Item 8 - Question Time

To the Leader of the Council

"In view of the considerable difficulties with infrastructure and services to support our important tourism sector, what does the Council view as the priorities to improve visitor experience in the Highlands, and how might these be delivered?"

Response to Mr A Graham

Along with the tourism industry and a number of public sector partners the Council has adopted the Highland Tourism Action plan as the document that guides tourism development in Highland. The mid-term review carried out in 2016 recognised this through the addition of a new action *"Building on the recent marketing success that has increased visitor numbers to many sites, we will work to ensure that the quality of the visitor experience and impacts on communities are not negatively affected. This will include identifying or where necessary lobbying for resources to invest in sites facing these challenges. Where appropriate we will work with communities to ensure they both contribute to and benefit from any solutions applied."*

A number of key sites were subsequently identified through discussions with communities and Destination Organisations and the first of a series of improvements are now under way.

In addition, the Council joined others in lobbying for additional funding to support such projects which in turn has led to the launch of the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. Applications must be made via local authorities or National Park Authorities and so applications for 10 Highland projects have been submitted to the fund in the first round (9 from the Highland Council and a further 1 from the Cairngorms National Park Authority). A number of further projects were identified and are being considered applications in the second round due to be considered in early 2019. Many of the projects being proposed are for properties which are not Council owned or managed so in many cases the prioritisation of which ones proceed to an application will be dependent on whether match funding is being provided by third parties.