

Agenda Item	13
Report No	CIA/24/20

## THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** City of Inverness Area Committee

**Date:** 27 August 2020

**Report Title:** Inverness Events and Festivals Working Group – Covid-19 Review

**Report By:** Inverness City Area Manager

### 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report reviews the options currently being considered for the recovery of the Inverness events and festivals programme. Members are asked to note that this report was written before the Scottish Government's anticipated (provisionally set for August 24<sup>th</sup>) announcement of possible easing to some of Scotland's Covid-19 smaller event related restrictions. However, it is not expected that mass gatherings will be permitted until the end of Phase 4 of the Scottish Government's Recovery Plan.
- 1.2 An extensive list of measures which event organisers must put in place to prevent the spread of the virus when mass gatherings resume is being developed. Every major event plan and every major event venue must be all be reviewed, redesigned, reassessed and if required, rejected. Further background information about this process in contained in **Appendix 1**.
- 1.3 As well as generating social, cultural and economic benefits; events must now prevent the spread of Covid-19.

### 2. Recommendations

Members are asked to

- 2.1 Note:
  - i. The status of the events scheduled to take place in the Inverness Events and Festivals Working Group (IEFWG) 2020-21 programme;

- ii. Events under consideration in the context of revised Health and Safety Guidelines;
- iii. Proposals for the development of a Covid-19 Safe Events Space in Inverness, along with the potential of an event which would meet Covid-19 and any other applicable guidelines and policies in the event of restrictions being eased sufficiently.

Agree:

- iv. The Inverness Events and Festivals Working Group reallocate up to £140,000 from 2020/21 Inverness Common Good Fund Events and Festivals Budget toward the cost of replacement events as described in the report for the Winter Festival period, in consultation with Members of the City Area Recovery Group. Noting that this would leave a remaining balance of £113k to be available for redistribution.

### **3. Implications**

#### **3.1 Resource**

£0.253m is unspent from the allocated Events and Festivals Budget. It is proposed that consideration be given once Covid 19 Guidelines allow, to using an element of the budget allocated to deliver Riverlights and make Northern Meeting Park Covid-19 Safe. The remaining £113k could be allocated for recovery related activity to support the priorities identified by Members.

#### **3.2 Legal**

There are no legal implications as a result of agreeing the recommendations within this report.

#### **3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)**

In considering the terms of the report the Committee should note that all event will comply with current Policies.

#### **3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever**

All events are planned to comply with Council Policies in support of Climate Change/Carbon Clever initiatives and objectives.

#### **3.5 Risk**

The Proposals have been prepared noting the need to reduce risk to the Council.

#### **3.6 Gaelic**

There are no Gaelic Implications as a result of this report.

### **4. Status**

4.1 The following Inverness Events and Festivals Working Group (IEFWG) events have been cancelled.

- Inverness Highland Games
- Highlands Strongest Man and Strongest Woman Championships

- Highland Pride
- Ness Islands Halloween Show
- Civic Bonfire and Fireworks Display
- Christmas Lights Switch On Parade
- Ding Dong Merrily Old High Carol Concert
- Winter Wonderland
- Red Hot Highland Fling Hogmanay Show

The decision to cancel the events of the Winter Festival programme had to be taken at this time noting the lead in period required to plan for each of the above events. Recognition was also given for the need to comply with all Covid-19 guidelines which currently prohibit events which could lead to large gathering of people.

- 4.2 Noting the above, it would also not have been possible to present event management plans to the multi-agency Safety Advisory Group (SAG) for consideration and approval.
- 4.3 As a result of cancellation of these events, £0.253m is unspent from the allocated Events and Festivals Budget for 2020/21. It is proposed to utilise £140,000 of this funding towards two project areas. These are detailed below. The remaining funding would be reallocated to projects to support the City's focus on recovery from covid-19.

## **5. Planning for 2021/22**

- 5.1 As outlined in section 4, it has been necessary to cancel a number of events as a result of Covid -19. However, IEFWG were keen to consider what alternative events could be staged during the initial recovery phase to support economic recovery and to stage events which bring both economic and wellbeing benefits to the City of Inverness and Area.
- 5.2 Building on our experience of delivering the Halloween Story in partnership with Eden Court, using a combination of projections and theatrical performances, consideration has been given to developing up a series of attractions that could transform the Inverness Riverside and City Centre but within a covid-safe context.
- 5.3 There are two areas proposed for events:
1. Riverlights - The first is the development of projection-based shows around the city centre and the second is the development of events in a Covid-19 safe space capable of use by multiple event organisers.
  2. Northern Meeting Park – to design a programme of covid-safe events and activities in partnership with High Life Highland, current users, Eden Court Theatre, UHI in support of the City and Area Recovery.

