

Meeting to discuss developing a Tourism Place Plan for Plockton

Plockton Village Hall, 15th November 2023

Attendees:

Plockton & District Community Trust	Ali Doc Mackenzie, John Maclean, Sandra Holmes
Plockton Historical Society	Mary Jane Campbell
Plockton Harbour CIC	Gill Bennett
PSBSC	Ian Hay (for David Hay)
Plockton & District Tourist Association	Jane Mackenzie
Seal Trips	Calum Mackenzie
Fishermen	Duncan McAndrew
Plockton Common Grazings	Alex Townend
NTS	Iain Turnbull
Plockton & District Community Council	Ian Hay
Plockton Village Hall	Jane Mackenzie

Note of meeting:

Context for the meeting

- The Community Council (CC) and Plockton & District Community Trust (PDCT) has been in dialogue with Highland Council for a couple of years regarding traffic management and parking issues in Plockton. It has been agreed between the CC and PDCT that the CC would focus on traffic management and PDCT would focus on tourism infrastructure.
- PDCT called this meeting to establish if there was support from relevant organisations and regular users of the car park (Seal Trips and fishermen) to apply for funding to commission a Tourism Place Plan. PDCT has completed an Expression of Interest to Highland Council's Community Regeneration Fund (CRF), and has been invited to make a full application.

Background

- Ian Hay provided an overview of the work previously undertaken by the CC regarding an extension to the car park. This was developed following conversations with the fishermen, sailing club, etc, and proposed a doubling or trebling of its size. It also included the creation of a hub with toilets/showers. Crown Estate Scotland were consulted and were supportive.
- Ian also provided a summary of the work undertaken more recently by Highland Council to improve parking and traffic flows – removal of boats and other items from the car park, creating disabled parking spaces in the car park, yellow lines on keep clears and at the main pier, 'no through road' signage, etc. These had worked reasonably well. Ian also outlined other actions undertaken by the Council, including the 'invitation to pay' in the car park and the hard standing for campervans at the access road to Coral Beach.

PDCT's position – the need for a Plan

- Sandra explained that PDCT is willing to progress plans to improve tourism-related infrastructure, following community consultation and engagement to determine what

is needed. Our preference is to identify and quantify the issues, undertake an options appraisal and then agree, as a community, a preferred way forward. A Tourism Place Plan would create a route-map/master plan that would be delivered in phases, as funding allows. In order to apply for capital funding we need to have a strong evidence base as to the issue, its impacts and how we have arrived at the proposed solution.

- In addition to the invitation to apply for CRF funding, PDCT made contact with [SCOTO](#) (Scotland's community tourism network). We have since been offered £3,500 funding from the [North Highland Initiative](#) towards a SCOTO [Press Pause for Tourism](#) workshop and action plan. We would need to fund the balance of £500 ourselves.
- The SCOTO workshop will help us to identify the issues and the action plan will be a good starting point for commissioning professional assistance to develop a Tourism Place Plan.

General discussion:

- The CC reiterated the need for Highland Council to undertake a Traffic Management Plan; they are obliged by statute to do so.
- The CC had met with Malcolm Macleod of Highland Council the week before to discuss the car park and the airstrip. It was a positive meeting and Mr Macleod confirmed the car park was the Council's responsibility and he'd come back with a plan for the way forward.
- The NTS is undertaking a visioning exercise for Balmacara Estate. This will include a review of visitor facilities. NTS might be able to contribute to the £500 for the SCOTO workshop, but won't know till after Christmas. Agree with the approach to develop a holistic plan. NTS would wish to retain a presence in the car park.
- A short discussion whether the car park was traffic or tourism? PDCT had assumed it was tourism, whereas the CC considered it to be part of traffic management. The meeting agreed the issues are interlinked.
- Brief discussion re some of the issues experienced, including the impact of the 'invitation to pay' on the Harbour CIC revenues from the toilets, and the merits (or not) of permit parking.

