

The Highland Council Tourism Committee

Minutes of Meeting of the Tourism Committee held remotely on Wednesday, 16 June 2021 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr G Adam
Mr R Bremner
Mr J Bruce
Dr I Cockburn
Mr C Fraser
Mr J Gordon
Mr A Henderson

Mr A MacInnes
Mr D Macpherson
Mr H Morrison
Mrs M Paterson
Mr D Rixson
Ms M Smith

Non-Members also Present:

Mrs I Campbell
Mrs H Carmichael
Mrs M Davidson
Mr D MacKay

Mr N McLean
Mrs T Robertson
Mr K Rosie
Mr P Saggars

Officials participating:

Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment
Mr C Simpson, Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism & Film, Infrastructure & Environment
Mr P Waite, Countryside Team Leader, Infrastructure & Environment
Mr S Manning, Principal Traffic Officer
Ms N Wallace, Environment Manager
Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator, 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 none.

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 Allan Henderson – B&B provider
Mr Hugh Morrison – Hotel owner

Mr Raymond Bremner - provider of AirBnB
Ms Maxine Smith – director of Thistle Excursion (not trading this year)

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

**3. Visitor Management Plan
Plana Stiùiridh Luchd-tadhail**

There had been circulated TC/05/21 dated 26 May 2021 the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

A progress update on the Visitor Management Plan (VMP) was provided on several issues including roads projects, seasonal ranger activity, motorhomes, wild-fires, waste disposal, public toilet issues, and engagement with various local groups and partners.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- progress with the VPM was welcomed and the tourism team were thanked for their work. Some frustration was expressed at the slow progress in some areas, with particular reference to the need to feed local information back to Area Committees and communities. In this regard, it was hoped the seasonal rangers would be able to feed the data they were gathering to Area Committees, Ward Business Meetings and Community Councils. That data would prove useful for planning for future years;
- improved signage was required, especially in relation to the parking of motorhomes, and this would be considered further at Item 4;
- concerns were raised in relation to some specific geographic areas including Battery Park, Lochcarron, Skye, Shiel Bridge and Plockton. Members were urged to contact the relevant official outwith the meeting with specific concerns;
- information was sought and provided on enforcement issues, especially in relation to the seasonal rangers if they were tackling inappropriate behaviour. The rangers did not have parking enforcement powers;
- there was insufficient data on motorhome visits to the Highlands in previous years to allow comparison with this year, but it was hoped more data would be gathered this year to allow a baseline to be developed;
- ownership of the VMP was queried, noting that it covered cross-service and cross-partner issues, and further consideration of this, including in relation to Area Committees, was required;
- in response to a query about the complexity of requirements for people to establish a temporary motorhome stopover sites, it was explained that the process had been made as straightforward as possible and any suggestions from Members on how to improve the guidance would be welcomed;
- it was suggested that motorhome stopover sites for 3-5 vehicles would be of limited help in reducing inappropriate parking, as sites for 40-50 were required in some busy areas;
- concern was expressed that some landowners were placing obstacles

such as boulders close to roads to prevent roadside parking and it was confirmed that this was not permitted within 3m of a road and that the Council was removing such obstacle as promptly as possible, as this was a statutory enforcement issue. A corporate response in relation to this should be considered;

- the positive impact of the rangers' communication with visitors was welcomed;
- good bus services were vital to help relieve parking issues, especially in popular tourist locations;
- in relation to concerns about congestion in Plockton, a community participation meeting was taking place that evening; and
- electronic variable message signs were required at Munloch and at Nigg to warn of any Cromarty Ferry closures.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the information provided by each Service on progress to date on delivering the Visitor Management Plan actions as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report;
- AGREED** the Principal Traffic Officer discuss issues relating to Battery Park, Lochcarron, with Mr A MacInnes outwith the meeting;
- AGREED** to consider issuing a corporate response in relation to road-side obstructions;
- AGREED** to share data gathered by the seasonal rangers with relevant Community Councils *and Area Committees (Corrected at HC(24/6))*; and
- AGREED** to work towards identifying budgets for electronic 'temporary variation' signs at Nigg and at Munloch to warn about Cromarty Ferry closures

