

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Thursday, 18 November, 2021, at 10 am.

Present:

Mr M Finlayson
Mr D Louden
Ms P Munro

Mr A Rhind
Ms F Robertson (**in the Chair**)
Ms M Smith

Officials in Attendance:

Mark Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer - Property & Housing
Helen Ross Senior Ward Manager, CSER
Tim Stott, Principal Planner, Development Plans Team
Julie-Ann Bain, Planner, Development Plans Team
Douglas Chisholm, Planner, Development Plans Team
Rory MacLeod, Housing Manager
Hayley Cameron, Interim Education Officer – Mid Area
Sara Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer
Fiona MacBain, Committee Administrator

Also in Attendance:

SC Paddy Farrell, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Mrs C Wilson.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were none.

3. Fire – Area Performance Summary Report Smàladh – Geàrr Aithisg Coileanadh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No ERA/21/21 dated 1 November 2021 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Members welcomed the comprehensive and reassuring report, the good engagement that had taken place with communities, and the improvements made to the recruitment process;

- information was sought and provided on the uptake of advice on new regulations in relation to domestic fire alarms and the provision of interlinked alarms;
- Members asked if there had been any incidents of fire engines being unable to source the minimum of four firefighters required, but data on that was not available at the meeting; and
- employers of retained firefighters were thanked for their valued support.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

4. Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan 2 Plana Leasachaidh Ionadail 2 ga Mholadh airson Linne Mhoireibh A-staigh

There had been circulated Report No ERA/22/21 dated 14 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

The Development Plans Team were thanked for their work on the consultation which had attracted a record number of comments. The process for the Development Plan was summarised, with the next stage being approval by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 2 December 2021, followed by a further period of consultation in early 2022, seeking any formal objections, which would be heard by the Scottish Government.

A presentation was provided for each area of the Proposed Plan, with particular attention drawn to two issues:

- since publication of the report, an additional expansion to the industrial allocation boundary at 'Nigg Energy Park NG01' was now proposed, following late receipt of a representation which had been circulated to Members and published on the Council's website; and
- the report did not recommend a change to the Hinterland Boundary within Easter Ross because of the council's commitment to tackle climate change and due to the additional expense incurred providing services to single properties outwith settlements.

During discussion, Members raised issues on the following areas:

Hinterland Boundary

It was confirmed that of the 28 comments received during the consultation period on proposed changes to the Hinterland policy, only two were from Easter Ross wards. Members spoke in favour of removing Hinterland restrictions in Wards 6 and 7. It was confirmed that the provision of public services outwith the boundaries of settlements was more costly, but exact figures for this were not available.

Alness

Clarification was sought and provided on the allocation of AL07 for community use.

Evanton

Members voiced an aspiration for a future road bridge over the River Sgitheach at Teandallon, Evanton, in addition to an active travel link. Discussion took place on how this might be funded. A Developer Requirement to reference an active travel link and the aspiration for the bridge would be added to the Development Plan although Members also queried whether these requirements would be viable for the developer.

Invergordon

- clarification was sought and provided on the proposals for IG02 and IG08, which were allocated, in part with a view to supporting possible growth in the area from the renewable energy industry, though it was not anticipated that during the proposed Plan term all of the allocation would be required for development;
- IG04 was allocated for a wide range of uses including housing, business, community and industrial use to allow for flexibility in its redevelopment;
- IG06 and IG07 were allocated for industry as there was remaining development potential within them, noting an application was pending for an anaerobic digester plant on IG06; and
- IG10, IG11 and IG12 were currently in the Hinterland, so if the Hinterland boundary was removed, there would be more flexibility for development in those areas. The Council would not be seeking to support larger scale housing developments in those areas, unless there was a significant surge in demand and allocated Housing areas were fully developed. Assurance was sought and provided that there would be no capacity constraints in respect of developments related to anticipated rise in Cromarty Firth economic activity, and it was pointed out that the LDP was updated every five years, and that applications could also be considered outwith the requirements of the LDP if there was sufficient justification.

