

## **The Highland Council**

### **Planning, Environment and Development Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Tourism Project Group** held in Committee Room 3, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 3 December 2008 at 1.30 p.m.

#### **Present**

Mr W J Ross

Mr A Torrance

Mrs H Carmichael

Mr T Prag

Mr B Murphy

#### **Officials in attendance:**

Mr G Robson, Head of Environment and Development

Mr C Simpson, Tourism Co-ordinator, Planning and Development Service

Mr G Ireland, Tourism Officer, Planning and Development Service

Mr L Houliker, Technical Manager, Transport, Environment and Community Services (TECS)

Mr B Donnet, Principal Service Support Officer, TECS

Mrs F Hampton, Director Highland 2007, Education Culture and Sport Services

Ms A Bell, Consultant

Ms L Lee, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

#### **Mr W J Ross in the Chair**

##### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Torrance and Mr D Hendry.

##### **2. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

There had been circulated Minutes of the Tourism Project Group held on Wednesday 17 September 2008, previously approved by the Planning, Environment and Development Committee on 23 September 2008.

The Tourism Co-ordinator provided an update on a number of issues referred to in the minutes, including that:

- the Area Tourism Partnership (ATP) had met at the end of September and had taken on board suggestions made by the Council relating to clarification of the role of the ATP, its membership, and the role of the Chairman; it was anticipated that the revised operating principles for the ATP would be approved at the meeting of the ATP to be held on 12 December
- VisitScotland's "Winter White" campaign had been launched in mid-November; part of the financial contribution made by the Council to VS had been used to enhance the Highland element of this campaign
- there were informal indications that the 2008 season had been mixed, with July and August being disappointing and visitor numbers from the US being perhaps 5% lower than the previous year; however, the Highlands appeared to have fared

better than Scotland as a whole, and those businesses which made greater efforts to attract visitors had been more successful than those who had not.

In response to points raised, the Tourism Co-ordinator advised that whilst the Scottish Government's targets had been for a 50% increase in revenue from tourism over the period 2005 to 2015, figures in 2006/07 had been static and 2008 was likely to show a decrease. The target would be difficult to meet.

The Working Group **NOTED** the information given.

### **3. Tourism Seminar**

Members discussed the Tourism Seminar hosted by the Council on 27 November 2008. In general, the event had been successful, with positive feedback from delegates as to content, and useful comments made. However, it was felt that the event could be improved by taking a more dynamic approach and maximising opportunities for networking in future years, although this had to be balanced against the overall length of the event. Following the Seminar, presentations from the event would be made available on the Tourism Development pages of the Council's website.

The Seminar had highlighted the importance of communication between the various parts of the industry and public sector bodies. In this connection, Ms Hampton provided information on an event being run on 23 January 2009 for those who had received funding under the Highland 2007 legacy programme, with a view to enhancing and co-ordinating a future programme of events, and providing a resource point for media queries. It was hoped that the legacy of Highland 2007 could be built on through the development of "HighlandCulture.com."

The Working Group **NOTED** the information given and **AGREED** that the possibility of combining the Highland 2007 follow-up event with the Highland Tourism Awards be investigated.

### **4. Presentation on Tourism Signposting**

The Technical Manager, TECS, gave a presentation on tourism signposting, providing information on Transport Scotland Policy (2006), Council Policies (1996 and 1999), and the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002 which controlled the design/content of the brown and white tourist signs. The purpose of Tourism signposting was to provide clear and consistent directions for visitors to enable them to reach their destination safely, but not to be a substitute for advertising. He also gave information on the applications procedure for tourist signs, including eligibility (approval by VisitScotland was a prerequisite) and costs. Council policy for urban settlements was, in general, geared towards preventing clutter for road safety reasons, but did make provision for tourist destinations and important settlements to have their own signing policy. 53 such locations were identified in the policy, but this action had not been taken forward.

In response to the Project Group's earlier request (Minutes 17 September 2008, item 7 refers) as to whether TranServ should be invited to a meeting of the Group, the Technical Manager suggested that this was not required, as the Council was the contact point for TranServ enquiries and therefore able to respond to any queries.

The Head of Environment and Development provided further information, including that the Council was to look at who paid for signage where there was no obvious business customer, for example at beaches, and commented that individual signage strategies for destinations needed to be developed holistically, to include industrial estates, finger-posts and composite signs showing what facilities were available in a location.

The Tourism Officer gave a progress update on provision of places where people could have their photograph taken adjacent to tourist signs at iconic destinations, as had been requested by the Group on 6 February 2008 (item 3 refers). He advised that a list of 11 priority sites had been identified and work was ongoing with landowners to take this forward. The signage around Loch Ness needed to be improved, but funding was very restricted. However, it might be possible to deliver one or two signs the following year.

Comments raised in discussion included:

- as the Council's Tourist Signs policies had been set in 1996 and 1999, it would be beneficial to revisit these; good practice elsewhere should be looked at, and Tourism Officers involved in any discussions
- tourism signing attracted visitors, even if it was not primarily designed for this purpose: it was contradictory for the Government to seek to promote tourism, but for Transport Scotland to take the view that signs were for direction purposes only
- iconic landmarks, such as Loch Ness, should be signposted; the Scotland Transport Policy of 2006 made allowance for signposting of natural features.
- closer working with Transport Scotland was required, in particular to discuss sign posting for the Ben Nevis car park, tourism signs for Loch Ness
- development of signage policies for individual destinations could encounter resource issues, but if taken forward, good practice elsewhere should be incorporated.

