

City Area Development Group
Monday 24th January 2022 at 10:00am

ACTION NOTE

Present:

Cllr Bet McAllister (BM); Cllr Bill Boyd (BB); Cllr Carolyn Caddick (CC); Cllr Colin Aitken (CC); Cllr Duncan MacPherson (DM); Cllr Helen Carmichael (HC); Cllr Isabelle Mackenzie (IM); Cllr Janet Campbell (JC); Cllr Jimmy Gray (JG); Cllr Margaret Davidson (MD); Cllr Trish Robertson (TR); David Haas (DH), Inverness City Area manager; Allan Maguire (AM), Head of Development and Resources; Alison MacNeil (AM), Senior Public Relations Officer; Scott Dalgarno (SD), Development Plans Manager; Tracey Urry (TU), Head of Roads & Transport; Stewart Nicol (SN), Inverness Chamber of Commerce; Michael Golding (MG), Visit Inverness Loch Ness; Mike Smith (MS), Inverness BID; Carol Barclay (CB), Network Rail; Ben Sulch (BS), Network Rail; Billy McKay (BMK), Network Rail; James Story (JS), Kingsmills Hotel; Craig Ewan (CE), Kingsmills Hotel

Items	Note/Action Agreed	Action For	Action Undertaken
1. Welcome/Apologies for Absence			
	Chair Cllr Carolyn Caddick welcomed attendees and introductions were made. NOTED apologies were received from Malcolm Macleod, Cllr Alasdair Christie, Cllr Ken Gowans and Cllr Knox		
2. Railway Station Redevelopment – Inverness Airport – Network Rail			
	<p>Carol Barclay gave Members an overview of the station masterplan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This plan interlinks with a number of other city and region development plans including the Inverness Strategy and the Academy Street redevelopment • Currently moving into phase 2 of the masterplan • The aim is to maintain operation and functionality during the development • Urban Realm – the station should enhance and complement its surroundings this will encourage people to explore Inverness. Aims to create green space, connect with tourist sites and civic spaced, improve the façade and make the most of local assets • Access and Connectivity – makes effortless journeys by connecting onwards transport modes. Aims to improve the flow of the station, improve commercial offerings, improve links with bus station and links with active travel networks • Rail Operations – adapt station and depot facilities to service and enable efficient operations. Looking at station configuration, staff accommodation, deport operations, decarbonization of traction and track layout • Freight – ensure yards and facilities are adaptable while making best use of the space. Looking at light/express freight, bulk goods, last mile green delivery and decarbonize delivery to the Highlands • CB encouraged members to look at the Scottish Strategic Review that came out on Thursday • NOTED the full presentation will be circulated to Members for information. ACTION: CB to send this on • It is proposed by Network Rail that the Highland Council lead strategically with Urban Realm <p>Tracey Urry put into context for Members what the Highland Council are doing in enabling and supporting this process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work is ongoing in partnership with Network Rail and the Station development is part of the Strategic Vision's 	<p>CB</p>	<p><i>Presentation received and circulated with note</i></p>

masterplan

- TU is the representing Officer from the Highland Council on the Inverness Station Redevelopment Steering Group
- A Council officer has been appointed to feed into the urban realm
- The development group met last week, this was productive

Billy McKay gave a briefing on the New Station development at Inverness Airport:

- Members were shown photographs of the ongoing works
- This is on programme and delivering
- In contact with key suppliers
- Work is progressing well and safely
- Looking December 2022 for the station opening and this is likely to be achieved

