

The Highland Council
No. 6 2023/2024

Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Tuesday, 3 October 2023 at 9.30 am.

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence
A' Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan

Present:

Mr C Aitken	Ms E Knox
Ms S Atkin	Ms L Kraft
Mr M Baird	Mr B Lobban
Mr A Baldrey	Mr P Logue
Mr C Ballance	Mr D Louden
Dr C Birt	Mr W MacKay
Mr B Boyd	Mr G MacKenzie.
Mr R Bremner	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr I Brown	Mr S Mackie
Mr J Bruce	Mr A MacKintosh
Mr M Cameron	Mr R MacKintosh
Mrs I Campbell	Mrs A MacLean
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Ms K MacLean
Mr A Christie	Mr T MacLennan
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr D Macpherson
Ms T Collier	Ms M MacCallum
Ms S Fanet	Ms J McEwan
Mr J Finlayson	Mr J McGillivray
Mr D Fraser	Mr D Millar
Mr R Gale	Mr H Morrison
Mr K Gowans	Mr C Munro
Mr J Grafton	Ms L Niven
Mr A Graham	Ms M Nolan
Mr R Gunn	Mr P Oldham
Mrs J Hendry	Mrs M Paterson
Ms M Hutchison	Mrs M Reid
Mr A Jarvie	Mr K Rosie
Mrs B Jarvie	Ms M Ross
Ms L Johnston	Mrs L Saggars
Mr R Jones	Mr R Stewart
Mr S Kennedy	Ms K Willis

In attendance:

Chief Executive
Interim Depute Chief Executive
Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place
Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business concern was expressed that the papers had not been received 10 days in advance of the meeting, in accordance with Standing Order 2.

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence
A' Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs H Crawford, Mr L Fraser, Mr M Green, Mr D Gregg, Mr A MacDonald, Mrs B McAllister, Mrs P Munro, Mr M Reiss, Mr A Rhind, Mrs T Robertson, Mr A Sinclair and Ms M Smith.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement
Foilseachaidhean Com-pàirt/Aithris Fhollaiseachd

The Council **NOTED** the following Transparency Statement:-

Item 5 and 7 – Mr K Gowans

3. Membership of the Council
Ballrachd na Comhairle

The Council **NOTED** that, as a result of the By-Election for Ward 7 on 28 September, Ms M Ross had been elected as a Member of the Council.

In this regards, Ms Ross was welcomed to the Council and responded accordingly.

4. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated Minutes of the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Monitoring Group held on 18 August and 22 September 2023 - which were **APPROVED**.

5. Update on Progress of Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport
Cunntas às Ùr mu Adhartas air Saor-phort Uaine Inbhir Nis agus Chaolas Chromba

Transparency Statement: Mr K Gowans declared a connection to this item as an employee of UHI but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that he had an interest to declare

There had been circulated Report No. HC/39/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

In amplification of the report, Mr Calum MacPherson, Chief Executive of the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport and Mr Allan Maguire, Head of Development and Regeneration explained what a Green Freeport was, the progress that been made, the need for confidentiality and the opportunities it would bring. In particular, it was important to halt the decline of the working age population in Highland and the number of forecasted job creation and economic investment were outlined. It was acknowledged the process for submission the Green Freeport OBC was tight, which was partly responsible for the delay in issuing the reports, but this was to ensure it wasn't stalled by the potential General Election in 2024. There were however challenges that would be faced moving forward including utilities, transport, grid connectivity, community and business engagement and housing.

The Leader welcomed the progress made in developing the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport to date and it was now at a critical point in delivering outcomes had now been reached where critical outcomes would be delivered. It was

recognised the process was pressurised and it was important the deadlines were met and outcomes achieved. Many investment partners, Governments and organisations were involved were relying on the process being carried out at pace. However, Highland Council had a duty to scrutinise the process and documentation. Nevertheless, this had now reached a milestone eagerly awaited by those involved in the project and the work carried out by officers and partners on the detail was commended.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- tribute was made to the former Leader, Margaret Davidson, who had invested time and energy to bring the Green Freeport forward;
- this was an opportunity to reverse depopulation and to attract people back to Highland. Apprenticeships would be created not only in the Green Freeport area but throughout Highland, reversing the previous history of creating low skilled, low value jobs;
- there was potential for global investment;
- with the growing older population, it was important to also re-engage with them to return to the job market;
- there were huge opportunities for the Green Freeport in terms of Green Hydrogen;
- it was important for all Members to explain to communities what a Green Freeport was, its benefits and what they could gain, so that they continued to be engaged;
- it was queried where stakeholders in communities sat in the process;
- the creation of up to 20,000 jobs would put pressure on schools and healthcare facilities and these social infrastructure issues had to be taken into account;
- there were a number of questions in relation to who the Green Freeport was accountable to and, it was noted while it would be the Board, it would ultimately be the people of the Highlands;
- it was hoped that there would be worker representation and a gender balance on the Board;
- reasons were sought, and provided, as to why the office was to be based in Inverness;
- it was contended that the Inverness Common Good Fund was the owner of the proposed tax site at the Longman Industrial Estate, not the Highland Council. However, the Head of Legal and Governance confirmed, for the avoidance of doubt, that Highland Council was the owner. It was confirmed that there would be regard to the interests of the Inverness Common Good Fund and engagement would take place through the City of Inverness Area Committee;
- grid connectivity was a concern given the potential amount of power Highland could generate;
- it was vital that this was inclusive and would benefit all areas of Highland. This could be achieved by building the transport infrastructure but it was accepted that this would take time;
- there was concern from some local communities regarding low frequency noise, as this would be in place for at least the next 50 years. There was an opportunity for this to be global world leaders on noise mitigation. In addition, assurances were provided that any proposals would have to meet Council regulations;
- this was, and would, involve a lot of Officers' time and it was hoped this wasn't to the detriment of other Council projects; and
- as the Highland Council was the accountable body it was important to take on board the lessons learnt as how the City Region Deal had been handled.

The Council **NOTED**:-

- i) the Executive Summary of the Green Freeport Outline Business Case (OBC) as set out in Appendix 1 of the report and the environmental, social and economic benefits which are expected to be achieved for the region;
- ii) the Council's role and responsibilities in the preparing the OBC, including as Accountable Body, as summarised in Section 4 of the report; and
- iii) that the OBC has been subject to discussion with the Members' Monitoring Group, with the Minutes of the 22 September meeting available under a separate item to this Council meeting.

6. Exclusion of the Public Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Council **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

7. Outline Business Case - Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Dreachd Chùis Gnothachais – Saor-phort Uaine Inbhir Nis agus Chaolas Chromba

Transparency Statement: Mr K Gowans declared a connection to this item as an employee of UHI but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated to Members only Report HC/40/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

Following discussion, the Council **APPROVED** the submission of the Outline Business Case for the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport, outlined in Appendix 1, to the UK and Scottish Governments.

The meeting ended at 11.40 am.