

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE

WOODHILL HOUSE, ABERDEEN, 23 JANUARY 2020

Present: Councillors P Argyle (Chair), J Cox (Vice Chair), W Agnew, G Carr, R Cassie (substitute for D Aitchison), M Ewenson (substitute for J Latham), M Findlater (substitute for R Withey), M Ford (substitute for P Johnston), J Ingram, I Mollison, C Pike, G Reid, S Smith, I Taylor.

Apologies: Councillors D Aitchison, P Johnston, J Latham and R Withey.

Officers: Director of Infrastructure Services, Head of Service (Transportation), Head of Service (Economic Development and Protective Services), Head of Service (Roads, Landscape Services and Waste Management), Team Manager (Planning and Environment, Chris Ormiston), Fleet Manager (Transportation) Principal Officer, Transportation (M MacKay), Strategy Manager (Transportation), Service Manager (Economic Development & Protective Services), Corporate Finance Manager (S Donald), Principal Solicitor, Legal and Governance (R O'Hare and Committee Officer (F Brown).

1. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The Chair asked Members if they had any interests to declare in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct and the following interests were intimated: –

- (1) Councillor Argyle declared an interest in **Item 8** by virtue of his role as the Chair of the Mid Deeside Community Trust (MDCT), and he advised the Committee that he would leave the meeting during consideration of that item.
- (2) Councillors Argyle, Cox and Pike (as substantive members) and Councillors Ford and Mollison (as substitute members) of NESTRANS for **Items 7, 8 and 9**. Having applied the objective test, they concluded that they would participate and remain when those items were being considered.

2. PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

In making decisions on the following items of business, the Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 149 of the Equality Act, 2010:-

- (1) to have due regard to the need to:-
 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
 - (c) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- (2) where an Equality Impact Assessment is provided, to consider its contents and take those into account when reaching a decision.

3. MINUTE OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING OF 28 NOVEMBER 2019

The Committee had before them, and **approved** as a correct record, the Minute of Meeting of 28 November 2019, subject to the following amendments:

- (1) Item 5, Page 8 – 5th paragraph, the word “should” to be replaced with “could”.
- (2) Item 8 – Page 13 – within the paragraph which voiced the Committee’s concerns about the impact on trees, after Dutch Elm disease, the wording “and Ash dieback” should be inserted.

PLANNING, POLICY AND ENVIRONMENT

4. FULL PLANNING PERMISSION FOR ERECTION OF DWELLINGHOUSE (RENEWAL OF PLANNING PERMISSION REFERENCE APP/2016/2197) AT PLOT 2, TOUX FARM, MINTLAW, ABERDEENSHIRE, AB42 4LX – REFERENCE: APP/2019/2106

With reference to the Buchan Area Committee meeting of 3 December 2019, (Item 5c), where the Area Committee had agreed to approve the application, there had been circulated a report, dated 10 January 2020, by the Director of Infrastructure Services, which sought consideration of an application for Full Planning Permission for the Erection of a Dwellinghouse, (Renewal of Planning Permission, Reference: APP/2016/2197), at Plot 2, Toux Farm, Mintlaw, Aberdeenshire, AB42 4KX – Reference: APP/2016/2016.

The report explained that the application had been determined by the Buchan Area Committee, who had agreed that the application should be delegated to the Head Of Planning and Environment to GRANT Planning Permission in Principle, subject to relevant planning conditions, on the grounds that the application would accord with Policy P1: Layout, Siting and Design and having determined that there were material considerations to support the departure from Policy R2: Housing and Employment Development Elsewhere in the Countryside, as the proposed dwellinghouse would sit between two detached houses and would therefore complete the layout, rather than leaving the site empty.

