisations from across Highland
- Scottish Tourism Alliance
- Federation of Small Businesses
- The Highland Council
- VisitScotland
- Highlands & Islands Enterprise
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- Forestry & Land Scotland
- Cairngorms National Park Authority

Cllr John Gordon and Cllr Gordon Adam represent the Council with officer support also provided through the Council's Principal Officer for Europe, Tourism & Film. The Council formally endorsed the Highland Tourism Action Plan produced by the HTP on 12 February 2014 as the strategic document that should guide the Council's tourism activity.

6.2 Following the launch of the new national strategy the Highland Tourism Partnership was due to meet on 27th April to consider how the ambitions of this strategy might be delivered in Highland and what local strategy / strategies might be required to support this. Due to a combination of the Covid-19 lockdown and partners activities being focussed on business support and recovery this meeting was postponed and a new date has yet to be set.

6.3 The new national strategy puts people and place at its heart and recognises that *"Scotland's communities will benefit from a 21st Century approach to tourism. They should therefore be recognised as a key stakeholder in tourism related planning"* and that *"We will actively engage local communities as valued stakeholders in tourism development and delivery."* These ambitions fit well with the Council's increased localism agenda and greater involvement of Area Committees while also suggesting that a new strategy only at a Highland level without some more local priorities is unlikely to be the best approach. This also fits well with some of the principles now outlined in "Towards a robust, resilient wellbeing economy for Scotland" the report of the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery (also known as the "Higgins report") which was published by the Scottish Government on 22 June 2020.

6.4 Towards a robust, resilient wellbeing economy for Scotland looks at Scotland's economic recovery, with the emphasis on the period after the immediate emergency created by coronavirus has been addressed with a view to ensuring the Scottish economy emerges stronger and more resilient. The report has yet to be formally considered by the Scottish Government, but it is already clear that many of the themes of the report and the recommendations in it will be of relevance to Highland tourism.

These are also likely to have a significant influence in the development of any Highland tourism strategy / strategies.

- 6.5 Full consideration of the report and the Scottish Government's response will be required as the recovery progresses, but it is useful to highlight a number of key themes that will be of relevance in developing future tourism strategy: -
- There is a recognition that different measures will be required to support different sectoral and regional challenges the economy will face in recovery – recognition that should be welcomed in Highland
 - There is a need to prioritise resilience in our economy – as a sector dependent on a physical presence tourism has been particularly hard hit leading to some disproportionate impacts in Highland e.g. a high proportion of staff on furlough
 - Recent challenges have led to some good examples of diversification such as more local supply chains that could usefully be continued so as to create more supply chain benefits from future tourism
 - Employment and education are at the heart of the plan for recovery – something that mirrors priorities already identified in the national tourism strategy. This is also likely to become all the more relevant as access to the migrant workforce that has been essential in recent years is anticipated to decline.
 - Historically low rates of borrowing could increase the opportunities for investment in public infrastructure.
- 6.6 In a Highland context there will also be a need to consider what happens at a more local level. Even prior to the launch of the new national strategy there was an increased level of interest in more localised tourism or “Destination Plans” with some areas such as the Cairngorms and Wester Ross having already done significant work in this area. While a Highland-wide plan may be an appropriate place for detailing elements such as workforce needs and skills, more local destination plans would allow the opportunity to define more location specific priorities rather than just focussing on broader themes. This is likely to be particularly relevant in setting local priorities such as those around sustainability, visitor management and infrastructure.
- 6.7 Some discussion regarding this approach has already taken place and it is anticipated that the many Highland tourism priorities for the future are likely to be defined in a series of more local “Destination Plans” rather than a single Highland plan. Developing these is likely to involve not just engagement with the Council's tourism specialists but will also overlap with some of the wider community engagement activities undertaken by the Council. As different areas of Highland are at different stages of this process there is no set timeline for the development of these plans, but it is proposed that updates be provided to this committee and area committees as required.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

Date: 3 July 2020

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