

The Highland Council

Minutes of meeting of the **Tourism Committee** held in the **Council Chamber, Inverness**, on **Wednesday, 16 February 2022 at 2pm.**

Present:

Mr G Adam
Mr J Bruce
Dr I Cockburn
Mr J Gordon
Mr A Henderson
Mr B Lobban

Mr A MacInnes
Mr D Macpherson
Mrs M Paterson
Mr D Rixson (VC)
Ms M Smith

Non-Members also Present:

Mrs S Fanet (VC)

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Ms K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance
Mr S Fraser, Head of Legal Services
Mr C Simpson, Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism & Film, Development and Resources
Mr S Manning, Principal Traffic Officer, Roads and Transport
Ms W Girard Pruden, Project Co-ordinator, Development and Resources
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance
Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Performance and Governance

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. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies were submitted for Mr C Fraser, Mr B Bremner, Mr J Gordon, Mr S Mackie and Mr H Morrison.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The following Transparency Statements were made at the meeting and requested to be recorded in the Minutes:

Mr G Adam declared a connection to the items on the agenda as a director of a glamping enterprise and a part-owner of a short term letting property. Having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare because the agenda items considered Tourism policy in general and could not be reasonably interpreted as benefiting his specific interests.

Mr D Rixson declared a connection to the items on the agenda as Secretary of the Mallaig Heritage Centre, which was not a Council appointment. Having applied the objective test, he did not consider he had an interest to declare because although the Heritage Centre welcomed visitors the connection was non-financial and remote.

Ms M Smith declared a connection to the items on the agenda as the owner of Thistle Excursions which offered trips principally to cruise ship passengers. However, having applied the objective test she did not consider she had an interest to declare because the agenda items consider wider tourism policy and issues in general and could not be reasonably interpreted as potentially bringing benefit to her specific interests.

3. Location Action Plans for Visitor Management Planaichean-gnìomha Àiteachan airson Stiùireadh Luchd-tadhail

There had been circulated TC/01/22 dated 2 February 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer - Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- the successful work of the seasonal rangers was commended;
- improvements in waste management in Lochaber in 2021 were welcomed, but parking remained an issue of concern, with particular reference to the Fort-William to Mallaig road. Future consideration might have to be given to compulsory land purchases to assist with visitor management and to ensure restrictions were not being imposed to solely benefit landowners;
- the need to educate the public to care for the countryside was highlighted and links to campaigns by NatureScot and VisitScotland would be shared with the Committee. The rangers had been instrumental in encouraging improved behaviour;
- after the forthcoming Council election, consideration should be given to putting out a call for sites that required improvement, and to start tackling problematic areas;
- with reference to recent publicity seeking a leaseholder for a caravan park, information was sought and provided on whether this was something the Council could consider. It was possible the Council's business gateway service could have a role in this type of situation;
- attention was drawn to the improvements achieved by the Council, especially via the ranger service, to help visitors and locals. The action plans would be built on and the infrastructure protected and increased. It was noted that much of the work had been undertaken with partners and communities;
- it was disappointing that public toilets had been vandalised, affecting local residents and visitors;
- it was hoped the improved services in relation to waste management in 2021 would be continued;
- more accurate numbers on motorhome users would be helpful, but they were challenging to count. It was unlikely numbers would fall in 2022; and
- it was requested that the next phase could include consultation with Loch Carron Community Council and the Loch Carron Development Company on plans for the Applecross and Loch Carron area.

The Committee:

- i. **APPROVED** the final draft of three of the four Location Action Plans;
- ii. **AGREED** that these areas were to be priorities for action and any activities that needed an immediate solution; and
- iii. **AGREED** that further Location Actions Plans were produced for other 'hotspot' areas identified in the Strategic Tourism Development Plan;
- iv. **AGREED** to include Loch Carron Community Council and the Loch Carron Development Company in the next phase of the consultation in relation to the Applecross and Loch Carron area; and
- v. **AGREED** to circulate to the Committee links for NatureScot and VisitScotland's publicity efforts in relation to promoting appropriate visitor behaviour in the countryside.

4. Visitor Management Plan 2021 Plana Stiùireadh Luchd-tadhail airson 2021

There had been circulated TC/02/22 dated 2 February 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer - Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

Assurance was sought and provided that the project to install a new motorhome facility at the Latheron Car Park, Ullapool was progressing according to plan.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided by each Service on progress in delivering the 2021 Visitor Management Plan actions and associated budget spend as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

5. Tourism Infrastructure Bun-structar Turasachd

There had been circulated TC/03/22 dated 31 January 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer - Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- in relation to design grant bids, some external organisations were providing information on bids they would like to make, and discussions were ongoing about internal projects on topics such as public conveniences and parking;
- in addition to significant projects in popular areas, it was important to consider smaller projects which could benefit less well known areas, and consideration should be given to using ward discretionary budgets for these;
- gratitude was expressed to the many small groups and organisations which had assisted with infrastructure projects in the local areas;
- the three major issues requiring improved infrastructure were parking, motorhomes and public toilets, as well as the inclusion of electric vehicle charging points, and consideration should be given to charging visitors for the use of facilities. A report on charging for electric vehicle charging had recently been considered by the Economy & Infrastructure Committee; and
- the importance of including active travel and non-car orientated solutions was emphasised.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the current position with the Highland Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund supported projects;
- ii. the results of the bids to the 4th funding round of Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund that were announced in January 2022;
- iii. that a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan as included as an appendix to this report was submitted to VisitScotland in early February 2022; and
- iv. the future process proposed to allow delivery of a number of the actions detailed in the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan.

The meeting ended at 2.55pm, and the Chair thanked the Committee and officers for their work during this Council's term.