

**The Highland Council
Tourism Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Tourism Committee held remotely on Wednesday, 21 April 2021 at 2.00pm.

Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr A MacInnes
Mr R Bremner	Mr D Macpherson
Mr J Bruce	Mr H Morrison
Dr I Cockburn	Mrs M Paterson
Mr C Fraser	Mr D Rixson
Mr J Gordon	Ms M Smith
Mr A Henderson	

Non-Members also Present:

Mrs J Barclay	Mr W Mackay
Mrs M Davidson	Mr G Mackenzie
Mr J Finlayson	Mr J McGillivray
Mr D Fraser	Mr K Rosie
Mr B Lobban	Mr P Saggars
Mr D Mackay	

Officials in attendance:

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive
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
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance
Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Mr C Taylor, Regional Leadership Director, VisitScotland

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 was an apology for absence from Mr S Mackie.

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

The undernoted Members declared interests relating to all items on the agenda for the reasons provided 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 applicable to all items:

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

Mr A Henderson – B&B provider

Mr H Morrison – Hotel owner

Mr R Bremner - provider of AirBnB but has been closed since summer last year and is still closed due to current restriction

Non-financial interests applicable to all items:

Mr G Adam – Director of a glamping business

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

**3. Presentation: VisitScotland
Taisbeanadh: VisitScotland**

A presentation was given by Chris Taylor, Regional Director, VisitScotland, on the work being undertaken in respect of reopening tourism. This included changed behaviour on modes of travel, length of stay, value for money and flexibility, safety and reassurance, a shift towards outdoors, and last minute bookings. Plans for managing visitors included new infrastructure, additional rangers, tourist information, a responsible tourism campaign and preparation for businesses reopening. A summary was also provided on marketing and digital issues, and recovery proposals led by VisitScotland.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- information was sought and provided on anticipated numbers of visitors to Highland in summer 2021, which was expected to be relatively high, especially for self-catering and at more rural attractions such as walks and beaches. Areas and sectors were advised to inform VisitScotland of any capacity issues or concerns;
- concern was expressed for organisations ancillary to the cruise industry, with particular mention of bus and coach companies. It was hoped that by 2022 activity would have normalised. Discussions were ongoing but still at an early stage with the cruise and other trade associations to identify recovery opportunities;
- work was being undertaken with a wide variety of trade associations and groups to develop safe procedures and guidance to ensure sustainable tourism, and to consider funding and other support that could be offered to businesses. Reference was made to the importance of the responsible tourism campaign that was being developed, with particular reference to motorhome etiquette;
- changes made to the VisitScotland website were welcomed, as was the Scottish Government encouraging visitors to take voluntary Lateral Flow Covid-19 tests before visiting parts of the Highlands and Islands. It was hoped this would be promoted via the VisitScotland website;
- Covid-19 had increased visitor appreciation of flexible booking policies, but this could be challenging for many businesses. The importance of having effective websites was emphasised, and the prospect of an extended tourist season was a possible aim;
- the need for improved infrastructure across Highland as early as possible was emphasised;

- it was important to gather visitor data to help with future planning;
- tourism should be promoted as a positive career choice for young people and that schools and other educational establishments should be encouraged to provide appropriate skills and qualifications. Skills Development Scotland was key to this issue;
- information was sought and provided on assurance being given to local people with concerns about the anticipated rise in visitor numbers and possible anti-social behaviour. Reference was made to the guidance and protocols being developed, the training being provided by businesses to their staff, and lessons learned from 2020; and
- concerns about the poor state of repair of the road network in many parts of Highland should be addressed to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation and **AGREED** the presentation be circulated to the Committee after the meeting.