Conclusion

- Everyone present was asked, in turn, if their organisation was supportive of PDCT making an application to Highland Council's CRF for financial assistance to develop a Tourism Place Plan. There was unanimous agreement.

Post-meeting note

- Highland Coast Hotels (Plockton Inn) has agreed to fund the £500 needed to complete the funding gap for the SCOTO Press Pause workshop and action plan. Thank you Plockton Inn.
- Our CRF funding application has been approved (£15,000). A condition of the award is that it be expanded to cover traffic as well as tourism.

For information: extracts from our CRF funding application

PDCT wishes to develop a community-led, sustainable Tourism Place Plan for Plockton. Recognising the importance of tourism to our local economy we wish to better accommodate visitors whilst reducing their impact on residents and our natural and cultural environment.

Plockton's infrastructure is unable to accommodate the volume of visitor-related traffic – gridlock is not uncommon. A tourism plan, built on extensive community consultation, will be critical to identifying the best solutions and securing capital infrastructure funding to help alleviate some of the acute pressures currently being faced. We anticipate a phased approach and need a master plan to direct this.

This project seeks to deliver a sustainable Tourism Place Plan for Plockton. This community-led plan will consider options to best mitigate the impacts of tourism on our village whilst also enhancing the visitor experience. It will be a community-first plan; one that seeks to best meet a wide range of local interests. Because of this we consider this project to be most strongly aligned with the first CRF strategic objective, but with benefits accruing to the local economy also.

- Primary objective - Increasing community resilience (People)
- Secondary objective - Helping economic recovery & sustaining growth (Economy)

Plockton & District Community Council and Plockton & District Community Trust have been in regular dialogue with Highland Council (Dot Fergusson, Willie Mackinnon, Leona Joiner, Shane Manning and Iain Moncrieff) regarding the issues of parking, traffic management and visitor management in the village of Plockton for over two years.

The Council has undertaken some improvement works but the pressures arising from tourism in a shoreside fishing village that was planned in the early 1800's requires a comprehensive options appraisal and master plan to identify viable and deliverable measures to mitigate the many current issues.

Whilst recognising the importance of tourism to the local economy the village is unable to accommodate the volume of traffic at present. The 'one road in, one road out' nature of the village is a significant constraint as is the on street parking on all the roads. The flow of traffic is regularly impeded and gridlock is not uncommon, particularly when delivery lorries, refuse vehicles, coaches and camper vans attempt to access the village. This is an inconvenience and causes frustration, but the primary over-riding concern is understandably one of health and safety. Plockton Primary School is located directly on the only approach road close to the village centre, and there have been incidents where ambulances have been unable to navigate Harbour Street – this provides the only access road to Frithard Road, the Brae, Camus an Arbhair, Cooper Street and Rhu.

It has been agreed that the Community Council will focus on traffic management, leaving PDCT to lead on a Tourism Place Plan.

An extension to the public car park, which also serves as a sea defence and provides access to the main pontoon, has been discussed locally and some initial work on this has been undertaken by the Community Council and Highland Council. This is a legitimate option, but we are keen to develop a holistic plan for the village and to consider alternative or additional options also, particularly with respect to camper van facilities.

We are mindful that the public car park is a resource for the whole community and is critical to a number of local businesses including five creel boats and a popular boat trip operator. Further, there has been a long standing ambition to improve shoreside facilities for the local sailing club (showers and changing rooms). The National Trust for Scotland has a visitor centre (a modest interpretation centre) at the car park and wish to enhance their presence at this prominent site.

Finally, the community-owned car park toilets have been operating at a loss since 'invitation to pay' was introduced for car parking. Visitors are less likely to make a donation to use the facilities when they have paid to park. This situation is unsustainable.

There is very little development land in the village to accommodate tourism-related services such as campervan facilities; the nearest being 7 miles away in Reraig. However, Highland Council

recently intimated that Plockton Airstrip is surplus to their requirements. PDCT submitted an expression of interest in a potential purchase of the airstrip in September 2023 and in October a productive meeting was held with council officials and the Community Council. We would like the tourism place plan to consider the airstrip as a potential location for campervan facilities, in addition to accommodating this within an extended the car park.