The Team Manager (Planning and Environment) introduced the report and explained that the planning application sought to “renew” a previous planning application (APP/2016/2197), granted on 27 September 2016, which it was reported was still extant at the time the new planning application had been submitted, and it was therefore considered a legitimate renewal of that application, however, no subsequent application for Matters Specified in Conditions had been made within the requisite 3-year time period and as such, the Committee were advised that the permission was no longer capable of being implemented.

It was reported that the application site lies in the countryside location in the Rural Housing Market Area (RHMA) and 240 metres south west of Fetterangus. When the application was granted in 2016 the policy on organic growth permitted development within 400 metres of the settlement boundary, however within the current Local Development Plan 2017 that had been reduced to 200 metres and that policy change was considered by the Planning Service to be fundamental and a material change in circumstances. It was also reported that Policy R2 identified Fetterangus as a settlement which would allow for 20% growth within a planning period, however, the capacity had been taken up by the approval of 10 dwellinghouses since 2017 and therefore the village had no further capacity for growth.

Following discussion, Councillor Ingram, seconded by Councillor Pike moved to endorse the decision of the Buchan Area Committee, and that authority to GRANT Planning Permission in Principle should be delegated to the Head of Planning and Environment, subject to:

a) Conditions covering the following matters;

- Details of Specified Matters, including: Layout, siting, design, materials, access, landscaping scheme, levels, surface water disposal, etc.,
- Tree Protection;
- Provision of private drainage system;
- Roads;
- Public water connection; and
- Carbon Neutrality

As an amendment, Councillor Ford, seconded by Councillor Mollison, moved to support the Officer's recommendation to REFUSE Planning Permission in Principle for the following reasons:

01. The proposal is in conflict with the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2017, in particular Policy R2 Housing and employment development elsewhere in the countryside, as there is currently no organic growth capacity for any additional dwellinghouses of the settlement of Fetterangus (identified for growth within the Development Plan). No other listed exceptions within Policy R2 apply.

Members of the Committee then voted:-

for the motion	(8)	Councillors Cox, Carr, Cassie, Ewenson, Findlater, Ingram, Pike and Smith.
for the amendment	(6)	Councillors Argyle, Agnew, Ford, Mollison, Reid and Taylor.

The motion was carried, and the Committee **agreed** to endorse the decision of the Buchan Area Committee, that authority to GRANT should be delegated to the of Planning and Environment, subject to conditions, as contained in Section 6.2 to the report, and as detailed in the motion.

5. FULL PLANNING PERMISSION FOR ERECTION OF DWELLINGHOUSE AT LAND AT BURNTHILL, FRASERBURGH – REFERENCE: APP/2019/2135

The Chair advised the Committee that a request to speak had been submitted by the applicant's representative Mr Gary Purves, Land Director for Colaren Homes, who would speak on the applicant's behalf.

With reference to the Banff and Buchan Area Committee meeting of 26 November 2019 (Item 7B) where the Area Committee had agreed to approve the application, there had been circulated a report, dated 10 January 2020, by the Director of Infrastructure Services, which sought consideration of an application for Full Planning Permission, for the Erection of a Dwellinghouse at Land at Burnthill, Fraserburgh – Reference: APP/2019/2135.

The report explained that the application had been determined by the Buchan Area Committee, who had agreed that the application should be delegated to the Head Of Planning and Environment to GRANT Planning Permission in Principle, subject to appropriate conditions on the grounds that the proposed development would form part of a cohesive group, would satisfy the need for a house for an essential worker and would meet two aspects of national planning policies by supporting regeneration and economic development.

The Team Manager, (Planning and Environment) introduced the report and advised the Committee that the site was located within the Aberdeen House Market Area (AHMA) in a countryside location. There was an existing cluster of five houses, to the north of the site, with

one additional house which had been approved by the Area Committee as part of the 20% growth within the current planning period. As such the proposed development would conflict with Policy R2, as the growth capacity had already been taken up. When considering the connectedness of the proposed dwellinghouse to the cluster to the north of the application site, the Planning Service were minded that there would be a separation due to the tree belt and paddock from the existing group which was concentrated to the east of the site and not visually connected the application site.