In response to points raised, the Technical Manager advised that a project group involving Council officials and the Inverness Business Improvement District (BID) Team were working on a finger-post signage strategy for Inverness City Centre and it was hoped that new signing would be in place during 2009.

In summary, the Chairman commented that the Council's tourism signposting policy should be about creating opportunities across Highland, and requested that ways of taking this approach forward be scoped out.

The Working Group **NOTED** the comments made and the information given, including that a report would be brought to the TECS Committee in the early part of 2009 on the use of Gaelic in signposting, and **AGREED** that a prioritised list of iconic sites be brought to a meeting of the Working Group as soon as possible.

## 5. Tourism Development Budget

There had been circulated Report No. TPG11/08 dated 20 November 2008 by the Director of Planning and Development outlining the current status of the Tourism Development Budget and showing that the budget for the current year was substantially committed.

The Working Group **NOTED** the information given.

## **6. VisitScotland Partnership Agreement 2008-09**

The Tourism Co-ordinator provided a verbal report on progress made on the Partnership Agreement and on some of the activities undertaken to date. A draft report by VisitScotland (VS) on the Partnership Agreement with Highland Council for Quarters 1 and 2 of 2008 was tabled. The report contained information on how VS had delivered against the list of activities specified by the Council, as well as statistics on the success of marketing campaigns, TICs, publications, and PR activities, but did not include figures on the economic value of activities. The style of the report was being piloted in the Highlands, with a view to producing a standard VS report style for use across Scotland. Members were given the opportunity to comment on the report content and style.

The Tourism Co-ordinator advised that a report was being prepared by Consultants on identifying the areas where the Council's spend brought the best return, taking both economic and community benefits into account, from both the subsidy to VS and its own Tourism Development Budget. The report would be ready in draft form early in the New Year, and would be brought to the next meeting of the Working Group. Initial negotiations between the Council and VS for the 2009/10 Partnership Agreement had commenced, but detailed discussions would not take place until the consultants' report had been completed.

The Working Group **NOTED** the information given.

## **7. Events Strategy**

The Director of Highland 2007 gave a verbal update on progress in the development of an events strategy for the Highlands.

She reported on a number of issues, including that:

- progress with the Events Strategy had stalled meantime, due to uncertainties about the future role of Highland and Islands Enterprise (HIE) in tourism activities. Whilst it had been previously understood that HIE would fund larger events, it now appeared that HIE might instead provide funding to events organisation companies. Discussions were ongoing. The Director also reported that she had met with Linda Fabiani, Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture, who had indicated that there was interest in an ongoing partnership with central funding
- the draft Events Strategy would be submitted to the meeting of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee (ECS) on 15 January 2009, and would be available on the Council's website during December for comments. However, the proposed Events Strategy could be affected by any changes to be made in the ECS budget
- a major Highland Homecoming event was being planned for the Highlands in October 2009; the Scottish Arts Council had asked that Highland 2007 legacy / HighlandCulture.com submit a funding request
- HighlandCulture.com would be launched in January 2009
- following the suggestions made at the Working Group at its meeting on 23 September 2008, the Highland 2007 Legacy Programme and the Events Strategy had been tailored to fit with each other; the next round of applications to the Legacy Fund would be called for in January 2009

- an application was being made to LEADER to match fund Council funding, and work was ongoing with Bòrd na Gàidhlig to promote Gaelic – all funding was used to lever in additional funding
- purchase of promotional material, eg. memory sticks, key fobs etc. was being investigated, with a view to maximising publicity for Highland events.

In discussion, Members raised concerns that HIE's uncertain position might cause problems for large events which were dependent on funding from that source.

Ms A Bell, Consultant, provided a verbal update on discussions with VisitScotland (VS) on their proposed activities and how Highland events could be promoted through these. Ms Bell tabled a report providing an Overview of VS Marketing Activities 2008-09 for UK, Ireland and International visitors. The report gave information on visitor characteristics, including country of origin, spend, and type of holiday undertaken by various demographic / social groups, together with details of the various marketing campaigns being run by VS aimed at the UK/Ireland market and at the Europe and USA markets, and press and PR activities. Ms Bell summarised the main aspects of the report and advised that the Consultants' findings (item 5 above refers) would be incorporated into the data in future reports to the Working Group. The information contained in the report would be forwarded to VS, with a view to focusing spend on areas which provided the best return. It was important for pressure to be maintained on VS to ensure that the Highlands featured in all VS newsletters and in other publicity material wherever possible.

The Working Group **NOTED** the information given, and **AGREED**:

- i. to request that clarification of HIE's role in events funding be placed on the agenda for the next meeting between HIE and the Council as a matter of urgency, and that Members of the Group also seek individually to resolve this issue with HIE where appropriate;
- ii. that the Director of Highland 2007 bring regular progress updates to the Working Group; and
- iii. that reports be brought to a future meeting on (a) improvements to coach parking provision in Inverness, given the increase in coaches and cruise liner excursions and (b) activities being undertaken by the Inverness Business Improvement District (BID) with regard to improving signage in the City.

## **8. Date of Next Meeting**

To be confirmed.

The meeting ended at 3.05 p.m.