

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Tourism Committee** held remotely on **Wednesday 29 September 2021** at **10.30am**.

### **Present:**

Mr G Adam	Mr A MacInnes
Mr R Bremner	Mr W Mackay (substitute)
Mr J Bruce	Mr D Macpherson
Dr I Cockburn	Mr H Morrison
Mr J Gordon	Mr D Rixson
Mr A Henderson	

### **Non-Members also Present:**

Mr A Christie	Mr D Mackay
Mrs I Campbell	Mrs T Robertson
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr P Saggars
Mr J Finlayson	

### **Officials in Attendance:**

Ms K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance  
Ms C Campbell Head of Performance and Resources, Performance and Resources  
Ms N Wallace, Environment Manager, Planning and Environment  
Mr C Simpson, Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism & Film, Development and Resources  
Ms L Joiner, Tourism Project Co-ordinator, Development and Resources  
Mr T Francis, Senior Countryside Ranger, Planning and Environment  
Mr P Waite, Countryside Team Leader, Planning and Environment  
Mr S Manning, Principal Traffic Officer, Roads and Transport  
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance  
Mrs O Bayon Committee Officer, 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**

There were apologies for absence on behalf of Mr C Fraser, Mr S Mackie, Mrs M Paterson and Ms M Smith.

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

**The following Members declared interests relating to all items on the agenda 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:**

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

Mr John Gordon – Air BnB provider

Mr Hugh Morrison – Hotel owner

**Non-financial interests:**

Mr Gordon Adam – Director of a glamping business

Mr John Gordon – Council Representative of Skye Connect

Mr Denis Rixson - Council's representative on the Isle of Rum Community Trust and as the Secretary of the Mallaig Heritage Centre

Item 5 – Mr R Bremner and Mr D Rixson (non-financial)

**3. The Highland Council Access Rangers – Working with Communities and Visitors****Luchd-Raoin Inntigidh Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd – Ag Obair le Coimhearsnachdan agus Luchd-tadhail**

A presentation was provided by Philip Waite, Outdoor Access Manager and Tim Francis, Senior Access Ranger - North Highland, on the first season of operation of the seasonal Highland-wide Access Ranger team including the role, main issues and the statistics of the Access Ranges visitor site monitoring.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- Members thanked the team for the presentation, and extended commendations were given to the Rangers for their hard work;
- in response to a query regarding informing the public on waste disposal and recycling, it was confirmed that Rangers regularly engaged with the public and distributed two leaflet types on motorhomes & caravans and responsible camping. In this regard the need of additional signage was recognised;
- consideration into ways of increasing waste disposal capacity should be given;
- Members enquired if evidence was available regarding tourists venturing off the North Coast (NC) 500, as such into the Caithness, Sutherland and Ross-shire surrounding countryside;
- the Ranger data demonstrated the level of tourist demand in Sutherland and it was suggested that the areas within the report should be renamed North & West Sutherland to capture Durness, and separately include a section for North Sutherland;
- consideration should be given to methods of roadside recycling for motorhomes and caravan users;
- the importance of ensuring that NC500 organisers attend and participate in the upcoming workshop was highlighted;
- it was necessary to increase social media posts, adding that posts should include positive pictures and statistics which would help promote the excellent work the Rangers were undertaking;
- there was a need to engage with local landowners regarding business opportunities to use private land for tourism ventures, such as additional parking facilities;
- clarification was provided that the Council had committed £300,000 which was sufficient budget for 10 Ranger posts. It was also confirmed that NatureScot/Scottish Government had contributed funding for a further seven Ranger posts. They were expected to confirm whether there would be a financial contribution for next year shortly. Members also recognised it was especially important not to reduce Ranger posts for next year;

- information was sought regarding if Rangers had to involve the Police when enforcing compliance issues and regulations;
- with the implementation of additional waste disposal measures, it was hoped that there would be fewer reports of Rangers having to clean up discarded waste next season;
- in terms of motorhomes it was suggested to introduce a levy which would contribute to the cost of infrastructure and enforcement. In this regard, it was suggested that there be further discussion on this at the workshop; and
- it was confirmed that Rangers were not able to enforce traffic regulation orders, however they could issue warning notices.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