## **6. Riverlights**

- 6.1 There has been discussion in the past about the potential to hold a sustainable light project. Initial consideration was given to this being supported by the Town Centre Fund. Members spoke favourably at the time however due to competition from other projects the project had to be postponed. We are now in a position to advance the benefits of this project noting the significant potential of it uplifting footfall and vibrancy to the City Centre. Support for the development of an affordable and sustainable light projection transformation of Inverness City Centre was confirmed previously during discussions over a number of years and in particular at an Events Tourism Charette attended by

representatives of numerous organisations and agencies which highlighted the potential benefits of bringing the city to life at night during the winter.

- 6.2 The Riverlights Project would be aligned with several strategies supporting the work of the City and Area Recovery Plan, the IEFWG Action Plan; and the strategic aims and objectives of the Highland Council and several organisations and agencies currently developing event driven recovery plans
- 6.3 Subject to the development of a social distancing route around the projections for spectators it would be proposed to transform the following sites in Inverness
- Inverness Castle
  - Abertaff House
  - Inverness Town House Front
  - St Andrews Cathedral
  - Inverness Museum and Art Gallery
  - Northern Meeting Park Grandstand
  - Ness Bridge
  - Eden Court Theatre
- 6.4 Project objectives:  
Riverlights would revitalise the town centre by creating events that will
- unlock strategically important event sites in the winter and their economic and creative potential;
  - make Inverness more attractive in winter
  - attract more tourists into the area
  - enable local artists to display their art
  - enable UHI students to display their art
  - increasing the number of local people taking part in community-led programmes;
  - bringing additional business/retail use to the town centre
  - support the marketing and promotion of Inverness

## **7. Safe Space - Northern Meeting Park**

- 7.1 Responsibility for the management of buildings and grounds within the Northern Meeting Park rests with the Council and its agents High Life Highland.
- 7.2 It is proposed that a programme of activities and events to be staged in Northern Meeting Park would be curated by a working group comprising of representatives of the IEFWG, High Life Highland, Current Users, Eden Court Theatre, UHI and current commercial promoters. Regarding the management of Coronavirus (Covid-19) related matters; it is proposed that this is administered through the existing management arrangements supported by the Inverness City Area Manager and the Inverness Events Manager.
- 7.3 These measures would enable a more strategic approach to be adopted towards the future programming and development of activities and events in Northern Meeting Park in support of the City and Area Recovery. It would also provide Eden Court Theatre with additional outdoor capacity (should it be needed) following its recent successful application to be allowed to stage events within its existing grounds.

## **8.**

8.1

## **9. Conclusion**

- 9.1 The Report provides a basis for the City Area Recovery Group to consider making better use of key City assets in line with the agreed Priorities for the Recovery of the City of Inverness and Area. The proposals are designed to support the growth and development of our Communities and provide for Communities to make an increasing contribution. The focus on extending the number of Stakeholders and increasing public use of the City Centre and Northern Meeting Park will enhance city vibrancy and increase recreational use of the Northern Meeting Park MP in line with the original objectives of the Northern Meeting Society when transferring the Northern Meeting Park to Local Authority ownership.
- 9.2 The IEFWG and its partners continue to work towards the development of a programme of events for 2022. Scotland's next themed year – the “Year of Scotland's Stories” – has tremendous potential for Inverness and the Highlands. The Bi-centenary of the Inverness Highland Games in July and the Bi-centenary of the opening of the Caledonian Canal in October have the potential to be used to raise place awareness and enhance the Royal National MOD (see below) in 2021 and deliver international visitors in 2022.

Designation: Inverness City Area Manager

Date: 17 August 2020

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Background Papers:

### **Issues affecting different types of events staged in Inverness and the Highlands**

According to The Events Industry Forum, which brings together 26 trade and representative organisations from across the outdoor events industry, any reduction in the need for social distancing would greatly help in making it feasible to restart events as this will be a key factor in deciding the viability of many.

The future of many of those organising and supplying the industry in Inverness and the Highlands will depend on the recovery of the sector sooner rather than later as many have found they fall outside the core Government support schemes and do not have the resources to get through the coming months.

Despite the contribution that outdoor events make to the UK economy, there is a widespread concern that they are too often ignored by Government at a national and local level in favour of conference, exhibitions and meetings which are seen as providing more tangible benefits. There is a need for a better grasp of this complex industry and the contribution that it makes to the Highland economy.

