

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
NAIRN ACADEMY - STAKEHOLDER GROUP
Minute of Meeting No. 9 held on Tuesday 17th June 2025
at 6:30pm Via Microsoft Teams.

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| Attendees: | <p><u>Highland Council – Members</u></p> <p>Paul Oldham – Chair Barbara Jarvie Laurie Fraser</p> <p><u>School Representatives</u></p> <p>Julie MacDonald, Head Teacher, Nairn Academy Sarah Abenheimer, Depute Head Teacher, Nairn Academy</p> <p><u>Parent Council Representatives</u></p> <p>N/A</p> <p><u>Community Representatives</u></p> <p>Hamish Bain, Nairn River CC Graham Stuart, Nairn West & Suburban CC Mandy Lawson, Nairn Place Plan</p> <p><u>Highland Council – Officials</u></p> <p>Robert Campbell, Service Lead - Capital Planning & Estate Strategy Susannah Holmes, Programme Manager David Walker, Estates Officer</p> <p><u>High Life Highland</u></p> <p>Simon Swanson, Head of Investment and Programme Management</p> <p><u>Balfour Beatty</u></p> <p>Atholl McKay, Portfolio Director</p> | <p>PO BJ LF</p> <p>JM SA</p> <p>HB GS ML</p> <p>RC</p> <p>SH DW</p> <p>SS</p> <p>AM</p> |
| Apologies: | Councillor Michael Green, Finlay MacDonald, Sharon Barrie, Philip Shannon, Mark Jones, Mark Greig, James Cook, Lisa Campbell, Sarah Bisland, Kirsteen Hotchkiss, Grace Chisholm, Alastair Noble | |
| Minute: | David Walker | |

| ITEM | DISCUSSION/COMMENT | ACTION |
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| 1 | INTRODUCTION/RECORDING OF THE MEETING | |
| 1.1 | PO noted that the meeting would be recorded to aid with the preparation of the minutes. There were no objections. | |
| 1.2 | PO welcomed everyone to the meeting and attendees introduced themselves. Apologies as above. | |
| 1.3 | The minutes of the previous meeting were approved. | |
| 2 | MEMBERSHIP OF GROUP | |
| 2.1 | RC noted that there has been a restructuring in Education and a new Area Quality Improvement Manager (AQIM) will take over covering the Nairn area from Fiona Shearer. JM confirmed that Mark Jones has been appointed as the AQIM with responsibility for Nairn. | |
| 2.2 | RC noted that Seamus McArdle (Nairn Access Panel) attended a previous meeting and was added to the group. THC to check whether he wants to remain in the group. | DW |
| 2.3 | RC asked about pupil representation for future stakeholder meetings. JM confirmed that the school will review this. | |
| 2.4 | RC explained, as is standard for major projects, a transition group will be set up as we get closer to handover. It will consist of mainly Council officers, school staff and various disciplines will be called in as required such as Catering, Cleaning and other people involved in the operation of the school. | |
| 3 | PROJECT UPDATE – HIGHLAND COUNCIL | |
| 3.1 | RC confirmed that works were progressing well on site and are on programme for the target operational date of August 2026. Works will continue to be closely monitored in the second half of the build period. | |
| 4 | PROGRESS REPORT – BALFOUR BEATTY | |
| 4.1 | AM shared a video and some slides with the group which detailed the progress made on site date as well as offering updates on work they have done with the school and wider community and apprenticeship numbers. | |
| 4.2 | HB noted that he believed the build to be different to what had previously been presented and asked why changes were not run past the stakeholder group. SH confirmed there had only been very minor changes such as a different hedge type. HB noted that he believed the design of the roof had changed. SH and RC confirmed that there had been no significant changes to the design that was presented at the public consultation events held at the school or to what was submitted for planning approval. | |

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| 5 | ACADEMY UPDATE | |
| 5.1 | SA offered an update from Nairn Academy. 3 groups of pupils and 3 groups of staff have visited the site. The school are working well with Balfour Beatty. SA has been working with the project team on the power and data layouts, security and access arrangements as well as working on plans for a memorial garden in the new grounds. | |
| 5.2 | JM noted the importance of getting pupils involved in the process and noted that the senior pupils who attended site were impressed with the building and these pupils will play an important role in mentoring the younger pupils who will attend the new school building. | |
| 5.3 | BJ asked whether the Depute Head Teacher post of SA will be covered in school as SA is moving to full time. SA confirmed that her post will be backfilled. JM added that they have appointed someone with Head Teacher and Deputy experience, and they will start in August 2025. | |
| 6 | PLANNING CONDITION (AREA OF DEMOLISHED BUILDING) | |
| 6.1 | RC explained that this relates to a condition that was put into the planning approval to do with what happens when the school building gets demolished. RC confirmed that the demolition of the existing school does not form part of the contract with Balfour Beatty. This will be arranged by the Council through a separate contract. SH shared the site plan drawing that was submitted to Planning following consultation and agreement with Sportscotland. The existing all-weather 3G pitch and grass rugby pitch were resurfaced and upgraded as part of the enabling works to allow continuous access to sports facilities during the build. These will be retained for the new school as well as a new Multi Use Games Area (MUGA), new 3G pitch and as well as a grass running track. During the planning process, Sportscotland had commented that the site could potentially fit an extra grass pitch where the current school is after demolition. This got conditioned through the planning process along with the biodiversity net gain condition, which also requires the existing school site to be used to achieve the biodiversity targets, and the two are obviously in conflict because the same site can't be used for two separate things that don't tie together. THC have submitted a Section 42 application to remove the additional grass pitch condition which has never been on any drawing. It was not included in the project but got conditioned through the Sportscotland comments during the planning process. The intention is not to deliver an additional grass pitch but to deliver all the pitches that were included within the planning application. | |