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

There had been circulated Report No TC/08/21 dated 10 September 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- provision was being made in the 2022/23 budget for 10 Rangers but Members expressed the need for at least the current level (17 Rangers) to be maintained but ideally for this to be increased;
- reference was made to the 40% increase in car parking revenue at Chanonry Point which was accredited to the presence of Rangers. The increased revenue for the Council to help to cost neutralize the existence of having parking wardens was welcomed;
- information was sought and provided regarding implementation of the voluntary car park charges. It was indicated that a report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on Parking Charges. The importance of continued community engagement and incentivising local communities in the car parking charge process which would allow them to receive an income stream to support local infrastructure was emphasised. However, there was a need for projected income streams to be realistic and it was suggested that this and how car parking charges would be implemented should be further discussed at the workshop;
- The data contained within the report was commended and it indicated public concern regarding littering and outside toileting. This could be addressed through additional resource and the provision of additional bins and bin collections in west Lochaber was a positive example of this. The importance of resource investment to enhance visitor experience, support locals areas and improve the economy of the Highlands was emphasised;
- it was queried whether the Comfort Scheme provided sufficient provision or could it be further extended and the need for a fair rate to be paid to providers was highlighted. Support for reopening public conveniences rather than allowing them to be disposed of was also indicated. An adequate inspection regime for public toilets to meet required standards was highlighted;
- it was suggested that the forthcoming workshop should include representatives from external agencies such as Forestry and Land Scotland, Police Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland. It was also suggested that the workshop should explore enforcement and collaborative working opportunities for Dog Wardens, Rangers and Traffic Wardens;

- due to the negative impact, Members recognised the need for additional focus by Rangers to address the issue of uncontrolled dogs in West Lochaber;
- Members endorsed the Ranger service to be extended to include the winter period, as this would allow further site improvements to be carried out before commencement of the following tourist season;
- it was confirmed that the Council would deploy its new variable message signs (VMS) in spring/summer 2022 or earlier if needed;
- a request was made for the data for the months of September and October 2021 to be made available for the workshop;
- it was queried whether the litter picks at beaches and road verges could continue over the winter period as part of the COVID recovery; and
- the need for further education of fire safety and discouraging the use of disposable barbeques was stressed. It was also suggested that there should be further engagement with large retail wholesalers and fast food companies to help prevent littering and reduce waste.

Thereafter the Committee:-

- NOTED** the information provided by each Service and the Access Rangers on progress to date on delivering the Visitor Management Plan actions as detailed in Appendices 1 and 2 to the report;
- NOTED** that there would be a need to re-allocate funding between activities as the detailed costs were being finalised, responding to the dynamic approach the Council had taken this year; and
- AGREED** that a Member / officer workshop be arranged in early autumn to consider feedback from the 2021 season and priorities for a revised Visitor Management Plan for 2022.

## 5. **Tourism Infrastructure Bun-structair Turasachd**

**Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as a director of Highland Opportunity (Investments) Limited 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 the discussion.**

**Mr R Bremner declared a non-financial interest in this item as Chair of Thrumster Community Development Association 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 the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No TC/09/21 dated 13 September 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- it was suggested that a scoring matrix for the RTIF funding applications be developed, and the Chair and Vice Chair receive oversight of the process before it was presented to VisitScotland;
- concern was expressed at the safety issues and lack of signposting at Whaligoe Steps car park and an update was sought and provided regarding how this would be addressed;

- there was concern that the Red, Amber Green (R.A.G) status that had been assigned was not an accurate assessment of progress, i.e. if an activity was not progressing then it should not be assigned a RAG status of green. Improved and more accurate reporting of progress could help to highlight resource, support or funding issues which needed to be resolved in order to drive the activity forward to completion;
- it was queried whether the additional grant support referenced at paragraphs 9.4 and 9.5 in the report would be financed from the proposed Economic Prosperity Fund; and
- it was clarified that previously established and recognised Airigh sites would be able to continue to operate next year but might require planning permission as would any new sites. It was indicated that further information was awaited from the Scottish Government on whether the moratorium on planning permission would be extended until next year.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- NOTED** the current position with the Highland Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund supported projects;
- NOTED** the new tourism infrastructure projects that were the subject of funding bids to the 4<sup>th</sup> funding round that closed in September 2021;
- AGREED** the proposals for supporting the development of a network of Airigh and any related facilities that would provide a particular public benefit;
- NOTED** the work proposed to produce a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan by January 2022.; and
- AGREED** authority be delegated to the ECO Environment, Infrastructure and Economy, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee, to develop a scoring matrix to prioritise the RTI funding applications.

The meeting ended at 1:05 pm.