The Planning Service had also raised concerns relating to the layout, siting and design of the proposed dwellinghouse, relating to the scale, mass and design and they were minded that it would be visually out of keeping in that countryside location.

The Committee then heard from Mr Gary Purves, on behalf of the applicant, in support of the application. Mr Purves advised the Committee that the applicant had asked him to raise a number of points; namely (1) that the existing group of five houses qualifies as a cohesive group and that was not in dispute and the applicant was minded that the application site would be an appropriate addition to that cohesive group and the justification for that was that the physical separation and distances involved between the application site and existing cluster were not dissimilar to the distances between the additional house to the north of the site which had been granted in August 2019. (2) The 20% growth, which the Planning Officer had stated had been used up by the approval of the dwellinghouse the previous year was unfair as a reason for refusal, as the applicant had applied previously in 2016 and 2017 and on both occasions the 20% growth had not been used up. (3) The extant planning permission on the neighbouring site is for Planning Permission in Principle so there was currently no guarantee that a Full Planning Permission would ever come forward or be built, again highlighting that it was unfair that the 20% growth was being taken up by that landowner. (4) The applicant had stated to the Area Committee that he had a need to live on the site to run his business at Burnthill Farm and that was another reason in support of the application complying with Policy R2. (5) In relation to the design, the proposal had been based on the neighbouring dwellinghouse and therefore was compliant with Policy P1 and E2 of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2017 and finally (6) There were no objections to the development and the Buchan Area Committee has supported the development as being in compliance with R2, P1 and E2 of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2017.

In response to questions raised, Mr Purves confirmed that the applicant's justification for living on site was that he currently runs a variety of businesses from the farm (quarry, commercial storage and a coffee shop) and that had been put forward to the Planning Service who had never requested a labour needs justification report.

When asked, Mr Purves, on behalf of the applicant, confirmed that he had been given a fair hearing.

Following discussion, Councillor Taylor, seconded by Councillor Cox moved to **DEFER** consideration of the application, to allow the applicant the opportunity to submit the additional information which the Planning Service required, in support of their application, providing the justification for an essential worker.

As an amendment, Councillor Ford, seconded by Councillor Argyle, moved to support the Officer's recommendation to **REFUSE** Full Planning Permission for the following reasons:

01. The application does not comply with Policy R2: Housing and employment development elsewhere in the countryside of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2017 as the proposed development does not constitute a suitable addition to a cohesive group of at least five houses, and does not accord with any other policy criteria within Policy R2. The proposal also represents a breach of the 20% growth allowance permitted within

each Plan period for any cohesive group as this allowance has already been exhausted by a recently approved application upon a different site.

02. The application does not comply with Policy P1: Layout, siting and design or Policy E2: Landscape of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2017 as the proposed dwelling would be visually out of keeping with the immediately surrounding landscape in terms of its mass, scale and external materials.

Members of the Committee then voted:-

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|-------------------|-----|---|
| for the motion | (6) | Councillors Cox, Carr, Findlater, Ingram, Pike and Taylor. |
| for the amendment | (8) | Councillors Argyle, Agnew, Cassie, Ewenson, Ford, Mollison, Reid and Smith. |

The amendment was carried, and the Committee **agreed** to support the Officer's recommendation, to REFUSE Full Planning Permission, for the reasons contained in Section 6.1 to the report, and as detailed in the amendment.

TRANSPORTATION

6. FLEET SERVICES STRATEGIC PLAN 2020 – 2030

With reference to the Minute of the Infrastructure Services Committee meeting of 20 June 2019, (Item 10), where the Committee had agreed that a draft Fleet Replacement Strategy should be brought back to Committee, there was circulated a report, dated 9 January 2020, by the Director of Infrastructure Services, which provided the Committee with details of Aberdeenshire Council's Fleet Services Strategic Plan 2020-2030 as presented as Appendix 1 to the report, which provided the Asset Management and Decarbonisation Strategy 2020-2030 and the Infrastructure, Finance and Fleet Services requirements which would be necessary to support those changes.

