

**The Highland Council  
Tourism Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Tourism Committee held REMOTELY on Thursday 3 December 2020 at 10.30am.

**Present:**

Mr G Adam	Mr S Mackie
Dr I Cockburn	Mr D Macpherson
Mr C Fraser	Mr H Morrison
Mr J Gordon	Mrs M Paterson
Mr A Henderson	Mr D Rixson
Mr A Jarvie	Mr K Rosie (substitute)
Mr A MacInnes	Ms M Smith

**Non-Members also Present:**

Mr J Bruce	Mr K Gowans
Mrs I Campbell	Mr A Graham
Mr Alasdair Christie	Mr Lobban
Mrs Margaret Davidson	Mr D Mackay
Mr John Finlayson	Mr P Saggars
Mr R Gale	

**Officials in attendance:**

Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment  
Mr C Simpson, Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism & Film  
Ms L Joiner, Tourism Project Co-ordinator  
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator  
Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator  
Miss M Zavarella, Committee Administrator

**Also in attendance:**

Mr M Ferguson, Cairngorms National Park Authority  
Mr M Tait, Cairngorm Business Partnership

**An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.**

**Mr Gordon Adam in the Chair**

**1. Apology for Absence  
Leisgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr R Bremner.

**2. Declarations of Interest  
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

Item 6 – Mr D Rixson (Non-financial)  
Item 7 – Mr D Rixson (Non-financial)

**The undernoted Members declared interests relating to all items on the agenda for the reasons provided but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion:**

**Financial interests applicable to all items:**

Mr G Adam - part owner of two self-catering units

Mr J Gordon – Air BnB provider

Mr A Henderson – B&B provider

Mr H Morrison – Hotel owner

Ms M Smith – director of Thistle Excursion (not trading this year)

**Non-financial interests applicable to all items:**

Mr G Adam – Director of a glamping business

Mr J Gordon - Director of Skye Connect

Mr A Jarvie – Director of High Life Highland

**3. Appointment of Chair  
Cur Cathraiche an Dreuchd**

Ms M Smith, seconded by Mr D Macpherson, moved that Mr G Adam be appointed as Chair. There being no other nominations, he was duly appointed.

On account that this now made the position of Vice Chair vacant, Mr G Adam, seconded by Mrs M Paterson, moved that Ms M Smith be appointed as Vice Chair. There being no other nominations, she was duly appointed.

**4. Tourism Committee - Terms of Reference  
Comataidh Turasachd – Cumhaichean Iomraidh**

There had been circulated Report No TC/06/20 dated 20 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern was expressed that the public might assume there was a dedicated tourism budget and that not having a budget might hamper progress. It was suggested that budget aspirations required further discussion alongside the wider Council budget allocation discussions that would take place prior to the Council's budget meeting in February 2021;
- the wording in the remit should be strengthened to reflect the importance of sustainability in the context of climate change and carbon clever initiatives, and also in relation to the importance of Gaelic and cultural heritage, as detailed in the recommendations, below. It was suggested that Councillor Calum Munro be included in any discussion about Gaelic;
- attention was drawn to the importance of tourism initiatives being community-led, with specific reference to tackling the carbon implications of and possible pollution from tourist routes such as the North Coast 500;
- the impact of Brexit on tourism was not yet known;
- attention was drawn to the importance of environmental tourism and the importance of working with the Climate Change Working Group on key

issues. It was suggested that the employment of an environmental tourism officer would be helpful; and