4. Motorhome Parking Parcadh airson Dhachaighean-motair

There had been circulated TC/06/21 dated 28 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- concern was expressed about motorhomes parking in single track road passing places and in cemetery and memorial site car parks. Signage was required to prevent overnight parking but to still permit people in motorhomes to use those car parks for an appropriate length of time to visit the site. It was explained there were manufacturing and installation delays in relation to signage and it was likely that for the most part additional signage could not be put in place until 2022. It was acknowledged that some car parks required local bespoke solutions;
- the list of action points at paragraph 7.1 of the report should also state that views be sought from community councils and that Area Committees review the proposals, this to be administered as required. The statutory process for consulting on traffic amendments was summarised and included community councils and others. It was pointed out that some sites might require consultation with additional groups or stakeholders;
- the use of generators in car parks or stopover sites had to be addressed. It was confirmed they were not permitted but enforcement, especially in the evening or during the night, was problematic;

- park and rides to service popular attractions were suggested;
- community partnerships should also be involved in the identification of key sites for off-street parking infrastructure;
- the vast majority of motorhome users behaved reasonably and it was only a small minority who behaved inappropriately;
- it would be interesting to know what the predicted motorhome pressures would be over the coming five or so years, and reference was made to discussions taking place in Applecross to possibly withdraw from the NC500 route;
- with regard to the creation of temporary motorhome stopovers, it was important not to disadvantage existing campsite businesses. It was pointed out that the proposals for stopover sites were temporary and as a result of Covid-19 restrictions;
- a signage budget or funding would be beneficial, as would Destination Management Plans for every area;
- information was sought and provided on contact between the Council and VisitScotland; and
- the value of the seasonal rangers in communicating with visitors and providing effective 'light touch' enforcement was highlighted.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the current position with parking legislation and in particular the position regarding overnight parking;
- APPROVED** the approach described to defining a Council policy on overnight parking of motorhomes and how consideration of the suitability of individual car parks for overnight parking by motorhomes might be undertaken;
- AGREED** the Principal Traffic Officer would draft appropriate wording in relation to signage to prevent overnight parking or inappropriate use by motorhomes of cemetery or war memorial car parks, possibly with a time limit on usage during the day; and
- AGREED** to add to the 5-point list at paragraph 7.1 of the report:
 - 6. Views be sought from community councils;
 - 7. Area Committees review the proposals.

5. Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Maoin Bun-structair Turasachd Dùthchail

There had been circulated TC/07/21 dated 25 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

It was explained that the fourth round of funding would close in September 2021, and that the closing date had passed for expressions of interest for the design grant, although for other expressions of interest the closing date was in mid-August 2021.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members referred to various local projects for which they required project design assistance to ensure proposals were 'shovel ready' in order to be submitted for funding, with some funding sources requiring an element of design and planning permission to have already been completed. There was a general perception that the officers in the Council's project design

team were too busy to take on this type of small-scale local project. Following discussion of this, Members were encouraged to develop a list of local tourism projects, to be reviewed and prioritised by the Tourism Committee with a view to informing future Council funding discussions. These projects should be submitted to the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment, in the first instance. Attention was also drawn to the work being undertaken on the Tourism Infrastructure Plan, which would be reported in due course to the Committee;

- it would be helpful to have a specific tourism budget;
- applicants should be encouraged where possible to include electric vehicle charging points with their proposals. Attention was drawn to the council's programme for the roll-out of charging points and the Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism & Film, Infrastructure & Environment would check the expressions of interest to date to find out if any were suitable to include a charging point; and
- in response to a query about congestion in Portree harbour, it was being discussed as part of a levelling up funding bid, though this was not likely to happen until later in the year.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** current position with the Highland Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund supported projects;
- ii. **NOTED** tourism infrastructure projects that were currently being considered as potential bids to the 4th funding round that closed in summer 2021; and
- iii. **AGREED** to develop a list of local tourism projects, with input from Members, to be reviewed and prioritised by the Committee with a view to informing future Council funding discussions.

The meeting ended at 1pm.