

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Lochaber Area

Date: 17 January 2017

Report Title: WestPlan - Update

Report By: Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This paper updates the Committee on progress with the preparation of the West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan (WestPlan)

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. note the progress with the preparation of the Plan;
- ii. note that it is intended to report on representations received along with any Plan changes (if appropriate) to the next cycle of relevant Local Committees which will finalise the Council's position prior to the Plan being sent to Scottish Government for Examination.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 A consultation on the Proposed WestPlan took place between May and June 2017. 316 comments from 132 respondents have been received and the team is preparing the Council's response to these along with formulating any plan changes which would be recommended to the Local Committees for approval. Around a third of the comments relate to the Lochaber area.
- 3.2 It had been intended to report the outcomes of this work to this cycle of Local Committees. However, taking into account a range of factors, particularly the work being undertaken on the likely implications of the proposed significant investment at the Lochaber Smelter site, officers have taken the view that it is more appropriate to pause the preparation of the Plan until the next cycle of Area Committees.
- 3.3 The decision to wait for a short period at this stage was not taken lightly but was based on the fact that:
- further work is being undertaken on developing a Fort William 2040 Vision that captures the up to date aspirations of all partners involved in delivering the smelter expansion – this work has just started and it is intended that the draft be reported to Members and eventually agreed at Committee for inclusion in the next stage of the Local Development Plan. It is intended that this will be the focus of discussion at a future Ward Business Meeting;
 - the STAG pre-appraisal report (which Members have been briefed on) is now underway and may result in alternative transport interventions being identified as options for the Fort William area, and subsequently referenced in the Local Development Plan;
 - the team felt that the implications of the impacts of the Liberty investment are not yet fully formed, whether that is the implications for housing land supply, the scale of any expansion at Corpach (if required), the need for new or enhanced gas and waste water networks, school capacity or wider transport improvements. A short period of further assessment, during which the first phase planning application is likely to be determined, will allow greater clarity and a more effective Plan going forward;
 - the Development Plans team is of the view that the existing Local Development Plan for the area remains fit for purpose in respect of current development pressures and that taking the time to get the new Plan right at this stage will be time well spent.

4. Implications

- 4.1 Resource: Resources to complete the statutory processes are allowed for within the service budget.
- 4.2 Legal: The Plan can be challenged in the courts but only on matters of process not planning judgement emphasising the need for the Council to continue to adhere to all statutory procedures throughout the Plan's progress so that the Council will have a defensible position in the event of any challenge.
- 4.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural): The vast majority of the Plan area is rural and therefore there will be no bias or other implications in respect of this issue. The Plan is supportive of and/or will help deliver affordable housing, employment and district heating opportunities which will make a positive contribution to the poverty agenda. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) screening report has been

undertaken and placed on the Council's website and found that a full EqIA is not required.

- 4.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever: The Plan has been subject to a full Strategic Environmental Assessment, which includes consideration of climate change implications and a Habitats Regulations Appraisal Record.
- 4.5 Risk: There is a risk that the reprogramming of the plan preparation will lead to a delay in adoption of the updated Plan. That said, if the plan is as robust as possible at this stage it should avoid the need for lengthy Examination processes. The new timescales will be included within the Development Plan Scheme which will be made widely available.
- 4.6 Gaelic: The Plan contains Headings and a Member Foreword in Gaelic.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

Date: 10 January 2017

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Background Papers: n/a