- another bullet point should be added to the remit to promote the requirement for all agreed tourism strategies and projects agreed by the committee to contribute to the Council's response to the climate and ecological emergency.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the draft Terms of Reference for the Tourism Committee subject to the following amendments:
  - a. the first bullet point of the remit, 'to develop and review a Highland Tourism Strategy', be amended to include reference to sustainability;
  - b. a specific clause be added to the remit on recognising the need to challenge every aspect of the tourist industry in terms of its ecological impact, and that every proposed tourism initiative be challenged on its carbon footprint so that the tourist industry contributed to Highland Council achieving its Climate Change targets;
  - c. the importance of Gaelic and cultural heritage be strengthened in the remit;
- \* ii. **AGREED** that the amended remit be recommended to the Council for inclusion within the Scheme of Delegation; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the allocation of a specific budget for Tourism be discussed by the ECO Infrastructure and Environment with the Chief Executive, the Leader, the Depute Leader, the Committee Chair and Vice Chair, prior to the Council's main budget allocation review in February 2021.

## 5. **Presentation: Visitor Management** **Taisbeanadh: Stiùireadh Luchd-tadhail**

Murray Ferguson, of Cairngorms National Park Authority, explained how national parks functioned and provided information on Cairngorms National Park, key issues and themes facing the park, and work in the pipeline for the future. Mark Tate, from the Business Partnership on Visitor Management, gave an overview of work undertaken with the Park Authority to help with the recovery from the Covid-19 crisis. He highlighted the importance of working with communities, the opportunities for visitors, and the challenges that were still being faced.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Mr Ferguson and Mr Tate were thanked for their presentations;
- Members welcoming the information that some of the poor visitor behaviour that had been experienced in 2020 in Highland had also been experienced in other countries;
- some communities had been concerned that visitors would bring Covid-19 to their localities but that had not proven to be the case, with businesses practicing good hygiene measures;
- it had been disappointing that one large campsite within the Park had not opened in 2020, despite pleas from local and national leaders. The importance of engaging with tourism businesses on reopening was emphasised, given the large numbers of visitors, especially camper van

tourists, that had been experienced (it was estimated that approximately one million visitors had been to the Park since July 2020);

- the Dark Skies initiative, to provide people with the opportunity to view the night sky without light pollution, was praised and it was hoped it would continue;
- the value of the ranger service was highlighted, especially for environmental tourism, to help to communicate countryside rules and guidance, and to undertake work with children and young people in schools. Some rangers were employed by smaller estates, sometimes with grant aid, within the Park and, going forward, there was an aim for all rangers to work as part of a Park-wide team. Further discussion on the ranger service would be undertaken with High Life Highland;
- attention was drawn to the long-term benefits of rewilding projects and to the value of eco-tourism;
- it was important there was collaboration between the Park Authority and the Council's Climate Change Working Group;
- increasing numbers of camper vans were expected in the coming years and it was important to develop strategies to manage this, noting that it was often a small number of key sites which were the most affected by excessive numbers of visitors, therefore a system of communication and information provision was essential. The majority of camper van visitors were respectful of local environments and keen to behave appropriately, and many were affluent and likely to spend money in local economies during their visits;
- reference was made to the value of Gaelic as a promotional tool for tourism; and
- information was sought and provided on the Park Authority's bid to the Heritage Lottery for around £50m to address climate change with an emphasis on nature and through a place-based approach. They had passed the expression of interest stage and the final bid would be submitted in February 2021.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

## **6. Visitor Management Plan Plana Stiùiridh Luchd-tadhail**

**Declaration of Interest: Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative on the Isle of Rum Community Trust and as the Secretary of the Mallaig Heritage Centre but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.**

During a verbal update, the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment explained that information gathering was occurring across Council services to determine areas of improvement for the 2021 tourist season that was in-line with current staffing and budgets. Additionally, recommendations were being sought for long-term improvements from 2022 onwards in terms of legislative change and infrastructure improvements in key workstreams. It was confirmed that a report on the Visitor Management Plan would be brought to the next Committee and would showcase the developments on the Isle of Skye in relation to tourist carparking and income