The report explained that the Scottish Government had published their programme, which had committed to the phasing out of all petrol and diesel cars from public sector fleets and removing the need for any new petrol or diesel light commercial vehicles by 2025. The Fleet Services Strategic Plan 2020 – 2030 had been based on the requirement to phase out the need for all new petrol and diesel vehicles in the Aberdeenshire fleet by 2030, which it was reported would require significant changes to the vehicles operated by services and to revenue and capital budgets to support a modern, low emission fleet.

During discussion, the Committee commented:-

- (1) Would manufacturers be able to keep up with the pace of providing environmentally friendly vehicles to meet demand by those key dates, as there could be a danger that manufacturers would invest in new technology which had not been properly tested. The Head of Service (Transportation) advised the Committee that manufacturers would continue to make improvements in the manufacture and supply of low emission vehicles and through ongoing communication with Transport Scotland, the service would gather intelligence to support the changes required and to keep abreast of new and emerging technologies and to introduce technology into the fleet assets which would help to ensure safety, mobility and efficiency.
- (2) The investment costs would be significant to replace every vehicle in the fleet, in particular the replacement of the varied range of fleet assets, and the Scottish

Government would need to support local authorities to help them meet those targets and ensure that the markets would provide competitive pricing.

- (3) The Strategic Plan should include a recognition of Aberdeenshire Council's own commitments for meeting specific targets, including climate change targets, and recognising that while incremental changes were necessary (as it was only 10 years), the Council should consider whole system changes going forward.

Having considered the content of the report, the Committee **agreed**:

- (1) to **approve** the Fleet Services Strategic Plan 2020-2030 as contained in Appendix 1 to the report;
- (2) to **note** that the Strategic Plan would be subject to ongoing review and the Committee would receive updates on specific sections of the Plan as, and when appropriate;
- (3) to **acknowledge** that the Capital and Revenue budgets must be developed to support the replacement Strategy and infrastructure requirements; and
- (4) to **instruct** Officer's to be more explicit within the Strategic Plan, in recognition of Aberdeenshire Council's own commitments for meeting specific targets, including climate change targets, and recognising that while incremental changes were necessary, they were not enough and the Council should consider whole system changes going forward.

7. PARTNERSHIP REVIEW – HEALTH AND TRANSPORTATION ACTION PLAN AND ROAD SAFETY NORTH EAST SCOTLAND

There had been circulated a report, dated 9 January 2020, by the Director of Infrastructure Services, which sought to facilitate a review of the Council's participation in the Grampian Health and Transport Action Plan (HTAP) and Road Safety North East Scotland (RSNES), in compliance with the Council's Partnership Working Policy which required a short partnership assessment and a short risk assessment, which must be undertaken before joining a partnership and then every two years thereafter.

The report explained that the Council's continued participation in both HTAP and RSNES partnerships was important to facilitate partnership working in Aberdeenshire and to ensure effective use of resource and funding to achieve common outcomes while eliminating duplication. The partnership assessment and risk assessment were presented as Appendix 1 to 4 to the report.

Having considered the content of the report, the Committee **agreed**:

- (1) to **endorse** the partnership reviews of the Grampian Health and Transport Action Plan and Road Safety North East Scotland, as presented in Appendix 1 to 4 of the report; and
- (2) to **agree** that the Council would continue to participate in the partnerships until January 2022.

Having declared an interest in Agenda Item 8, Councillor Argyle left the room, and the Vice Chair, Councillor Cox chaired the meeting for the next item.