Comments

- SN welcomed the airport development and the set end date but highlighted the importance of ensuring the message is out there about transport links as this lack of messaging is distracting from the phenomenal investment which will connect the City
- Questions were raised in relation the completion of the station works. CB advised that as they will need to be decarbonized by 2030 it is likely works will start of the ground by the mid 2020's
- JC requested that consideration be given to the frontage of the station on Academy Street and suggested ornate frontage similar to that done on the Academy Street development. CB confirmed the heritage aspect will be looked at during the planning stage
- A number of comments encouraged for the front of the station to be finished as soon as possible
- BM highlighted an issue raised by a constituent that they can no longer access the Station from the Eastgate side. CB confirmed this was closed due to COVID restrictions, it is hoped as restrictions eased this will be reopened
- IM highlighted the importance of communication and the need to link in with the hospitality sector, rail enthusiast etc. The businesses around the station need to know what is happening for certainty. IM also suggested links with UHI campus and LNER. CB advised Network Rail are in regular liaison with LNER. But links to UHI are difficult as HITRANS did a feasibility for a station in the area and found it would be hard to develop there due to the landscape so would be technically challenging
- DH reassured Members close work and communication will be done with the development group to allow a clear plan of communication. Local community groups and business will also be involved
- BB advised he believed there was room for more information and a need to see clear deliverables. The information on the station needs to connect with all the other works being done in the city. Need to look at how to get people of the road and onto rail. Needs to be ambitious
- CC highlighted that the cost of trains is still rather expensive and suggested the possibility of integrated tickets or something to encourage people
- MD highlighted the importance of engagement strategy and the need to be getting on with the plans as soon as possible

ACTION – Updates noted and re Inverness Railway station, Members keen to see progress on;

- Project Programme – Timelines
- Engagement Plan
- Tie-in with other related activity relating to city development sites

3.	Hotels – Update on Developments and Bookings over the Festive Period			
		<p>Craig Ewan gave a briefing to Members on hospitality over the Festive Period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID has caused the most difficult and demanding period for hospitality • There have been two, 4-month closures since the start of the pandemic, Mother's Day weekend and the festive period • Occupancy appeared to recover well but then with periods such as January when occupancy rates are already low this has been a struggle • Kingsmills are currently operating at significantly reduced capacity and this huge reduction in room occupancy has been seen across the city • Ness Walk and Kingsmills alone have had to absorb significant income pressures • Going forward there are pressures of increased laundry costs and guest supplies etc. There is also the effect of having to use different suppliers • There is a huge skills shortage due to COVID and Brexit. Individuals from Europe cannot be employed unless they have settled status • High levels of staff absences due to covid and isolating are also continuing to impact • Increased costs are predicted to continue to rise due to the price of gas and electric <p>James Story gave Members an insight of the Inverness Hotel Market:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total accommodation available in Inverness is 2,074 bedrooms. This does not include B&Bs as they are not seen as competitive to the overall hotel market due to the different client group • There are concerns with the number of hotels currently going through the planning process as it is predicted an additional 1,000,000 visitors would be required to fill this supply of rooms • JS summarised that they are optimistic for the future and are looking to aim at a different market with KIN. This will look at appealing more to a younger audience • Biggest struggle faced is funding due to continuing restrictions • NOTED due to technical difficulties the presentation was not available during the meeting. ACTION: JS to provide Members with the presentation of statistics for information <p>Comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MD queried if the same picture is being seen elsewhere and also if Visit Scotland are doing any work to bring back national trade. CE confirmed yes, the picture is being experienced throughout and close work and activity is ongoing with Visit Scotland to look at Quarters 1 and 4 to ensure a higher demand moving forward • MD highlighted that employability and training for the hospitality sector is vital for the Highlands Future and encouraged JS and CE that when the opportunity arises this is to be encouraged • MD highlighted there needs to be a high-level discussion around finance as it is clear hospitality has been widely affected • DH reassured Members the INBS Business Liaison continues to meet and link in with employability to ensure there is a unified voice in terms of the Highlands • IM highlighted that some businesses are still not receiving funding so this needs to be picked up. Relevant bodies need to be engaged. Also, the link in with Loch Ness is crucial • ACTION: AM to take back to the Scottish Government the query raised by JS regarding the temporary structure 		