Tain

- in response to concern about the Grove, a disused Victorian property in the centre of Tain which was in a poor state of repair, it was explained that planning permission had been granted for housing but significant investment was required to renovate the property. In the first instance, a meeting was proposed between the Senior Ward Manager, the Executive Chief Officer - Property & Housing, and the Principal Planner to consider what support could be offered to the owners to develop the site for the benefit of all; and
- it was confirmed that TN06 was not being proposed for housing but would remain within the Settlement Development Area (SDA).

Nigg

- A late representation in relation to Nigg had been received and had been circulated to Members and added to the Council's website. This had contributed to a proposed change to the land allocations detailed in the committee report, namely the additional expansion to the industrial allocation boundary at 'Nigg Energy Park NG01' to meet the anticipated pressures to

support the expanding renewable energy industry, with a comprehensive rationale being provided during the presentation; and

- Members expressed disappointment that this change would prevent the creation of a golf course in that area, which was of benefit to local communities and visitors. However, the anticipated expansion of the renewable energy industry at Nigg was likely to bring significant economic benefits to the area, including a variety of permanent long-term jobs and higher retention of young people in the area. Although supportive of the proposed changes, Members urged engagement with the local community and highlighted the further 8-week consultation period in early 2022 during which formal objections to the LDP could be made.

The Committee:

- NOTED** the issues raised by respondents to the consultation on Area committee-specific matters and **AGREED** the recommended responses to these issues both as detailed at **Appendix 1, but including the additional expansion to the industrial allocation boundary at 'Nigg Energy Park NG01' as shown during the presentation;**
- NOTED** the issues raised by respondents to the consultation on strategic matters and officer recommended responses both as detailed at **Appendix 2 and AGREED TO RECOMMEND these to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee**, with the exception that the Area Committee wished the Hinterland Boundary for Wards 6 and 7 to be removed to exclude any areas of Hinterland within those wards;
- NOTED** that additional supporting documents would accompany the publication of the Proposed Plan, including those outlined in section 3;
- NOTED** that minor presentational, typographical and other factual updates and changes would be made by officers, with any material changes to be agreed in consultation and agreement with the chair of the relevant committee(s) prior to publication;
- in line with government guidance, **AGREED** for the published Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan to be treated as a material planning consideration in making planning decisions and providing advice;
- AGREED** the approach to consultation outlined in section 7 of the report;
- AGREED** a meeting be arranged between the Senior Ward Manager, the Executive Chief Officer - Property & Housing, and the Principal Planner to discuss possible support for the owners of the building in Tain referred to during discussion, which was currently out of service and in a poor state of repair, then provide feedback to local Members; and
- AGREED** that a Developer Requirement to reference to an active travel link and the aspiration for a road bridge over the River Sgitheach at Teandallon, Evanton, would be added to the Development Plan.

5. Housing Performance Report Aithisg Coileanadh Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No ERA/23/21 dated 5 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2021 to 30 September 2021.

**6. Ross and Cromarty Educational Trust
Urras Foghlaim Rois is Chromba**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/24/21 dated 4 November 2021 by the Area Education and Learning Manager.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

**7. Proposed Award of Cromarty Firth Repurposed Covid Response Funds
Moladh Maointean Freagairt Covid Ath-stiùirichte Linne Chromba a Thoir Seachad**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/25/21 dated 4 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the proposal to allocate £14,750 from the Cromarty Firth reallocated Covid-19 Ward Discretionary funds to purchase a play multi-unit and associated surfacing selected by Saltburn & Westwood Community Council representatives in consultation with amenities staff. The unit would be installed and maintained by the amenities service subject to ongoing maintenance budget being available

**8. Tain & Easter Ross Place Based Funds – Proposed Funding Allocation
Maointean Stèidhichte air Àite airson Bhaile Dhubhthaich is Rois an Ear –
Riarachadh Maoin ga Mholadh**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/026/21 dated 4 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

The Committee **AGREED** the proposed allocation £5,000 of Easter Ross Place Based Funds to Seaboard Memorial Hall to allow the harbour toilet refurbishment to be completed despite increased costs.