The outdoor sector is structured and organised around a risk assessment approach with organisers presenting event plans for consideration by Safety Advisory Groups (SAGs). The process for restarting events will generate significant additional work for Council Officers and SAGs as they will be required to comment on the measures being suggested by event organisers and currently there is no agreement as to what measures will be appropriate.

#### **Public Spectacles/Displays**

There are many outdoor events which take place in the open air where it would be relatively easy with good management and public co-operation to provide entertainment without the risks of crowding as there would be enough space for people to social distance. Such events might include air displays, fireworks and music in the park type events etc.

Each event would need to be risk assessed to ensure that the space available was suitable for the size of audience expected and access and egress from sites would need to be managed. While insisting that those attending wore masks would prove impossible to ensure signage encouraging social distancing could be used to remind people together with some gentle marshalling used to encourage people to keep apart.

Consideration might also be given to temperature checks, but it is not recommended given that spectators would be expected to be self-isolating in the event of developing symptoms.

On-going cleaning of facilities such as toilets would be needed but unfortunately no operational guidelines have been published to date (18 July 2020).

For some events, in areas where the space is available, drive-ins with cars parked at allocated distances have been suggested and cancelled this summer. There is no evidence that they would be popular or viable in the Highlands.

Services such as catering, which are a key source of income for many, might be restricted to foods that can be sold by vendors strolling through the crowd but wearing

suitable protection, thus avoiding queues and people moving around the site. Many event caterers are now starting to offer pre-ordering or click and collect services. Some organisers might prefer to encourage consumers to pre-order foods, such as a hamper, which they collect on arrival rather than saying they can bring their own picnics in order to preserve revenues. Caterers also tend to generate less wastage than the public.

The use of technology could address some issues at events. For example, the use of bar code access and stiles rather than people at gates would help to reduce the contact points between staff and attendees.

How this can happen: As they can be made economically viable, any new events on any scale are likely to need at least a couple of months of planning and organisation as a minimum and depending on the scale. The loss of concessions would pose a problem financially for many of the family-type events, so some underwriting is likely to be needed by Government. There is, however, an opportunity now to rescue a few events this autumn; that could be managed and made to work, provided a Covid-19 Safe Space could be established. This would be a good starting point for getting something going.

### **Use of Public Parks**

Although not strictly outdoor events, the creation of restaurants in open spaces, where there is plenty of space for social distancing, could be a first step towards getting life back to some normality and providing local restaurant businesses with an option for trading again.

Such activity would require the provision of some facilities on site and would need consideration by and the co-operation/support of local authorities in permitting this to proceed.

We could also consider introducing some entertainment into parks, such as bandstand music, and encouraging the public to bring picnics etc.

How this can happen: The use of public spaces to get some small activity started again would be relatively straightforward

### **Use of City Centre Streets**

While previously suggested – based on observations in Iceland – the idea of converting streets for events during the pandemic is not recommended now.

The provisional of additional space – road closures – during the pandemic to enable additional social distancing is recommended and could provide a useful introduction to the concept of having such spaces available for activation in the future.

### **Festivals and Outdoor Concerts**

The biggest obstacle to resuming festivals and major outdoor concerts remains social distancing and the economic impact this has. It would also be extremely difficult to avoid crowding around stages where key artists were performing as well as during entry and egress, even if the site space was enough for social distancing.

With the costs of infrastructure and artists fees, these events operate on extremely tight margins which means that it would not be feasible for most festivals to reduce capacity to allow for social distancing and still deliver a viable event.

It is also questionable whether the levels of security/marshalling that would be needed would be acceptable to the audiences, if the numbers of SIA approved staff were even available.

Entry and egress from such events would pose problems as it would be almost impossible to manage a staggered entry approach for an event with 10,000 - 20,000 plus attending.

There is equally concern that in the event of an emergency evacuation would be extremely challenging with social distancing measures in place.

One exception might be outdoor Classical music events, which are often held in the grounds of stately homes where there is space for social distancing and where attendees generally bring their own food and drink.

How can this happen: It is extremely difficult to see how festivals and concerts can return until social distancing is lifted as the economics and management issues are too great to make this viable or safe. Furthermore, it takes months rather than weeks to organise these events and, with a few exceptions, most outdoor festivals/concerts have already been abandoned for 2020. However, for organisers to begin investing in events to 2021, they need to have assurances now that it will be feasible to operate by then. The need for a Coved-19 Safe Space to be established is clear together with the installation of any facilities (roadways) which can reduce the costs of staging events.