8. ABERDEENSHIRE COMMUNITY TRANSPORT INITIATIVE GRANT AWARDS

With reference to the Minute of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting of 19 January 2017 (Item 11), where that Committee had approved Aberdeenshire Community Transport Initiative (ACTI) funding for three years, up to 31 March 2020, there had been circulated a report, dated 9 January 2020, by the Director of Infrastructure Services which sought approval for the continuation of funding to support six voluntary/community transport projects listed in Section 2.1 and Appendix 2 to the report for 202/21 and to provide the continuation of funding in 2021/22 and 2022/23 (including adjustments for transport inflation) subject to available budget and satisfactory performance and taking into account any recommendations of the Passenger Transport Review, Member/Officer Working Group (PTRMOWG).

The report explained that should there be insufficient budget in any financial year, that it was proposed that the Passenger Transport Manager would approve reduced grant awards, as appropriate to match available funding and the Small Grant Fund, currently providing grant of up to £3,000 would be continued, but with an increased maximum award of £7,500 (with the grant covering no more than 75% of the project costs).

Having considered the content of the report, the Committee **agreed** to:

- (1) **approve** the award of Aberdeenshire Community Transport Initiative (ACTI) grants, amounting to a maximum of £386,275 in financial year 2020/21, subject to the approval of the Revenue Budget for 2020/21;
- (2) **approve**, in principle, funding for the subsequent 2 financial years, based on the 2020/21 grant awards, which may be adjusted to allow for transport inflation, all subject to available budget and Council priorities; and
- (3) **delegate** authority to the Passenger Transport Manager, following consultation with State Aid colleagues as appropriate, to **approve** the award of funds from the ACTI Small Grant Fund up to the value of £7,500 subject to available budget.

Councillor Argyle returned to the room, and to his role as Chair.

9. STRATEGIC TRANSPORT UPDATE

With reference to the Minute of the Infrastructure Services Committee meeting of 3 October 2019 (Item 10) there had been circulated a report, dated 9 January 2020, by the Director of Infrastructure Services, which provided the Committee with updates on transportation projects across Aberdeenshire for the period between October 2019 and January 2020 as presented in the Local Transport Strategy (LTS) Action update, which provided progress made against identified categories as Appendix 1 to the report.

During discussion, the Committee raised a number of points:

- (1) Page 113 – School Roadshows – The Garioch Centre, should read the Garioch **Sports** Centre.
- (2) Trunk Roads Projects. While the Committee recognised that the Toll of Birness junction was a trunk road and a Transport Scotland project, a letter should be sent to Scottish Ministers, stating that Aberdeenshire Council would continue to work closely with Transport Scotland to deliver that project, however, they were minded that the strong business case should be put forward, to provide a roundabout at that junction.
- (3) Charge Place Scotland –Officers should report back to the Committee, after the meeting, regarding addressing the needs for Kemnay for providing chargers.

- (4) Trunk Roads Project – A96 Dualling Petition Letter – Identify whether the letter which was sent to Transport Scotland, should also have gone to the Transport Minister.

Having considered the content of the report, the Committee **agreed**:

- (1) to **acknowledge** the progress made with projects, activities and developments taken forward by Nestrans, external agencies and stakeholders as outlined in the report;
- (2) to **note** that further updates on the progress of both the implementation and delivery of the Aberdeenshire Local Transport Strategy (LTS) would be provided, as appropriate;
- (3) To **instruct** the Director of Infrastructure Services, to write to Scottish Ministers, stating that Aberdeenshire Council would continue to work closely with Transport Scotland to deliver the Toll of Birness junction project, however, a strong business case should be put forward to provide a roundabout at that junction.

ROADS, LANDSCAPE SERVICES AND WASTE MANAGEMENT

10. RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON CIRCULAR ECONOMY BILL

There had been circulated a report, dated 6 January 2020, by the Director of Infrastructure Services, which notified the Committee of the response to the Scottish Government's consultation on their proposals for a Circular Economy Bill which would allow the bill to set a framework to allow circular economy to be developed in the future.

