

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

3 SEPTEMBER 2009

INVERNESS COLLEGE CAMPUS OPTIONS

Agenda Item	
Report No	

Report by Director of Planning and Development

SUMMARY

The report updates Members on the progress being made on the development of a new campus site at Beechwood on the east of Inverness. The Beechwood campus will offer the opportunity for the relocation of Inverness College from the current Longman site and a number of other related activities including the Scottish Agricultural College, additional student residences, the future development of the Centre for Health Science and sports facilities.

The report seeks the endorsement of support by the Council towards the establishment of the new campus at Beechwood, given the wider economic benefits for the Highlands as a whole.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council's Strengthening the Highlands Programme states that it will support the development of a new, high quality Inverness campus as an essential part of the University of the Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute (UHIMI). This aspiration is shared by a number of key public sector partners, including Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE) who have a commitment in their Operating Plan to the creation of "a contemporary university campus in Inverness, attracting high-calibre staff and significant numbers of students, with particular linkages to the healthcare sector".
- 1.2 A site has been identified at Beechwood to the east of the A9 for the new campus. The relocation of Inverness College from the current Longman Road site could be an important part of the first phase of development of the site. Inverness College Board will shortly be considering an options appraisal on the two potential sites for their relocation – the existing Longman road site and the Beechwood Campus site. UHIMI are known to be supportive of the Beechwood option. HIE has acquired the site and developed a masterplan for it.
- 1.3 This report sets out the progress to date on the development of the Beechwood Campus, and seeks endorsement and support towards the efforts being made to develop the site given the wider economic benefits for the city and the Highlands as a whole.

2.0 PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.1 A preferred site for the development of the campus has been identified at Beechwood Farm located to the east of the A9. This site is currently part of the green wedge as shown within the adopted Inverness Local Plan but is identified as a campus site within the A96 Corridor Framework, which has been approved as supplementary planning guidance by the Council in September 2007. The site which covers some 219 acres (88 hectares) is shown on the attached map.
- 2.2 The development of the Beechwood Campus links well with the future growth of the city. The A96 Corridor between Inverness and Nairn has been identified in the National Planning Framework 2 as the main focus for growth in the Inner Moray Firth. The development of the campus will therefore complement the wider efforts to improve transport links to the east of the city (including the A96-A9 link) as well as provide good linkages with the development of major housing, business and commercial opportunities.
- 2.2 Over the last two years, HIE has led a project team in the development of a masterplan for the site. The project team involved Inverness College, UHIMI, the Council, NHS Highland and the Scottish Agricultural College. This work has identified the potential for the site to deliver not just a first class environment for a relocated Inverness College, but also spin-off developments which could include:
- accommodation for UHIMI
 - the Scottish Agricultural College;
 - up to 800 student residences;
 - Phase IV of the Centre for Health Science;
 - sports facilities which go beyond amenity to provide possibilities for sports development and sports research and education (and use by the surrounding community);
 - another important medical-social facility,
 - a social enterprise hotel and hospitality training and research facility,
 - a proposed Centre for Gaelic Education,
 - space in a science and technology park for businesses linked to the University and other establishments to operate.
- 2.3 The masterplan has been submitted by HIE as a planning application to the Council, and is currently being considered. Discussions are underway with HIE and statutory consultees including Transport Scotland to ensure an appropriate way forward on the site can be recommended to Members in due course.
- 2.4 As set out above the relocation of Inverness College will be an important element of the Beechwood Campus project. The College Board is currently discussing the options available to them and carrying out their own risk assessment of the two main options – the redevelopment of the Longman Road site and the Beechwood Campus. The Board is expected to make their decision shortly with the intention of progressing the preferred option through the funding process required for the scheme. Senior Members and officials of the Council have been actively involved in discussions with the College on both of the options currently before the Board.

- 2.5 In planning terms the redevelopment of the Longman site could be supported by current Council policy, although it is suggested that this would not offer the wider benefits that a co-located college on the Beachwood campus could offer. The current college site is rather limited in area, and remains better suited in the medium to longer term to other uses, including retail, business and industrial uses. In addition future expansion of the Longman site would involve negotiation with different land interests. By contrast, the Beechwood site is wholly owned by HIE and of sufficient size to accommodate considerable expansion over future decades. The site also provides potential for a range of supporting activities which will enhance the attractiveness of further and higher education in the city and the Highlands. These include student accommodation and sports facilities which would be problematic on the Longman site.
- 2.6 Discussions are continuing with the College Board on the options appraisal that they are considering. The Council has requested that the affordability section of the options appraisal and a timetable for the final decisions be provided. Whilst no decision has been reached the key risks of the Beechwood Campus, including the delivery of access to the site and the phasing and location of the individual development “parcels” are capable of being managed effectively through joint working between the various agencies involved.

3.0 ECONOMIC BENEFITS

- 3.1 HIE commissioned work to produce a comparative economic impact appraisal of two siting options under consideration by Inverness College.
- 3.2 The subsequent report concluded that at a very conservative level of economic assessment the difference between the two sites is that, averaged over the next thirty years, Longman Road can contribute in the region of £59m/year to economic demand in the region, and about a further £16m/year will be gained elsewhere if the Longman option is chosen. Inverness Campus at Beechwood will contribute £147m/year. These figures take into account the direct effect of construction and the operations of the college, UHI and other organisations, expenditures by ‘additional’ students, the indirect effects exerted through the supply chains for those operations (in so far as they are in the Highlands & Islands) and the induced effects when incomes earned in the operations or the supply chains are spent. The additional economic benefit of the Beechwood option is therefore considerable and could provide a significant economic stimulus over the coming decades.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The development of a new campus in Inverness is a priority for the Council, and this aspiration is shared by a number of public agencies in the area. The Beechwood site offers the opportunity for an integrated, sustainable and high quality new development with wide spin-off benefits. Although there are challenges in delivery, effective partnership working will ensure that the project can be delivered in the timescales that all partners are aspiring to.

4.2 It is important that the Council endorses the commitment to the delivery of the new campus in Inverness. Whilst any proposal to redevelop the Longman site in Inverness could be supported in planning terms, Members may wish to endorse the benefits that the Beechwood site offers in providing long-term capacity and fit with the longer-term development strategy for the city.

5.0 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council:-

- supports the efforts underway to deliver a high quality campus site at Beechwood, Inverness
- agrees to continued dialogue with all the partners involved in the scheme, to ensure the site can be delivered in the timescales required.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Planning & Development

Date: 25 August 2009

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Background Papers:

