

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**  
**CITY OF INVERNESS AREA COMMITTEE**

**2 SEPTEMBER 2014**

Agenda Item	7
Report No	CIA/35/14

**EU GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAMME 2014/2020: 'INVERNESS WALKS ON WATER'**

**Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure**

**Summary**

This report outlines details of a bid for funding from the EU Green Infrastructure Programme to provide a sequence of high quality green spaces linked by green active travel routes along our waterways and seafront in Inverness. This proposal was identified at the Muirtown and South Kessock Design Event earlier this year, where the community collaborated with public and private sector representatives to agree the regeneration and development priorities for this area of the City. The proposal was submitted by the Highland Council in partnership with Scottish Canals and other partners.

The project titled 'Walks on Water' aims to improve key areas and facilities along the River Ness, Caledonian Canal and the seafront. It has potential to deliver a range of benefits for the City in terms of improved accessibility, enabling access to high quality open space and therefore improving quality of life.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The Highland Council's Highland-wide Local Development Plan (2012) identifies Muirtown & South Kessock as a regeneration area. It sets out the need for a development brief to be prepared for the area to guide future development, regeneration and transport improvements. The Council has been working closely with people living, working and using these areas to draw up these Development Briefs. Earlier this year members of the community in the Muirtown, Merkinch and South Kessock areas of the City worked collaboratively with Highland Council and Scottish Canals at the Muirtown & South Kessock Charrette. The purpose of this event was to seek agreement on the regeneration priorities and development opportunities for these areas.
- 1.2 South Kessock benefits from being the only built up area of the City where there is a direct interface with the Moray Firth coastline, with green and natural areas that make it a natural asset. However, many of these green areas are underutilised. Participants at the design event were very keen to better utilise and exploit the seafront setting in South Kessock for the wider City, and find ways to attract people to experience this underused and undervalued area, including provision of new attractions and improved active routes.

- 1.3 The Muirtown & South Kessock design event coincided with an announcement on the Green Infrastructure fund to be made available to Scottish Local Authorities as part of European and Structural Investment Funds for 2014-2020. The fund is intended to target the improvement of green spaces and the 'greening' of movement corridors in larger urban areas, where the candidate project has been identified through a strategy or charrette and therefore has community buy-in. Following the Muirtown and South Kessock Charrette this project fitted very well with the objectives and desired outcomes of both the Green Infrastructure programme and the Council's own Programme.
- 1.4 This culminated in the 'Walks on Water' project being submitted for consideration under the Green Infrastructure fund. The proposal was submitted by the Highland Council in partnership with Scottish Canals and other partners. An illustration outlining the overall masterplan for the project is attached in **Appendix 1**.

## **2. The Inverness 'Walks on Water' Proposal**

- 2.1 The Walks on Water project has potential to provide high quality green environments connected by continuous active travel routes along improved green corridors connecting the City Centre and surrounding neighbourhoods with the natural and water environment and wildlife areas. These routes would cater for both functional and recreational journeys and enable access to new and underused green spaces that can increase visitor numbers to the area and contribute significantly to quality of life. New and improved facilities and visitor features along these routes would stimulate interest and provide a reason to visit the area.

- 2.2 The proposal comprises three key components that will make the project a success:

### **1. Environmental enhancements in green areas and vacant land and improved green active travel corridors:**

- environmental improvements at Carnach Point to improve the design quality and feel of this under-utilised green area of the City;
- addressing 'pinch points' along the active travel route to create a continuous circular route;
- we will investigate how best to deliver dedicated cycling routes along Telford Street to provide the most convenient connection between the River Ness and Caledonian Canal;
- we will use the Council's "Approaching Inverness" project to identify the best method for greening key routes such as Telford Street or Carse Road and to maximise funding opportunities;
- improve the perception and if possible the routing of paths between the Ferry / Carnach Point and Black Bridge; and
- improve the quality and perception of the route connecting the Ferry and Muirtown Basin including improvements to nature reserve, creation of 'landscape shelters' and viewing platforms.

### **2. Introducing new attractors along the route, including re-use of vacant and derelict land, to create an interpretation centre, more attractive and usable**

**green spaces:**

- construction of a small Visitor/Interpretation Centre and Dolphin Viewing Centre (maximising use of any existing facilities) at the disused Ferry Terminal at South Kessock; and
- improvements to the pathway along the sea defences adjacent to the Nature Reserve providing viewing point and landscape shelters.

**3. Clear and consistent standards for surfacing, signage and branding:**

- appropriate surfacing to new footpaths to a standard that links well with existing high quality footpaths and which permits use by cyclists and walkers;
- interpretive and directional signage that complements the routes and maximising the users understanding of the cultural and natural heritage to be found around the routes; and
- effective branding and marketing and interactive apps for interpretation (incl. local history, natural environment features/habitats, industrial and cultural heritage).

**3 Potential Benefits**

- 3.1 The Inverness Walks on Water project has potential to deliver significant benefits to those living, working and visiting the City of Inverness, particularly communities surrounding the routes. There are also opportunities for improving areas for wildlife and habitat creation. The project responds directly to the aims and priorities highlighted by local communities through the recent Muirtown & South Kessock Charrette and City Centre consultations.
- 3.2 By improving accessibility to green environments and from the City Centre and addressing the needs of Highlands' most deprived neighbourhoods the project will make an important contribution to the Highland Single Outcome Agreement. The project will directly support the Highland Council led initiative, Carbon CLEVER, which has the vision of a carbon neutral Inverness in a low carbon Highlands by 2025.

**4 Next Steps**

- 4.1 Initial informal feedback received from partner organisations has been positive. We intend to progress the next stages of work with partners including Scottish Canals, RSPB, and local communities and charity groups. This will seek to ensure that the project can deliver a range of benefits for our communities. We will also seek to confirm likely costs for the project to assist the next stages of the bids for funding.
- 4.2 Following submission of candidate projects it is anticipated that formal offers of grant to any successful projects identified would be made around February/March 2015, with project implementation starting in April 2015 and beyond.

**5 Implications**

**5.1 Equality Implications**

There are no known direct equality implications arising from this report.

## 5.2 Environmental Implications

Strategic Environmental Assessment has not been undertaken as the project would not be considered a qualifying plan, programme or strategy under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.

## 5.3 Resource, Climate Change, Carbon Clever, Legal, Rural, Gaelic and Risk Implications

Given the nature of this report, there are no direct implications immediately arising with respect to these matters. However, such is the subject matter that significant implications will arise and will need to be considered as integral to decision making going forward.

### **Recommendation**

The Committee is invited to:

- note and approve the Inverness 'Walks on Water' proposal; and
- agree for officers to progress the next stages of the bid process in liaison with partners.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

Date: 20 August 2014

Authors: Scott Dalgarno