The report explained that the consultation ran from 7 November to 19 December 2019 and the Head of Roads, Landscape and Waste Services had submitted a response following consultation with the Chair, Vice-Chair and Opposition Spokesperson for the Infrastructure Services Committee as the timescales for submitting a response did not allow for a draft response to be considered and approved for submission prior to the consultation deadline.

Having considered the content of the report, the Committee **agreed to acknowledge** the response submitted to the consultation, as presented as Appendix 1 to the report.

11. HARBOUR RATES & DUES 2020/2021

There had been circulated a report, dated 6 January 2020, by the Director of Infrastructure Services, which summarised the proposed changes to the Harbour Rates and Dues for the financial year 2020 to 2021, which were reviewed annually, following consultation with Aberdeenshire Council's seven Harbour Advisory Committees.

The report proposed (1) that the increase in Rates and Dues for the financial year 2020/21 be set at +2% in respect of the charges highlighted in red in Appendix A to the report, excluding percentage fees or "one-off" single payments such as leisure slipway fees or seasonal tickets; and (2) to increase the Rates and Dues at Macduff Harbour by an additional 8% in lieu of the Annual Security Charge, which was proposed to be removed and (3) changes to the document to provide clarity and to ease the administration in raising invoices to customers.

Having considered the content of the report, the Committee **agreed**:

- (1) to **approve** the baseline increase of 2% in Rates and Dues for Aberdeenshire Council Harbours for the 2020-2021 Financial Year, as set out in Appendix A, discussion Item 4.5 to the report;

- (2) to **approve** the change in application of the Annual Security Charge at Macduff Harbour, discussion Items 4.2 - 4.4 to the report; and
- (3) to **approve** the change in format of the Rates & Dues document.

12. UPDATE ON DAMAGED BRIDGES IN KING EDWARD AREA

The Chair advised the Committee that three requests to speak had been submitted and the Committee **agreed** to hear from Lorna Paterson, from the National Farmers Union (NFU), Caroline Close and Wilson Strachan.

The Chair also advised the Committee that he would be tabling an amended set of recommendations, which were then displayed on the screen for consideration and a paper copy was made available to those parties who had submitted a request to speak.

There had been circulated a report, dated 8 January 2020, by the Director of Infrastructure Services, which updated the Committee on the current position regarding the roads closed as a result of bridge collapses in the King Edward Area, following a localised flooding event which took place on 28 September 2019, where seven bridges had been severely damaged or lost which had resulted in a number of road closures, leading to diversions for road users and a significant impact on the road network in that area.

The report explained that following an assessment of the impact of road closures, one of the bridges, South Mains on the B9105 had been rebuilt as a matter of urgency as it was considered to be a strategic link to the east of Aberdeenshire, however, the six remaining bridges were viewed as beyond repair. Section 3.10 to the report stated that there was currently no funding available within the planned 10 year programme of works for the six bridges in the King Edward area, and as such additional funding would be required to progress the replacement of any, or all those bridges. If the Committee were minded that the replacement would be an appropriate course of action, Officers would be instructed to prepare a business case for consideration by the Officer Capital Plan Group, and if successful that would have to be reported to Full Council.

The report further explained that if the Committee were minded that the long term position of those bridges could not be replaced, it would be necessary to progress a formal stopping up of the road, in accordance with the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, Part VI, clause 68. That process would include a consultation phase which would allow all interested parties to object, and if that happened, the final decision would be made by Scottish Ministers.

The Committee then heard from Lorna Paterson who was in attendance to represent the farming community and to raise key points which were impacting the farming and business communities due to the lack of bridges and road closures. In excess of 40 farmers had been affected by the damaged bridges in the King Edward area and it was highlighted that there was a real fear that those businesses and all other related businesses which fed into the farming industry would be impacted, along with the local economy (those letting out the land and those letting in the land) who had been significantly affected and real concerns had been raised that they would no longer be viable businesses due to lack of access their land. Welfare issues for animals was also highlighted and the community felt that there was a real sense of urgency and there was a need to consider which bridges the farmers believed should take priority. The farming community were seeking clarification on what the plan would be going forward for the bridges in the King Edward area along with sensible communication. When working with infrastructure, farmers had previously been compensated when their businesses had been put under pressure and something needed to happen quickly and NFU had stated that they would be delighted to work with the farming community and the local authority to get things moving.