being achieved.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought and provided on the new carparking facilities at the Storr and Quiraing which was based on a self-funding model covering capital costs and profit-sharing that would be further detailed in the report coming to the next Committee;
- in response to a question it was agreed that electric vehicle charging points would be outlined in the next report given the growth of environmental tourism and it was commented that the Climate Change and Energy teams were making positive progress on electric vehicles in terms of accessing opportunities and selling strategies to key funders;
- with regard to the success story on the Isle of Skye it was requested that information on campervans and visitor facilities also be included in the future report given the lessons learned in this area; and
- in response to a question it was confirmed that the Highland Council, SEPA and Scottish Water guidance report on Campervan and Motorhome Waste Disposal had been recently published and would be circulated to Members.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the update;
- ii. **AGREED** that a copy of the Campervan Waste Disposal Guidance document be circulated to Members; and
- iii. **AGREED** that a final report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on the Visitor Management Plan with additional areas of focus on electric vehicle charging points and on showcasing the positive developments in respect of campervans and visitor facilities on the Isle of Skye.

## 7. **Tourism Infrastructure Plan Plana Bun-structair Turasachd**

**Declaration of Interest: Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative on the Isle of Rum Community Trust and as the Secretary of the Mallaig Heritage Centre but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.**

During a verbal update, Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism & Film explained that the draft Tourism and Infrastructure Plan was in the audit and gap analysis phase currently undergoing wider consultation with key partners. It was anticipated that the responses provided would offer significant information on key areas which would be utilised in developing the final draft of the plan to feedback to the Committee for approval. It was highlighted that next steps would be to analyse feedback, identify projects to fill gaps and determine with the Committee how to address needs in infrastructure while prioritising feasibility, time and budget. It was commented that the Council made 16 applications through the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund for Highland area projects and the results would be announced 15 December 2020.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members welcomed the volume of applications made to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure fund and highly anticipated the results;
- the guidance on Campervan and Motorhome Waste Disposal was a positive development however, Members expressed concern about the daunting information enclosed and whether this would deter small scale businesses. In response, it was commented that cost-effective solutions for small scale sites would be challenging though it was highlighted that these businesses did not require overnight waste disposal on-site but could consider relying on a wider network of waste disposal facilities available. The guidance may be useful for a community development of a standalone waste facility for motorhomes passing through for instance and it was confirmed that the Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism and Film would liaise with interested parties in respect of installing waste disposal facilities;
- managing expectations of the public on timelines of improving infrastructure for tourism was important as it might take a few years to achieve all that was being sought;
- it was suggested that emergency arrangements that had been previously identified be revisited in the short-term if large projects were not feasible within the timescale for the upcoming tourism season;
- in response to a question it was explained that in order for communities to be open to development financing it was important to highlight that there was a commercial opportunity available to them and though the Council might not be able to provide financial assistance, other forms of support such as Business Gateway would be accessible;
- The need for increased non-statutory tourism (brown) road signage, particularly on the A9, was emphasised and it was suggested that the Chair, Vice Chair and Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism and Film liaise with Transport Scotland regarding this. It was highlighted that it could be a lengthy process due to funding requirements;
- the Tomintoul Bowling Club was a good example of a simple small-scale facility that appeared functional and accessible with good signage and it would be useful to know how the facility and payment strategy was managed; and
- in response to a question it was explained that small towns and villages that desired increased marketing and tourist draw could look into utilising less costly avenues such as social media and should consider gathering community information and feeding into the North Coast 500 team to market these destinations on the NC 500 website. The Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism and Film would liaise with Destination Management Organisations to assist in this regard.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the update and that a final draft of the Tourism Infrastructure Plan would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee;
- ii. **AGREED** that the Chair, Vice Chair and Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism and Film liaise with Transport Scotland regarding improving the tourism (brown) signage on the A9; and
- iii. **NOTED** that the Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism and Film would liaise with interested parties in respect of installing waste disposal facilities and

Destination Management Organisations on marketing and promoting small towns/villages and lesser known destinations across the Highlands.

The meeting concluded at 12:26pm.