

AGENDA ITEM 8v

Highland Council Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee

Minutes of Meeting of the **Tourism Working Group** held in Committee Room 1, Council Headquarters, Inverness on Thursday 28 November 2019 at 4.00 pm.

Present

Mr Bill Lobban (Chairman)
Mr John Bruce
Mr Craig Fraser

Mr Allan Henderson
Mr Duncan Macpherson
Ms Maxine Smith

Officials in attendance

Mr C Simpson, Principal Tourism & Film Officer
Ms A Prior, Project Manager, Commercial & Efficiency Team
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Democratic Services

MR B LOBBAN IN THE CHAIR

BUSINESS

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr G Adam, Dr I Cockburn and Mr J Gordon.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

There had been circulated the Minutes of the last meeting held on 26 September 2019, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

4. Tourism Projects

There had been circulated Report No TWG/08/19 dated 20 November 2019 by the Executive Chief Officer – Transformation and Economy.

During discussion, the following main points were raised by Members:-

- Following recent issues regarding project timescales for the Cromarty Slipway project, Visit Scotland had confirmed that the Assessment Panel had agreed to an extension to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund award for this project, subject to further detail being provided no later than 31

December, 2019. Officers were working with Community representatives and key partners to ensure that the conditions were met within the timescale required by Visit Scotland;

- It was advised that the Scottish Government announced a further £3m would be available for a 3rd Round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. Expressions of interest for the 3rd Round were required by 22 January, 2020 and full applications were required by 10 July, 2020. Details of the 3rd round process and requirements for submitting bids were also provided at the meeting.
- It was queried if a project to improve the Clava Cairns car park would meet the criteria of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. It was explained that given there was a big enough area between Clava and the City of Inverness boundary it should qualify. It would be checked if the car park was owned by the Council or Historic Environment Scotland.

The Working Group **NOTED**:-

- i. the status of the first and second round Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund projects; and
- ii. that proposals for the third round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund had recently been announced.

5. Tourism Infrastructure Plan

There had been circulated Report No TWG/09/19 dated 20 November 2019 by the Executive Chief Officer – Transformation and Economy.

During discussion, the following main points were raised by Members:-

- Members gave their support for the inclusion in the Tourism Infrastructure Plan, the different types of infrastructure listed in the report, that was currently provided by the Council individually or in conjunction with partners;
- it was confirmed that electric vehicle (EV) charge points as part of a wider project would be an eligible item to be considered within the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. Details were provided of current and future proposals for the installation of EV charge points in Highland. It was understood that there was to be provision of EV charge points in Cromarty and an undertaking was given to check this.
- A large number of EV charge points had been funded by Transport Scotland to get the initial rollout of EV points underway. Private Sector involvement would also be key in increasing the number and areas that EV charge points were available.
- Coffee shops and restaurants would be the obvious location for electric charge points for E-Bikes. It was explained that while there was no provision in the Plan for E-Bike charging, one of the bids for low carbon and transport European Funding was for active travel hubs such as in Rose Street, Inverness where consideration was being given to have E-Bike charging points. The alternative provision would be for businesses to provide charging points to encourage E-Bike use for commuting to work.
- There was a need to ensure that Public Wi-Fi services were sustainable in the long term.

Thereafter, the Working Group:-

- i. **NOTED** the proposals for how an infrastructure plan might be developed; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the range of facilities in the draft outline attached to the report.

6. **Transient Visitor Levy**

There had been circulated Report No TWG/10/19 dated 20 November 2019 by the Executive Chief Officer – Transformation and Economy. There had also been circulated a draft response to the Scottish Government’s consultation on “The Principles of a Local Discretionary Transient Visitor Levy or Tourist Tax”.

There was a presentation on the Council’s consultation on a Transient Visitor Levy which involved both an online survey open to all types of stakeholder and dedicated face-to-face visitor surveys. Response rates exceeded expectations with 5,622 responses to the online survey, 950 face-to-face interviews with visitors and a further 26 written responses.

It was noted that a report on the Transient Visitor Levy consultation and the draft Council response to the Scottish Government’s national consultation would be submitted to the next meeting of the full Council.

In discussion, Members supported the content of the draft Council response to the Scottish Government’s national consultation on the Transient Visitor Levy. It was noted that two thirds of respondents were in support of a Visitor Levy. Visitors to the area regarded Council facilities as tourist facilities e.g. public conveniences and car parking. Members commended staff on their work with the Survey.

Thereafter, the Working Group:-

- i **NOTED** the progress made to date with the consultation process; and
- ii **APPROVED**, for submission to the next Council meeting, the draft Council response to the Scottish Government’s consultation on “The Principles of a Local Discretionary Transient Visitor Levy or Tourist Tax”

7. **2020 Meeting Dates**

The Working Group **NOTED** that meeting dates for 2020 had been scheduled as follows:-

- Thursday 19 March 2020 at 2.00pm
- Thursday 11 June 2020 at 2.00pm
- Thursday 23 September 2020 at 2.00pm
- Thursday 3 December 2020 at 10.30am

The meeting was closed at 5.30 pm.