

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	9
Report No	CP/12/24

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 22 May 2024

Report Title: Update on Improvements to Public Conveniences

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive, Corporate

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council currently operates 74 public conveniences throughout the Highlands. Whilst this is not a statutory function it is one that is highly valued by providing an essential amenity for our residents, businesses, and visitors.
- 1.2 This report updates Members on improvement works carried out to Council owned public conveniences during 2023/24.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. **Note** the content of this report;
 - ii. **Note** the improvement projects to date including the resulting environmental benefits, and improvements planned for 2024/25; and
 - iii. **Note** the case studies relating to Glenmore and Wick sites.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource:

The Council currently operates 74 public conveniences throughout the Highlands with a net revenue budget of £939k. The capital programme for 2023/24 was £167k. The capital programme approved by Council on 14 September 2023 included £34k for public conveniences and further annual provision of £33k for the following 4 years to 2028/29. Additional funding of £615k has been secured from several different sources, as detailed at 5.1.
- 3.2 Legal:

The Council does not have a statutory responsibility to provide or operate public conveniences.

- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island):
Public convenience provision increases the offering to the public, making the Highlands a better place to live and visit.
- 3.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever:
Low energy hand driers and lights have been installed and this will contribute toward the Council's climate change ambitions.
- 3.5 Risk:
There are no known Risk implications arising from this report.
- 3.6 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people):
There are no known implications arising from this report.
- 3.7 Gaelic:
There are no known implications arising from this report and any signage will comply with the Gaelic Strategy.

4. Background

- 4.1 The Council currently operates 74 public conveniences throughout the Highlands. The promotion of public convenience locations is done via the Council website, with an interactive map of provision. A QR code was created and used on signage, placed at hotspot wild toileting locations, allowing those travelling to click the code, access the map, and locate their nearest facility.

www.highland.gov.uk/publictoilets
- 4.2 The Council operates a Comfort Scheme that provides an additional network of toilet facilities cost effectively with no liability for buildings or repair for the Council. A Comfort Scheme provider is an organisation (i.e. community hall, café, shop) which allows public use of their toilets, and the Council provides a grant to contribute towards their operating costs. The Service now operates 53 Comfort Schemes and manages 4 sites via Service Level Agreements. There is a more detailed report on Comfort Schemes at a separate item on today's agenda.
- 4.3 In 2021 the Council created a Visitor Management Group (VMG), with representation from the public convenience team, and a Visitor Management Plan (VMP) was developed. The investment programme submitted to the VMG evidenced a need for, and benefit of, capital funding. The Service was awarded £333k in 2022/23, supplemented with a successful bid to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. The Council also committed further capital of £167k for 2023/24. Table 1 sets out funding over recent years and expected to the end of the current capital programme.

4.4 Table 1 Funding

Year	Capital Allocation	Other Funding
2022-23	£333k	£283k
2023-24	£167k	£615k
2024-25	£34k	£7k (Ward 21 for CCTV at Fort William Public Conveniences)
2025-2028 (annually)	£33k	

The Service will continue to seek further funding opportunities whenever they arise.

5. Improvements

5.1 Improvements have been undertaken using several funding sources including Ward funding, visitor management funding, Rural Tourism Infrastructure Funding (RTIF), Coastal Communities funding and capital allocation. Most larger projects have taken place over two financial years due to procurement and other practical reasons.

5.2 Smaller value improvement works have included:

- Fitting new sanitaryware
- Fitting new flooring
- Fitting new consumable holders
- Fitting new cubicles
- Installing baby changing facilities
- Installing LED lighting
- Installing 24 honesty boxes
- Installing 100 energy efficient hand dryers
- Fitting DDA compliant taps, railings, and handles
- Replacing doors
- Drainage works
- Installing CCTV

5.3 An officer-led Public Convenience Board was established in 2023 and meets monthly with Service reps from across the Council to support effective governance and the delivery of projects as listed at Table 2.

Table 2 Refurbishment and Upgrade Projects

Public Convenience	Work	Status	Budget (£m) from all funders) *
Ballachulish	Refurbishment	Complete	0.095
Glencoe	Refurbishment	Complete	0.110
Glenmore	New facility	Complete	0.235
Kinlochbervie	Upgrade	Ongoing	0.081
Lochinver	Upgrade	Ongoing	0.093
Rhiconich	Upgrade	Complete	0.075
Scourie	Upgrade	Complete	0.108
Whin Park	Upgrade	Complete	0.110
Wick, Whitechapel	Refurbishment	Complete	0.395

*Funding sources include Council Capital and VMP, RTIF, Coastal Communities, Community Regeneration Fund, Partners (e.g. Cairngorms National Park Authority for Glenmore), Ward funding.