**9. Use of Tain & Easter Ross Covid Response Funds
Cleachdadh Mhaointean Freagairt Covid Bhaile Dhubhthaich is Rois an Ear**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/27/21 dated 14 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

The Committee:

- i. **AGREED** the proposal to allocate £10,000 from the remaining Tain & Easter Ross Covid-19 Ward Discretionary funds to support investment in

- play in the Tain & Easter Ross Ward in consultation with amenities staff and local communities; and
- ii. **NOTED** that next steps to progress this work would follow on from upcoming play equipment inspection reports and local communities would require to be involved in discussions around future provision along with amenities staff.

10. Invergordon Common Good Fund – Consultation on the proposal to dispose, by sale or lease, of Invergordon Town Hall
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain – Co-chomhairle mun mholadh faighinn cuidhteas, tro reic no aonta-màil, de Thalla Bhaile Inbhir Ghòrdain

There had been circulated Report No ERA/28/21 dated 27 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- there had been no responses to the second consultation, which suggested a significantly decreased level of public interest in the building;
- in response to a suggestion the Council take over the building and use it as part of its building rationalisation initiative, the high costs of restoration and ongoing maintenance were highlighted, along with the significant pressures already on the Council's capital budget;
- it was disappointing the Town Hall had fallen into a state of disrepair and it was hoped that funding could be found to improve and maintain the building. Mr D Loudon made reference to the bust of landowner and MP Sir John Gordon, which had been sculpted by the French artist Edmé Bouchardon in 1728, and recently valued at around £1.4m, and he suggested investigation into selling the bust and using the proceeds to repair and maintain the Town Hall, pointing out that the bust was of little benefit to the people of Invergordon, whereas the Town Hall was of considerable value. In response, it was explained that consideration would have to be given to the possible implications of the Common Good Fund selling the bust, as well as the process for doing so, which would likely require public consultation. It was possible that other UK or Scottish Government funding streams could be available and these should be investigated, along with likely ongoing maintenance costs once the building had been restored;
- the community group which had been trying to save the Town Hall had no longer felt able to take it on in face of the significant challenges to restore and maintain the building;
- reference was made to the successful refurbishment project of Tain Picture House, but it was also pointed out that this had the ongoing benefit of a community group; and
- it would be ideal if a local project officer could take on the Town Hall project, but it was not known if that would be possible.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the outcome of the consultation process undertaken as detailed in paragraph 6 of the report; and

- ii. **DEFERRED** the decision for 6 months to allow investigation of the possibility of alternative sources of funding.

11. Invergordon Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain

There had been circulated Report No ERA/29/21 dated 4 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the Quarter 2 monitoring statement for the Invergordon Common Good Fund; and
- ii. the current position in relation to the Invergordon Town Hall.

12. Tain Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich

There had been circulated Report No ERA/30/21 dated 4 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

- it was clarified that local contractors would be sought for the Tain Golf Club Road project once a budget had been agreed; and
- in relation to mussels, the Senior Ward Manager drew attention to the latest survey results showing the forestry area as stable in terms of the presence of spat but with the sub tidal survey showing limited recovery and few areas with a high mussel density, therefore a full stock survey at this stage was not planned. In terms of the Green Accelerator project referred to in paragraph 6.3 of the report, the Highland Council's Climate Action Coastlines project had been selected as one of the pathfinder projects under the Scottish Government's Green Growth Accelerator programme. This was a significant and long term programme under which the Scottish Government would provide up to £1 million to support the pathfinders through the development phase, which was mostly about developing a business case and doing research on the best methods to employ once there was access to the full GGA funding. A mussel bed restoration project could align with the criteria set for the Green Growth Accelerator programme and it was possible that work on mussel beds could begin in 2023 and could take place over the following 25 years. This was, however, entirely dependent on whether the pathfinder process identified this work as a priority. Future reports would provide Members with information on this as it developed.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the Quarter 2 monitoring statement; and
- ii. **APPROVED** a budget of £20,000 to allow work to be carried out to the Tain Golf Club Road as outlined in section 5 of the report.

13. Minutes

Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and was **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Easter Ross Area Committee held on 12 August 2021.

The meeting ended at 1.05pm.