AM

		which was granted due to covid regulations NOTED that the Hotel sector has a key role in ensuring a clear path to growth for the City economy and that the Council will continue to ensure that sector is closely engaged with.		
4.	Key Strategic Projects update and Project Planning			
		<p>Allan Maguire provided an update to Members of the ongoing City Centre projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church Street – now complete, Highland Council are marketing the housing units while the developer markets the retail one • Union Street – progressing well, estimated completion date Sep 2022 • Castle Street, Chisolms – delays due to additional substructure works. HHA now progressing with target of completion Nov 2022 • Victorian Market – progressing well. Due to complete June 2022 • Archimedeas Screw – due to complete June 2022 • Castle Street Project – still in discussions and tender process continues. Paper is going to Committee on Wednesday. Also awaiting comments from Scottish Government. Hoped will be in a better position in Feb to let contract • Inverness College Site – waiting for update from UHI on this • Eastgate Hostel – Owners confirmed firm offer of purchase but have since gone quiet. HHA have reopened negotiations on this • Viewhill House – HHA have carried out an initial feasibility study. Challenging due to issues with access on this • Successful bid for 3 projects Castle Street Energy Unit, Northern Meeting Park and Bught Park. Awaiting formal agreement from UK Government <p>Comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BB advised he would like to see a comprehensive plan for the City which included all ongoing projects. BB suggested Inverness Futures Group have an involvement the strategic planning. AM confirmed links are there are the City Centre vision is being taken forward. Meetings have been held with Drew Henry on how to integrate the wider vision • DM queried the £5M granted by the Gaelic school fund and if this is still available suggested Slackbuie • DH confirmed a presentation will be given to the Association of Urban Markets regarding the Victorian Market 		
5.	Marketing – BID/VILN			
		<p>Michael Golding gave a summary of the Inverness City Recovery Marketing Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTION: MG report to be circulated to Members for information • Discover Our Stories video - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ap1ZwIQiccg • https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/scotland-now/new-loch-ness-monster-short-26003109 • https://www.thenational.scot/news/19862551.loch-ness-monster-new-nessie-campaign-hopes-bring-tourists-back-area/ • https://www.inverness-courier.co.uk/news/watch-sightings-of-loch-ness-monster-inspiration-for-new-vi-263636/ • Also, on STV news, P&J and more • 16.5M people reached through social media in 2021 • Business Tourism continues to be hard hit, with the majority of conferences cancelled • The Loch Ness Challenge (three-day, five event fitness festival) takes place in May, with over 300 competitors 	MG	<i>Report received and circulated with note</i>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looking at working with communities and ward managers to install local lamppost banners to promote the area Announced becoming the first carbon neutral BID in the UK https://www.traveldailymedia.com/how-visit-inverness-loch-ness-has-become-first-carbon-neutral-business-improvement-district-in-uk/ https://www.businessleader.co.uk/visit-inverness-loch-ness-becomes-uks-first-carbon-neutral-business-improvement-district/ https://www.businessleader.co.uk/is-global-warming-really-a-concern-for-businesses/ Also on BBC Radio, Inverness Courier, P&J, Highland News, Highland Times and more <p>Mike Smith provided an update from Retail over the Festive period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Footfall was 30% down on 2019 figures Same difficulties being faced as hospitality Return of tourism is seen as the solution Hoped a return of coaches will be seen Also hoped there will be a return to offices 		
6.	Communications and Engagement Plan			
		<p>David Haas advised Members of the current plans around communication and engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings are taking place with Colleagues and Officers, this is supported by Malcolm Macleod and Allan Gunn Recognised there needs to be a common message Highland Council will lead on engagement Next stage is to get Officers together to ensure a concise engagement plan The Rethinking Inverness report is the vision Work will be done with Partners to deliver on this across the piece The initial engagement will be getting the strategy right going forward ACTION: DH to comeback to the next meeting with a plan for Members NOTED the next meeting they key priorities to focus on are communications and engagement so a detailed plan is required, and that work will be taken forward with Executive Chief Officers and the Chief Executive to ensure that the key themes of the Vison and projects are promoted to enhance investment in the City. <p>Comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MD highlighted the importance of the need to move on this now as it is a massive job on marketing potential. ACTION: CC to speak with the Provost and MD to speak with the Chief Executive regarding economic development 	DH	
7.	Notes of Previous Meeting/Matters Arising			
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NOTED any matters arising were covered appropriately throughout the meeting and the minutes of the last meeting were agreed as accurate 		

8.	Date of Next Meeting			
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NOTED the next meeting is to be set for Monday 7th March. The meeting will focus on the Communication and engagement plan • HIE are also to be invited regarding the campus 		<p><i>Meeting has been set and arrangements have been made for HIE to attend</i></p>