

NAIRN & NAIRNSHIRE

Business Improvement District Proposals

INTRODUCTION

Nairnshire is a compact area covering 200 square miles with a population of 14,500 people. Within the county there is a wealth of natural assets which must be nurtured and developed in a strategic way. There is a proud tradition of civic involvement. This paper looks at Nairnshire in the round, emphasising the interconnection of its major assets, and highlighting the key issues that need to be addressed.

BACKGROUND

This discussion paper has been prepared by the directors of Nairn Improvement Community Enterprise ("NICE") to inform the discussions scheduled for 3 November.

The new Scottish Government approach to Business Improvement Districts is an exciting opportunity for Nairnshire to develop a new way of working to harness the community spirit and involvement the community already has, and to facilitate delivery of projects that have already been identified.

This paper is an attempt to show how a BID for Nairnshire (including a Marine Bid) will benefit all of Nairnshire with both environmental and sustainable developments. A main objective would be to use Nairnshire's historic great natural assets to produce more jobs in Nairnshire via properly funded developments which must include the right infrastructure.

In terms of what NICE would want to see flow from this new Nairnshire BID, the vision is to create as many sustainable jobs in Nairnshire as possible, generated principally by increasing the visitor footfall in the context that:

- a) Nairnshire is a great place to stay, retire and visit;
- b) Nairnshire is a great place to work;
- c) Nairnshire is a great place to come on holiday;
- d) An increased footfall will increase local spend.

This paper deliberately sets out a strategy for all Nairnshire. The purpose of this new style BID is to ensure that all partners work together to deliver the various component parts.

It is assumed that the Nairn by-pass is built, and it is clearly needed as soon as possible. If finances dictate, it would be preferable to start with a single carriageway by-pass now rather than wait for a dual carriageway at some indefinite future date.

This paper identifies the many proposals being brought forward within Nairnshire, and one of NICE's ambitions is to avoid the typically long delays that might arise in delivering them. The approach must clearly be based on collaborative Partnership Working and an acceptance of Nairnshire as a vibrant community that wishes to be involved, to be accountable, and above all a community that is prepared to accept responsibility for the community's well being.

The paper explores what is in the Common Good, taking the view that this includes all assets effectively owned by the community, and not necessarily just the assets in the Common Good Fund registered and held by Highland Council.

The paper assumes a Local Authority responsible for Nairnshire that has a commitment to real consultation on Locality Planning, Community Empowerment and an increasing Locality Capacity. Nairnshire has excellent and active Community Councils. NICE as a Social Enterprise with over 1,000 members, as a Scottish Charity, and as a Community Body with the "Right to Buy" is an essential partner alongside the statutory bodies, and in particular as the vehicle for consultation and delivery. This has been recognised in the recently published Town Centre Charrette document, and NICE is already working with Highland Council and the Association of Nairn Businesses to take the Town Centre Plan forward.

Nairnshire is therefore starting from a very strong position.

In highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of all the various proposals we are identifying the opportunities whilst being aware of the historic weaknesses. It is clearly in Nairnshire's interests that genuine Partnership working and understanding develops. This can only be achieved if everybody pools their expertise and experience in good faith.

This paper takes a geographical look at Nairnshire from the coast to the Dava Moor. The priorities follow this pattern rather than what must be done first.

1. **BEACHES**

Nairnshire has wonderful beaches with fantastic views of the Sutors of Cromarty and the whole Sutherland coast, stretching naturally from Findhorn Bay to Fort George. The area encompasses Culbin Forest, Hilton and Whiteness Head as Sites of SSI for wetlands and forests.

A proper coastal path is needed to link Findhorn Bay and the Moray coastal path to Fort George and then Inverness. There should be several viewpoints on the path. Nairn's beaches are regularly reviewed as some of the best in the world.

Current ideas for the Beach area include a Lido complex in association with the swimming pool; a developed promenade; better children's play areas; and closer attention to beach cleanliness. The area needs better parking and access to the RSPB Culbin site from Nairn itself.

The biggest risk to enjoyment of the beaches is pollution from the sewage works which are not functioning properly. The facility needs upgrading to cope with the existing resident and tourist population and changing weather conditions, and this must be done before the relevant population increases.

First Priority – To sort out sewage works and the drainage system with Scottish Water and SEPA, and to ensure adequate capacity for future developments

2. **HARBOUR**

The harbour is weakening and will in due course fall down. Nairn needs a bold plan to develop an outer deep water harbour to allow bigger yachts to berth. This would attract yachts from Scandinavia and Germany and increase tourist spends.

Nairn has very active sailing and kayak clubs who wish to have better and expanded facilities. They would in particular like to develop more active junior membership and become a regional centre for training.

Second Priority – to develop a new harbour with modern facilities

3. **THE RIVER NAIRN**

This is another wonderful asset for Nairnshire, extending inland the wilderness feel of the beaches. The aim should be to preserve that feeling of wilderness along the Nairn valley.

The river is a fantastic salmon river but is a spate river and needs careful local input and management.

Third Priority - careful, sensitive and well maintained paths from Nairn to Cawdor preserving the wilderness factor.

4. FISHERTOWN and FLOODING

Fishertown is again a wonderful part of Nairn's heritage and deserves its conservation status and protection. With increased Harbour usage, parking capacity, road access and enhanced tourist attractions will need to be addressed.

These aspects need to be addressed in the context of a comprehensive plan for The Links and The Maggot – both of which need care and attention.

Fourth Priority - Flood alleviation plans for Fishertown.

