

ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

BULLETIN ITEM

Subject: Inverness and Highland City Region Deal

Date: 1 September 2021

ECO: Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this Committee Bulletin is to update Members on the good progress being made in the Inverness and Highland City Region Deal and highlight actions being taken to remedy issues arising within projects.

The Deal's annual award of funding was signed by Scottish and UK Governments and The Highland Council. This fully funds the planned delivery for the year and allows for some accelerated spend should projects be able to do so.

2. Project Summaries

2.1 Affordable Housing

12 units in Avoch have been completed during quarter 1 21/22, with tenants occupying late June 2021. Negotiations are ongoing to secure further opportunities including 5 units in Kirkhill.

2.2 Northern Innovation Hub

Highland Food and Drink Technology Centre (TechHub) - Outline business case; cost and timeline feasibility studies regarding refurbishment of a preferred site is under development.

IMPACT30 – recruitment for cohort 6 is now complete and came onboard in July.

Coding Academy – a new focus of this project will be on advanced digital skills in the workplace.

Pathfinder Accelerator: - New contractor Skillfluence was appointed

Nexus - The business breakfasts continue to be hosted via GoToWebinar. A new series of webinars has been developed for 2021/22 with 2 delivered to date.

2.3 Inverness Castle

All statutory planning consents that have been submitted have been approved. The tenders for the main construction contract were published on 31 of May. It is anticipated that the successful contractor will be engaged prior to the end of this year. The Spirit 360 artists commission scheme was launched in June and will offer support for small-scale commissions (up to £1,000) to Highland-based or originated artists.

- 2.4 Land Remediation Longman**
The projects consultants have agreed with SEPA a way forward for a formal application. Updates to the site monitoring plan will be completed and an application submitted to SEPA shortly.
- 2.5 UHI - Life Sciences Innovation Centre**
The procurement of the building contractor is complete, and contract has been signed between Robertson Construction Northern and HIE. The Development Agreement between the University and HIE has also been fully signed on 22 June 2021. The sale of the land for the new facility is now completed.
- 2.6 Science Skills Academy (STEM)**
The Thurso, Fort William and Dingwall Newton Rooms are all ready to welcome pupils back, once restrictions permit. The Pop-Up Newton Room is ready to launch in August 2021 and will be hosted firstly in Portree. The Pop up will relocate to areas where there is not a fixed Newton room throughout the Academic year. A lease has begun for the next 12 months with two facilities on The Highland University Inverness Campus and will act as the interim Inverness Newton Room.
- 2.7 Innovative Assisted Living (Fit Home)**
While good progress is now being made in the construction programme after covid related delays, these will not be ready in time for the required data study. A retro fit programme has therefore been approved to work with a number of bodies to gather data using the sensors. Further engagement is underway to develop a wider partnership group which would manage the opportunities and benefits that will come from this pioneering project.
- 2.8 Digital**
Due to commercial and state aid reasons it is becoming increasingly unlikely that the R100 North Lot contract will be the vehicle through which the City-Region Deal funds can be used to increase broadband coverage within Highland. Regular discussions are ongoing with UK and Scottish government, City Region Deal and Digital teams to determine the way forward. Analysis is being carried out to develop a proposal of works the project would seek to commission while in parallel another procurement framework is sought to deliver the work.
- 2.9 Air Access**
It is already clear that the longer-term impacts of the Covid pandemic on all operators will be significant and will require all levels of government and the industry to work together to identify how air services might develop. A short-term focus is securing a sustainable air service for Wick.
- 2.10 Transport Infrastructure - West Link (Highland Council)**
All major works were completed, and bridge opened to traffic. There have since been issues with the automatic system for the bridge operation which has necessitated the fixed opening of the bridge while remedial works to adjust sensor positioning are carried out. Torvean Park was complete and open, including the artwork installation in April.
- 2.10 Transport Infrastructure - Inshes Junction (Highland Council)**
Approval on the options and agreement to commence consultations was obtained at the Inverness City and Area Committee on the 27th May 2021. Consultations are being undertaken virtually using the Council's website. The consultation continues until the end of July. There has been active engagement with the consultation exercise but face to face consultations is currently not permitted due to the pandemic. Inshes 3 lanes over overbridge is complete and Beechwood access is now substantially complete.

2.11 **Transport Infrastructure - Longman Junction (Transport Scotland)**

Progress of the scheme will depend on the level and nature of formal representation received in response to the published draft Orders and whether a Public Local Inquiry will be required to consider objections made and not withdrawn. Construction of the scheme itself can only commence if the scheme is approved under the relevant statutory procedures and thereafter a programme for its delivery can be set.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

Date: 6 August 2021

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