- 5.4 As well as managing the Council’s own improvement programme, the team have also offered support to community groups to upgrade their facilities. This has included:
- Achiltibuie, Coigach Convenience Refurbishment
 - Achmelvich, Achmelvich public convenience
 - Nairn, Harbour Street, supporting the Common Good Fund improvement project
- 5.5 Whilst many sites have undergone various improvements, two sites in particular have undergone significant upgrades; Wick Whitechapel and Glenmore. Further information is included at Appendix 1 and 2 as case studies. The range of improvements being delivered are positive investment in the communities and supports sustainable tourism.

6. 2024/25

- 6.1 Members may be aware that the Infrastructure, Environment and Economy Committee on 2 May 2024 considered and approved the Council’s Sustainable Tourism Strategy. The provision of Public Conveniences form part of this overall approach including:

“Visitor amenities – Sustain a network of essential amenities (such as public conveniences and motorhome waste services) across the Highland region for use by visitors, residents and businesses, and making sure these are high quality and suitably maintained”.

A joined-up and strategic approach will therefore continue to be undertaken in the provision of public conveniences and sustainable tourism.

- 6.2 A site-by-site plan for required upgrades is in place to allow for funding applications as opportunities arise and some minor works are being prioritised funding by the annual £35k of capital funds from 24/25.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive, Corporate

Date: 22 May 2024

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Background Papers: Update on Public Convenience Provision, Communities and Place
November 2023.

Appendices: Appendix 1 Case Study – Glenmore, New Facility
Appendix 2 Case Study – Wick Whitechapel, Refurbishment

Appendix 1 – Case Study, Glenmore, New Facility

One of the aims in the Council programme is to work to promote and develop the Highlands as a world-class, year-round tourist destination by working with communities, businesses, and partners to enable improvements in local tourism infrastructure that will help mitigate against the current tourism pressures communities are experiencing. Working in partnership with the Cairngorm National Park Authority (CNPA) specifically on visitor management for the Glenmore Area, and strategically as part of the Cairngorms Managing for Visitors Group, the old PC site at Glenmore was identified as a location requiring additional facilities. This proposal was also supported by Forest and Land Scotland (FLS).

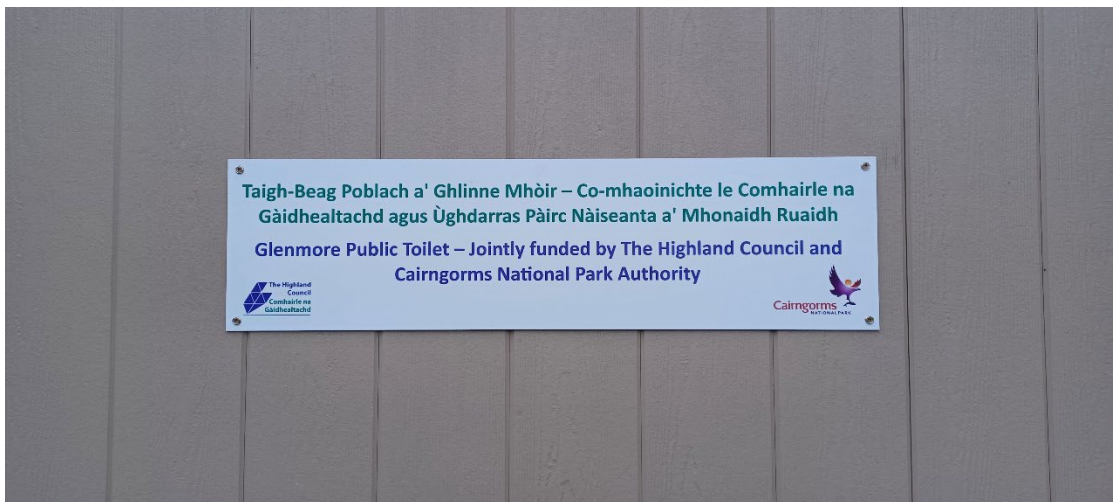
The Glenmore area attracts 40% of all visitors to the National Park. Owned on behalf of the people of Scotland, the Cairngorm and Glenmore area is managed by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and FLS. In 2014, these public bodies, along with the CNPA and Highland Council, formed a partnership to collaborate on the long-term management of this important area of land. The purpose of the Partnership is to collaborate in the strategic management of these land holdings to deliver: an exceptionally high-quality natural environment and a world-class visitor experience.