4. Visitor Management Stiùiridh Luchd-tadhail

There had been circulated Report No. TC/04/21 dated 16 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

Updates were provided on the current situation on key topics in the Visitor Management Plan (VMP) including seasonal rangers, public toilets, waste management, motor home stopover sites and public transport. During discussion the following issues were considered:-

- it was welcomed that there might be 17 rather than 10 additional seasonal rangers, with a decision on this anticipated on 26 April 2021. Initial interviews had taken place and it was hoped the rangers would be in post by 3 May 2021. A summary was provided of the likely duties the rangers would undertake and while welcoming the news, Members also pointed out that in some areas, one ranger would have a large geographical area to cover. Consideration was given to how the rangers would interact with local volunteers, perhaps as back up or support, and with landowners and communities. Information was sought and provided on training that would be given to the rangers, such as on the outdoor access code and dealing with challenging behaviour. The cost effectiveness of the additional rangers would be analysed when data on their activities and community feedback was available;
- attention was drawn to the importance of maintaining paths;
- information was sought and provided on the funding of the various NC500 signs, with many on the trunk roads being the responsibility of Transport Scotland;
- in relation to proposals to incentivise private campsite business owners to allow passing visitors who were not resident to use their motorhome waste disposal points, or other facilities, it was important the charge was not prohibitively expensive, with £10 maximum suggested as a reasonable fee. A grant scheme for this was being considered;
- various local concerns including waste collection, public toilet provision and motor home facilities were raised by Members and they were advised to bring these up via their Ward Managers or Ward Business Meetings, as agreed at

- the previous Tourism Committee;
- it was suggested the implementation of the VMP should be faster, however it was pointed out that the funding had only been agreed in March 2021 and much work had already been undertaken, with some issues not able to be resolved quickly. Officer time constraints were highlighted;
 - it was confirmed that work was being undertaken on the comfort scheme and the provision of motorhome waste disposal points, with the latter to be discussed with SEPA and to include the disposal of chemical waste;
 - assurance was sought and provided that adequate provision had been made in the budget to cover the large amount of waste that was likely to be generated in 2021;
 - ongoing consultation with communities, including community councils, was vital, and information was sought by Mr A MacInnes on the possibility of community installation of portaloos;
 - locally produced 'footprint' posters encouraging sustainable tourism should be shared and promoted, and consideration should be given to the production of etiquette flyers to encourage responsible tourism;
 - reference was made to the multi-agency Visitor Management Operational Group, including Police, Fire & Rescue, NHS Highland, and the Council, which was collecting data and monitoring the impact of visitors to the Highlands;
 - an email would be circulated to Members to gather data on the local issues that required resolution;
 - it was important the Council followed through on promises to the public, and more should be done to control litter and dog waste;
 - following discussion, and consultation with the Gaelic Committee, two Scottish names for informal motorhome stopover sites had been shortlisted, Àirigh and Stadan, and a final decision on this was required; and
 - given the anticipated further easing of Covid-19 restrictions in May and then possibly to level zero in June 2021, it was suggested that a further briefing, or if necessary, an additional Committee meeting, should be held in May 2021 to update Members on progress with the reopening of tourism and easing of Covid-19 restrictions.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the final draft of the Highland Council Visitor Management Plan for 2021;
- ii. **NOTED** the information outlined by each Service in the appendices that gave additional detail on the initial range of activities to be undertaken for the 2021 season;
- iii. **APPROVED** the final draft of the Highland Council Visitor Management Plan for 2021
- iv. **NOTED** the information outlined by each Service in the appendices that gave additional detail on the initial range of activities to be undertaken for the 2021 season; and
- v. **AGREED** where further activities were required that need an immediate solution as follows:-
 - a. to raise the provision of motorhome waste disposal with SEPA;
 - b. to discuss the provision of portaloos with Mr A MacInnes outwith the meeting;
 - c. that locally produced posters encouraging sustainable tourism be shared and promoted;

- d. an email be circulated to Members to gather data on the local waste issues that require to be resolved;
- e. the need for a final decision to be made between the two options shortlisted, Àirigh and Stadan, as the Scottish reference to informal motorhome stopover sites; and
- f. to hold, in May 2021, a briefing, or if necessary, an additional Committee meeting, to update Members on progress with the reopening of tourism and easing of Covid-19 restrictions.

The meeting ended at 4.25pm