It should be noted that free lets, free infrastructure and free marketing and promotional support is currently being offered by other local authorities to promoters and a review of our "event hosting offer" is needed.

### **Agricultural/County Shows and other exhibition-style outdoor events**

There are some outdoor events that operate rather like indoor exhibitions which could relatively easily manage social distancing, although they might need to adjust their programmes to avoid activities that might lead to crowding, such as arena events and cooking demonstrations.

County/Agricultural shows are a good example where there tend to be relatively wide walkways between exhibits which would allow for social distancing and exhibitors would relatively easily be able to manage with this, although they might need larger stands to allow staff to distance themselves.

Much of this is already in place for agricultural events via the industry code of practice and hand washing arrangements required to meet the DEFRA Animal Gathering Orders and Access to Farm rules. There are also smaller trade events run by the same organisations which could possibly be managed on a pre-purchase ticket basis.

Social distancing for these events would need to be carefully managed, possibly by the number of people per square metre/acre. This could be done using a similar system to the existing Temporary Event Notice which uses a grid basis to divide up a showground.



As with other events, organisers would need to risk assess their programmes with a view to managing Coronavirus and consideration would need to be given to the provision of sanitization points, disinfecting of toilets etc. Again, there would need to be trust in the public observing the rules, which could be reinforced with regular signage and some marshalling. Consideration might also be given to asking all visitors to wear masks which might help to remind people of the need for caution.

Smaller shows operating in larger spaces would be in a better position to create social distancing layouts than those larger events with more infrastructure, buildings and larger attendances.

There are also many opportunities to use technology to help ensure distancing and safety. For example, self-authentication of tickets, selling time slots and even temperature screening.

This type of event should be considered no greater risk than customers visiting a retail shop and probably less so given the wide open spaces.

How this can happen: Unfortunately, many of the summer events have already been cancelled because of the uncertainty but it might be possible, given the go-ahead soon, for some events in the late summer or early autumn to be held.

### **Touring Circuses**

As most of the larger circuses have flexible seating and it would be entirely possible to reconfigure this for individuals and groups as they enter the Big Top.

The public movement around the site, and the use of amenities, would be risk assessed and could be managed, as could public access and egress, to social distancing.

As with other events, secondary spend and catering facilities could be accommodated through technology and forward purchase options.

The performance area can also be configured in such a way to ensure it is social distancing compliant.

Circuses, unlike theatres and other fixed venues, generally only sell their tickets up to 14 days in advance and can react quickly if given the green light to open. Currently there are many foreign artistes isolating in the UK as tours were halted and they have been unable to return home. The events industry believes most touring circuses would be able to be up and running with 4 – 6 weeks' notice.

### **Participation Events**

It may be possible for some participation events, such as cycling and running, to take place with social distancing. It has been estimated that in the case of running a 10 metre gap between runners would be needed and in the case of cycling 20 metres. This would require staggered start times and management numbers of participants.

Although larger road race events are traditionally more financially viable, it might be more viable and manageable to kick start a revival with smaller events.

## **Community and Charity Events**

These take many forms, but some could be brought back relatively quickly with social distancing. A concern here would be the traditional reliance on volunteers, many of which are traditionally from at risk groups. Without these volunteers many of these events are likely to become unviable with a negative effect on charity finances.

### **Conclusions:**

There is scope for some sectors of the outdoor event industry to return with social distancing in place and these could be operating within a couple of months;

There are key benefits to be gained in terms of bringing revenue to areas and boosting public morale as highlighted in the research carried out by Bournemouth University in 2019;

With a few exceptions, it will take at least two months from being given the go-ahead to get some events going and, for many, recovery will take considerably longer;

A major issue will be the viability of organising many events if audiences and revenue earning facilities need to be curtailed;

Events will need to undertake a detailed review of emergency plans to assess the new risks from Covid-19;

The use of volunteers will need to be reviewed as for some events these are likely to be in vulnerable age groups;

For some types of event, such as music festivals, it is unlikely that they can restart while social distancing continues;

A strong economic case can be made for getting outdoor events up and running again in terms of the jobs they provide and the economic contribution they make;

To start planning the return of outdoor events, the industry needs to have clear guidance on the timeline for relaxing the lock down and clear guidance on the on-going rules it will need to comply with;

Event businesses will need financial or in-kind support during the return as most do not have the resources to underwrite the costs, particularly given the uncertainties of the initial consumer response to events restarting.