

FACELIFT PROPOSED FOR POPULAR DOLPHIN WATCHING POINT

BBC wildlife programmes like Springwatch and Coast have contributed to a rapid increase in visitors coming to see dolphins at Chanonry Point in the Black Isle, according to a recent report commissioned by The Highland Council in partnership with the Community Council and part funded by Leader. A plan of action to give visitors a better experience, when they visit the point, and tackle real concerns expressed by the Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council and Golf Club over summer congestion seen over the last two years, is set out in the report.

“Chanonry Point now attracts around 140,000 visitors each year, nearly the same number that visit Culloden Battlefield, and puts Chanonry in the top 10 visitor attractions in the Highlands” said **Highland Councillor David Alston**. “Many are from other parts of the UK and Europe and spend their money in caravan parks, B&Bs, cafes and local shops”, he added.

Local **Highland Councillor Billy Barclay** welcomed the report saying “I have been called down to Chanonry on several occasions in the past to witness the congestion at first hand and it has been choc-a- block with cars and buses, which helps nobody. Quite frankly the constant wear and tear has made the site look scruffy and improvements are urgently required. But we have listened to local concerns and we are keeping Chanonry’s informality, so big areas of tarmac, white lines and toilet blocks are not on the agenda”.

The report highlights the point as providing some of the best shore based dolphin watching in Europe. Heritage interest takes the form of the 1846 Stevenson designed lighthouse, the royal sea crossing to Chanonry from Ardersier by King James IV on his regular pilgrimages to Tain, a pier designed by Thomas Telford, a place used to prepare for the D Day Normandy landings and a hidden Cold War observation bunker.

“There is much to think about and plan for in the report” said local **Highland Councillor Isobel McCallum**. “For instance, there is an opportunity to get Scottish Hydro to investigate the possibility of undergrounding wires running out the point to improve a view popular in the hearts of many people.” “Chanonry Point is a unique part of our community and we must find new ways of looking after it,” added **Gwynn Phillips** of the Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council.

For summer 2010 improvements to the car park, to give approximately 15 extra spaces, are proposed. For 2011 a more extensive programme to improve traffic movements, make paths more wheelchair friendly and provide better information will be worked up.

At the end of April community representatives and local groups will be invited to a public presentation on the proposals and to join a new Chanonry Advisory Forum, chaired by a local Highland Councillor, bringing everyone together for the first time.

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