

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

13 August 2008

Agenda Item	
Report No	

HIGHLAND HOUSING FAIR

Report by Director of Planning & Development

SUMMARY

This report updates Members on the current situation with the proposed Highland Housing Fair. The Fair supports the Administration's commitments to housing and sustainable development.

1. Background

1.1 Members will be aware of the proposal to hold a Highland Housing Fair in 2009 in Inverness. The Fair will be the first of its kind in the UK and will be an innovative development of around 50 homes which will be at the cutting edge of modern design and sustainable building techniques. The concept behind the Fair is to:

- Showcase innovative modern low energy housing designs and to demonstrate sustainable development through advanced forms of site servicing, scheme layout and building practice.
- Stimulate wider use of timber construction and other Highland materials/finishes thus promoting a distinctive local vernacular.
- Help secure a step-change in developer products and public aspirations for new housing, including encouragement for self-builders and component suppliers.
- Promote the creativity and quality of lifestyle in Highland to residents and the significant number of visitors expected to attend the Fair.

1.2 Following a successful design competition where over 100 entries were received from across Scotland, the 25 winning entries, including five from Highland, are currently going through the development process to have their buildings complete in time for the Fair event itself. The Fair will be marketed as a major event for locals, tourists, companies and construction professionals. All of the properties will be open to visitors and there will be supporting display, exhibitions and events within the Fair site. The properties will then be sold or rented and occupied by the owners/tenants. 40% of the houses will be affordable.

2. Update

2.1 Members will appreciate that Highland Housing Alliance who are project managing the housing aspect of the Fair, are naturally in close contact with all the architects and developers involved. Towards the end of June 2008 it

became clear that macro economic factors relating to the 'credit crunch' meant that a number of developers were having difficulty accessing development finance. Over the past few weeks meetings with all of the architects and developers have taken place to take soundings from all involved. This has confirmed that the problem of development finance is shared but that the Fair should be rescheduled to 2010 as commitment and enthusiasm for it remains strong. While it was considered that the current economic downturn will last some two to three years, it was felt that by 2010 some 'green shoots' of recovery will be there and the Fair could be a timely and vital catalyst to encourage confidence and economic growth. All were in agreement however, and urged the public sector partners to investigate how assistance could be provided to help access development finance as ultimately the Fair can only proceed if the houses are built.

- 2.2 On 5th August 2008 the Highland Housing Fair Board formally agreed to reschedule the Fair to 2010. In addition, it was agreed to investigate how assistance with the development finance could be provided and to prepare a revised funding package for the rescheduled Fair exhibition. In the interim financial commitments will be kept to a minimum.

3. Council Support

- 3.1 The Council has been an active promoter and supporter of the Fair since its inception. In light of the decision to reschedule the Fair and with recent changes to the Council Administration, it is proposed that a further report is brought back to the September 2008 PED Committee, to consider ongoing Member involvement and financial support for the Fair.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 To be considered at the September 2008 PED Committee.

5. RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 The Committee is recommended to note the decision to reschedule the Highland Housing Fair and that a further report on Member involvement and financial support for the Fair is presented to the September 2008 PED Committee.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Planning and Development

Date: 5 August 2008

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