The Committee then heard from Wilson Strachan, a local farmer and business operator who had lived in the King Edward Area for 50 years, and who had never experienced flooding of that type. The bridge, Mill of Balmaud, was the nearest bridge to his farm, which had been completely washed away, with his farm and house, partly flooded. Mr Strachan highlighted that to get to his land on the other side of that bridge, it would now be an 8 mile round trip which would add an additional 2/3 hours travelling time, per day, which would generate greater fuel costs for the transportation of seed, fertilizer, sprays on roads which were considered unsuitable for large vehicles and that would be even worse at harvest time. It was not just local people that were suffering but other people coming into the area such as emergency services, taking longer to assist the vulnerable people in the community. Businesses, delivery drivers, tradesmen, school routes, carers, district nurses, all of whom were losing valuable time trying to support the community. It was also highlighted that the A947 Turriff to Banff road was a concern, as if there was an accident, traffic was always diverted to those roads and bridges and because nothing had been done since those bridges had been damaged, if a similar event were to happen again there would be a risk of further disruption to the area. It was suggested that cheaper alternatives to replace bridges should be investigated as a priority. It was suggested that there were a number of wind turbines within the area, and the generation of rates from those turbines could be used to support the repair of damaged bridges.

The Committee then heard from Caroline Close who was in attendance as a local resident and school bus driver. Ms Close stated that an unprecedented six bridges had been lost within their area and while it was suggested that the impact was hard to quantify, the local community had come together to define the impact with 136 letters being submitted which all agreed that the bridges were essential to allow the community to stay connected, to allow businesses to stay competitive and for access to emergency services which was a serious concern for everyone. It was also highlighted that emergency services had no alternative traffic management plans in place for the diversion of traffic following accidents and attendance at community halls had reduced. Church, parish and school catchments had been cut in half which would have a negative long-term effect on the school rolls and access to A947 bus services were more difficult, creating social isolation. Significant detours had incurred extra costs, journey times, damage to vehicles, fuel consumption and impact the carbon footprint and there was a disproportionate burden on those who could least afford it. The report stated that the reasons for the closures were purely financial, however the roads authority had a legal obligation to maintain all public roads in their area until a stopping up order is made but they must first satisfy themselves that suitable alternatives exist. The community felt that the alternatives were unsuitable for the volume and combination of two-way heavy goods farm and domestic traffic which they are required to carry. It was suggested that when considering the economic output from King Edward, alternative funding should be sourced to reinstate all the bridges, or at least one in the short term, using modern materials at a lower cost.

The Chair sought clarification from the Head of Service (Roads, Transportation and Waste Services) on the legal issues regarding the stopping up of roads and he confirmed that the Roads Authority has a duty to maintain all public roads and there was a process for changing a category of a road, that can be done through traffic orders. The most drastic one is the stopping up order, which closes that public road and the two main criteria for that was that the road has become dangerous or was no longer required and if no longer required you would have to be clear that there was a suitable alternative. The roads were currently closed on a temporary order, however, if the roads remain closed for longer than 18 months they would have to be stopped up unless the Scottish Government approved an extension to the temporary order.

During discussion, the Committee raised a number of questions:

- (1) How would the service capture all the economic and social aspects of the bridge and road closures at a local level; not replacing the bridges with like for like, thereby

providing cheaper replacement options and how officers would engage with communities, begin consultations and a report back to Committee, addressing all the points that had been raised.