5. CARAVANS, MOTORHOMES, CAMPING and BACKPACKERS

Nairn's major caravan site sits behind the East Beach at the river's mouth and harbour entrance, and its location demonstrates how important natural assets are to tourist trade. There is a case for increasing the size of the caravan site, providing much better and bigger motor home accommodation, and possibly diversifying into alternative smaller sites.

The big downside is the sewage works and the smell at the end of the caravan site.

Nairn's very many outdoor attractions and the likelihood of a coastal path extension would suggest that backpacker / hostel accommodation would attract a different and large group of active tourists.

Fifth Priority – to provide much better facilities for motor homes, campers and backpackers.

6. GOLF

Nairn's two golf courses are both of championship standard, and are two of Nairn's greatest assets. The Nairn Golf Club is in a very strong alliance with clubs at Castle Stuart and Dornoch. The Nairn Dunbar Club has a good local membership and attracts many visitors who really enjoy it.

Sixth Priority - to continue to develop the golf tourist potential.

7. HOTELS

Nairn's two largest hotels sit close to the beach (the Golf View) and to the golf course (the Newton), again showing how important the environment is to Nairn's tourist trade. The Newton is a major conference centre as well.

Seventh Priority – to develop tourist trade, involving all local hotels, B&B's, bars and restaurants in this BID

8. TOWN CENTRE

Redevelopment of Nairn Town Centre is the next major piece of work to be done. Whilst there has historically been much talking but very little action, the outcome of the Town Centre Charrette led by Highland Council has gained strong community support, and NICE, the ANB and Highland Council are currently collaborating to establish the framework for working together to deliver the identified outcomes. The aim is to develop the town centre to make it attractive for locals and tourists and thereby create an

enlarged footfall from which will flow more income and jobs in retail trades and tourism. Part of the plan is to bring the “King Street Building” which houses the old Police Cells into use as a “gateway” to the town centre. The town centre and High Street have also been identified as having capacity to provide more housing by the use in particular of empty buildings.

Eighth Priority - to use BID to support redevelopment of the town centre by involving local businesses.

9. INLAND SITES

Viewfield is an area that includes Viewfield House (which houses Nairn’s Museum), the Sports Club, a Bowling Green, the Community & Arts Centre, and the original Stable Block to Viewfield House that is effectively empty and available for community use. The area is very close to the town centre and provides a lovely link through a lightly wooded area down to the Links and Beaches.

The **Farmers’ Show Field** is a valuable open space close to the town centre that is under-utilised and capable of enhancement now that the Farmers’ Show has outgrown the site.

Lochloy – Nairn’s newest housing development is badly in need of remedial action to enforce planning conditions not met. There is in particular the need for a road bridge onto the A96 at the eastern end, and need for play/open spaces.

Ninth Priority – to develop the Stables Block as a Men’s Shed and deliver funding to improve the fabric and facilities of the Museum with BID input.

10. SANDOWN

Sandown provides a massive opportunity to use a Common Good asset in this BID way forward.

Sandown sits on the western approach to Nairn on the A96, and with its open views across the Moray Firth is seen as essential to welcoming tourists when the by-pass is in place. This fits well with the Wetlands Visitor Centre plans to encourage especially winter visitors to observe the geese and waders on the wonderful beaches and wetlands. This would help to extend the tourist season and create much needed employment through the winter months in addition to providing community meeting and green space facilities for residents of the Tradespark area.

Interested parties have worked up proposals that include building council houses to meet local need, making house sites for sale available for self build or small local developers, and (in the Southern field) a zoned area developed as a Wetlands Park with a Visitor Centre doubling as a community building with play facilities.

Tenth Priority - to use this BID process to develop Sandown for multipurpose use.

11. FARMING and FORESTRY

Historically, Nairnshire’s key industries were farming and forestry. The BID must be used to assist Gordon’s and Tulloch’s sawmills as major employers along with all the land owners and forestry workers.

Developments must not prejudice Nairn’s major employers and must support as appropriate the forestry and farming community.

Eleventh Priority - to use BID to help Nairnshire’s traditional industries

12. The INFRASTRUCTURE

Roads and bridges are not coping at present and must be provided as vital links between the town and wider Nairnshire as well as routes out and into Nairnshire.

Twelfth Priority - to provide proper roads and bridges in Nairnshire

13. TOURISM

Tourist potential is massive with Cawdor Castle, Fort George, Clava Stones, Culloden, Logie Steading, Brodie Countryfare and Brodie Castle all close by, and the opportunity to develop action holiday offerings.

Last but not least, the Dava and Lochindorb must be protected as real wilderness with the Wolf of Badenoch in his historic lair.

As described above, the western approach to Nairn on the A96 offers wonderful views across the Moray Firth, and makes the statement that you are arriving at a seaside destination.

Thirteenth Priority - to use BID to maximise tourist potential in Nairnshire

Action Plan to implement Nairnshire BID.

In writing this strategic paper NICE underlines its commitment to working in a genuine collaborative partnership for the common good of Nairnshire. The detailed planning and finance will follow if the BID proposal is sound and all parties in the community work together to make it happen.

It is acknowledged by all that Nairn needs capacity to deliver all these plans and developments. This means:

(a) A BID project manager and a BID finance manager to move this forward in the correct professional way. These would start as short term contracts of say £50,000 each per year for 3 years.

(b) A contribution from HIE is needed. HIE are spending hundreds of millions of pounds in Inverness and tens of millions of pounds in Forres. One million pounds a year for 3 years in Nairn would be a good start.

If this BID process is used properly, a massive return on investment in Nairnshire can be achieved. This would be an exciting whole area use of BID, and the considerable collective local knowledge and experience base with true partnership working involving all the agencies will deliver the future that Nairnshire wants and deserves.