It was agreed in 2021 that through a partnership approach with CNPA a new PC facility should replace the closed and derelict facility. This proposal was included as part of the 2022 Visitor Management Plan and the proposal to demolish the existing derelict PC at Glenmore and replace it with a modular unit was agreed. Work commenced with the project team in November 2021 with the project becoming a capital project managed by the Property and Facilities Management team. A project board of Property and Amenities officers was set up to provide governance. The budget for this project was agreed as 50% from the Councils Visitor Management Tourism budget and 50% from the CNPA.

The timescales to achieve this project were much longer than initially anticipated. The project was first discussed in May 2021 when the title check was completed then there were significant delays experienced. The sourcing and securing of sufficient funding, confirming the suitability of the location, which involved discussions with the neighbouring landowner FLS.

There were many challenges in delivering this project. Additional drainage works which were not known to be required until the project commenced were also identified. This resulted in more discussions on what the best, most cost-effective options would be as well as additional jetting and dye tests. Finalising the design of the modular unit and receiving the correct drawing information to progress the demolition and building warrants was also a drawn-out process with pressure to get the new unit installed and up and running for the busy tourist season in 2023. However, due to all the delays the installation was not until late summer 2023 and an opening of the unit in October 2023.

The outcome in Glenmore has been a new modular PC unit offering male, female, and disabled facilities.



Appendix 2, Case Study, Wick Whitechapel, Refurbishment

The town of Wick has over 7,500 residents, is a community hub for the surrounding local rural area of East Caithness and has seen a considerable increase in the number of visitors due to the popularity of the NC500 and the increase in staycation visitors.

The Council closed the public convenience at the Camps area of the town as a budget saving in 2017 and, following significant vandalism and antisocial behaviour, had no option but to close the only remaining public convenience at Whitechapel Road in December 2019. That meant the nearest public convenience was in a village seven miles to the west of Wick. This project aimed to provide a public convenience for all users and visitors to the town centre of Wick.

The local community believed that a PC in the town centre was essential in providing an enhanced amenity and improved facility provision for the regeneration of the town centre but also for the use of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups who need a PC available due to medical conditions. A PC allows members of the public who have certain medical conditions to have confidence in visiting the town centre knowing that such a facility exists.

A project group was established with representatives from the Wick Development Trust and with an aim of refurbishing the site to support the regeneration of the town centre, provide a fit-for-purpose PC, improve the amenity of the town centre, improve access to essential public facilities, provide a safer and more secure facility, contribute to the focus of developing the area as a travel hub and to provide a sustainable and more commercially viable facility for all.

The project aim was also provide a supporting facility to visitors who will be in the neighbouring car park facilities including motor homes and camper vans and provide locker facilities for travellers who wished to stay longer in the town centre.

Overall, the facility would provide toilet facilities, disabled toilet access, baby-changing facilities, showering facilities and locker storage. The facility refurbishment would enhance the local amenity of the area and contribute to the greater vision of the regeneration of the town centre.

There was significant pressure from community to get the Wick PC up and running again. Sourcing the funding for this project was the first challenging element with expectations of what could be delivered and budget available not aligning. The funding had to come from a variety of sources and took many funding applications to secure. Eventually funding was approved from the Place Based Investment Fund, the Highland Coastal Community Fund, the Community Regeneration Fund, the Visitor Management Fund, and Capital funds.

In Wick the refurbished facilities were completed in January 2024 and final CCTV installation completed in March 2024. The improvements at the site have seen a significant interior refurbishment, new cubicles, sanitary ware, LED lighting, wet wall, flooring, CCTV, consumable holders, baby change stations, disabled facilities, and showers with contactless charging. Exterior works were a new

pitched roof, new lockers, a new wall, footpath, and access ramp as well as signage and exterior CCTV and LED lighting.

The refurbishment presented many challenges. The timescale for this project was lengthy with the site closing in 2019 and then the feasibility study being completed in 2021. There was a requirement for structural and drainage surveys which took time to organise and resource. A project board was set up to meet regularly and progress the various actions required to move it forward and to provide regular updates to the community and Councillors.

In 2022 the funding started coming together and the tender was issued at the end of the year with responses received in January 2023. Work commenced on site in March 2023 and took nine months to complete.

There were delays with availability of materials and provision of shower charging units. In addition, it was decided late on into the project to include internal and external CCTV which were the last elements of the project to be completed.

The outcome in Wick has been the full refurbishment of the existing PCs, enhanced with internal and external CCTV.

Exterior Before



Exterior After



Disabled Before



Disabled After



Gents Before



Gents After



Ladies before



Ladies After



New Showers and Baby Change Areas