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| | <p>RC noted that the new 3G pitch will be a 7 a-side pitch but as it is a synthetic surface the playing hours available on it will be greatly increased.</p> <p>RC explained that the sports provision being provided will meet the needs of the school and offer community access. The existing full size synthetic pitch and rugby pitch were in poor condition prior to the start of the project. They have both need upgraded and there will also be a new 7 a-side synthetic pitch, MUGA and running track so overall the school will have increased hours of usage available at the new school facilities.</p> | |
| 6.2 | <p>HB asked for confirmation as to where the rugby pitch is on the site plan and queried whether this area belonged to Albyn Court.</p> <p>SH confirmed that the rugby pitch is owned by the Council.</p> <p>HB asked if THC could double check the ownership of the ground as he believes that Albyn Court residents used to have full access to the area until a gate was locked.</p> <p>Post meeting note: On 18/06/2025 SH sent HB the title check from the Land Register of Scotland which confirmed THC ownership of the area in question.</p> | |
| 6.3 | <p>GS noted that the section 42 application came as a surprise to them and some additional context would have helped them understand the reasons behind it. GS explained that they are content, after discussion with the school, that the school do not need an additional pitch for their needs. GS noted the need to review what the Community needs are and whether there is unmet need for an additional grass pitch in the town and suggested that they have received feedback from organisations to suggest that another pitch that would be managed by Highlife Highland at the Academy would be very helpful for them. GS added that if pitches are to be removed from the public or from the school then audits should be carried out.</p> <p>SH noted that the maximum amount of use for a grass pitch if used weekly is recommended at 7 hours. As part of the consultation with SportsScotland prior to submitting the planning application it was agreed to that the new 7-aside pitch would be synthetic to increase usage. We agreed with SportsScotland that this was enhanced facilities as two synthetic pitches and one grass pitch would offer increased usage versus two grass pitches and one synthetic pitch. SH added that we are required by Planning to achieve the required biodiversity net gain, so this land is required to achieve this. Something more biodiverse than a grass pitch is required to achieve this. SH added that there may be the potential to provide some smaller sports facilities on the existing site in amongst some biodiverse planting which may achieve the required targets. THC are</p> | |

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| | waiting on an updated biodiversity report to demonstrate what exactly is required. | |
| 6.4 | <p>GS asked whether an audit on pitches could delay the completion of the school.</p> <p>SH confirmed we could ask for an extension in terms of submitting the final position on the pitch. The condition is not a preoccupation condition because it happens post demolition, but we would need to agree prior to completion of the project what was happening. Sportscotland have asked THC to do some analysis about what is available across the town, and we intend to meet with them further to discuss.</p> <p>RC noted that 7 a-side synthetic pitches have been popular elsewhere for community use and noted that there are other pitches in Nairn but in varying states of condition. One thing that may come out of an assessment of what is available is to see if there was anything we could do to improve the condition of any Council owned pitches.</p> <p>SS noted ownership and condition wise, HLH would have to investigate the reports they have and do some work on this with local user groups. HLH would be interested in helping improve access to pitches.</p> | |
| 6.5 | <p>PO asked whether Sportscotland were a statutory consultant on the planning application.</p> <p>RC confirmed that they were and noted that we engaged with them at an early stage. We understood that we had their support on what we were proposing however in the finalisation of the planning decision notice this condition was put in, so it needs to be resolved. The biodiversity issue has come through the National Planning Framework as a requirement in all projects from a certain date, so it's something that needs to be complied with.</p> | |
| 6.6 | <p>GS noted that the price of hiring pitches at the school was a deterrent to some local groups and asked whether this could be looked at as part of the review.</p> <p>SS explained that this is the standard Highland Council pricing throughout the Highlands so could not be reviewed in isolation for Nairn.</p> <p>RC added that the charges are set by the Council and noted that similar concerns have been raised elsewhere and the comments would be passed on.</p> | |
| 7 | DATE OF NEXT MEETING | |
| 7.1 | To be confirmed. | |
| 8 | AOCB | |
| 8.1 | GS asked about the current strategy around Points of Delivery and community use at the school including the potential for the public library to move into the building. | |

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| | <p>RC explained that the project predates the Community Point of Delivery approach but with Nairn, as in other areas, we are working with colleagues in Asset Management to map all assets (Council owned and other public bodies) rather than looking at things such as the library in isolation. This will hopefully help inform what the long-term proposal for the library is, but Members and stakeholders have made their views clear, and no decision has been made.</p> <p>PO noted that as local Members, they have had an initial meeting with officers who are looking at the assets in Nairn and have made their views very clear that they do not want the library to move to the school.</p> <p>PO added that there are other locations in Nairn that may be suitable, or it could be retained in its current location if financially viable.</p> | |
| 8.2 | As there was no further business, the meeting was concluded at 19:28. | |