The environmental impact of the various development options will be considered as part of the plan as will green travel options.

We will complete a SCOTO 'Press Pause Workshop' to fully engage with the community and to agree a scope of work for specialist tourism management consultants. The resultant Tourism Place Plan, with estimated infrastructure costings, will be critical to seeking capital funding to help alleviate some of the acute pressures currently being faced. We anticipate a phased approach, and need a master plan to direct this. Highland Council, as owners of the car park and airstrip, will be a key stakeholder in any future development. We look forward to continuing to work with Council officials to deliver improvements for the people of Plockton.

The plan will provide a route map to securing funds to make infrastructure improvements in Plockton that will benefit residents, businesses and visitors alike. It is difficult to quantify these improvements in advance of undertaking this planning work, but in the long-term this could include:

- Improved traffic flow through the village
- Increased parking capacity, including 'out of village' parking, and ideally long-stay as well as short-stay parking options
- Green travel options (push bikes and electric bikes) from 'out of village' facilities to the village, and EV charging
- Improved shore side facilities for fishermen, sailing club, visiting yachts and visitors
- A new overnight campervan facility with hook ups, water and waste facilities
- Greater income generation potential from new visitor facilities
- Fewer incidents of 'dirty camping' and associated waste hazards
- An improved visitor experience arising from infrastructure improvements to increase capacity for visitor traffic and overnight campervan facilities

During discussions with Highland Council, we were informed that our proposed Tourism Place Plan will be important in promoting Plockton to a 'tier one' tourism hot spot in a future THC Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan. Inclusion within the Council's forward infrastructure plan will be important to help secure Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund support which we anticipate as the main funder of the 'yet to be identified' infrastructure works.

PDCT has engaged with all relevant local organisations to share our aspirations to develop a plan with, and on behalf of, the local community. We hosted a meeting in Plockton Village Hall on 15 November 2023, at which the organisations and individuals listed below were represented. We explained that we would not progress this CRF funding without the support of the community. There was unanimous support to develop a holistic Tourism Place Plan and to submit an application to CRF.

- Plockton & District Community Trust
- Plockton & District Community Council
- Plockton & District Tourist Association
- Plockton Harbour CIC
- Plockton Small Boat Sailing Club
- Plockton Historical Society
- Plockton Grazing Committee
- Local fisherman representing Plockton fishermen
- Seal Trip Operator
- National Trust for Scotland

If successful, we will ensure the above interested parties are fully engaged in the development of the plan and will undertake broader consultation to ensure all local and wider interests are able to input to its development also. Broader consultation will include the following:

- Local residents
- Local businesses
- Plockton Primary School
- Plockton High School
- Visiting tourism related operators such as tour bus operators
- The Highland Council
- Crown Estate Scotland
- SEPA

We are requesting CRF funding towards a Tourism Place Plan. This is therefore a discrete revenue project that will end on the production of the plan. However, the plan is a critical first step to determining the best tourism-related solution/s for Plockton and will be a major cornerstone for future work to agree a way forward with Highland Council and then to secure capital funding, most likely in partnership with the Council.

We are very cognisant that public funds are constrained and likely to be for some time. We therefore anticipate a phased approach to meeting our infrastructure needs. The plan will provide a route map toward this, and with a prioritised action list. This strategic approach will also put us in a stronger position to respond to any short-term capital funding opportunities that may arise as we will have 'shovel ready' proposals that we can bring forward at short notice.

Environmental considerations will be a key aspect of the brief. The car park is on the water front, indeed it doubles as a sea defence, so rising sea levels will need to be factored into any development at this location. There is no EV charging point in the village at present so we will be keen to accommodate this into future plans. A key consideration will also be the environmental 'whole life cost' of developing either the car park or airstrip. An assessment of this will be built into the plan. Any option to accommodate visitors outwith the heart of the village will include consideration of green travel options to and from the village in the form of electric and push bikes.