The Committee were advised that initial discussions would be undertaken with Area Managers and their teams who close relationships with community councils and the business communities over the next few weeks. Through those discussions Officers would capture the all the social and economic impacts and the Committee would be provided with an update report at future meeting.

- (2) When considering the cheaper solutions which had been suggested such as pipes, would those have implications for the functioning of the water course in terms of the movement of animals.

The Committee were advised that the service would take everything into account which they had done for the replacement bridge B1905 at South Mains which was not a like for like replacement. That replacement bridge redesign was able to take increased water flow than the previous bridges had been able to take and Officers had consulted with SEPA with regards to what goes in the pipe to ensure aquatic life could grow and fish bypass channels were included. Any design for new bridges would be designed appropriately.

- (3) The cost of climate change would be that it could be predicted that there would be more events of this type, however, the report highlights that that there is simply not enough funding to maintain the current 1380 bridges in the condition they are and as they deteriorate over time. Prioritisation of funding should be considered across the whole road network

The Committee were advised that a Strategic Review of all of the Council's bridges was well underway, which contained some real challenges and that review would be reported to back to Area Committees, in the first instance, as soon as that work was complete and there would be full engagement during that process.

Having considered the content of the report, the Committee **agreed** to support the amended recommendations tabled by the Chair, namely:

- (1) to **note** that the bridges listed below were severely damaged/lost in the flood event of 28 September 2019:-
- C7S/20 Bridge of Gorrachie
 - C9S/10 Bridge of Fortrie
 - C51L/10 Bruntyards
 - U12S/20 Millcroft
 - U12S/30 Mill of Balmaud
 - U17S/30 North Litterty
- (2) to **acknowledge** that the Gorrachie and Bruntyards bridges were confirmed as the top priorities of six;
- (4) to **agree** that representations would be made to both the Scottish Government and the UK Government, seeking additional financial assistance, particularly in the context of the wider challenges that the Council faces with its bridges;
- (5) to **agree** that there would be early engagement with local communities, businesses and with SEPA, to explore other solutions and opportunities to address the loss of those bridges;

- (6) to **agree** that other opportunities for funding would be explored, and
- (7) to **agree** that the Committee would receive a further update report in early course.

Having proposed an amendment, to add a further two additional recommendations, which was not seconded, Councillor Ford requested, as provided in Standing Orders 5.2.4, that the terms of his amendment be recorded in the minute:-

- (1) to **note**, the closure or restrictions on use of bridges was inevitable with the current funding availability; and
- (2) to **agree** that the Council's future approach be that prioritisation for use of available funding for bridge maintenance and keeping bridges open take place across the whole Aberdeenshire road network, to minimise the impact on residents, businesses and travel.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES

13. INVESTING IN ABERDEENSHIRE'S COASTAL COMMUNITIES – SCOTTISH CROWN ESTATE FUNDING 2019-20

There had been circulated a report, dated 12 December 2019, by the Director of Infrastructure Services, which advised the Committee that the Scottish Government had awarded the first tranche of funding from the Scottish Crown Estate (Marine) Coastal Communities Fund to local authorities and Aberdeenshire Council had been awarded £328,314 for 2019-20. The Committee were now required to make decisions on how that funding should be invested in Aberdeenshire's coastal communities.

The report explained that an Officer Working Group had been established to work up proposals for the first tranche of funding and consultations had been undertaken with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, the Senior Leadership Team and Area Managers.

Section 4.4 to 4.6 of the report provided the principles and potential uses of the fund (core criteria); the four Area Committees with coastlines allocations of £12,500 to spend on coastal initiatives that meet the core criteria and the proposed funding projects which could be delivered over the next 12-18 months. It was reported that any funds remaining unallocated or underspent would be held in reserve and carried forward into the next bidding round.

Section 4.3 to the report highlighted that the proposals in the report would be for a one year funding stream, however, it was likely that the Council would receive revenue through that funding stream for many more years to come, and a policy would be developed for its future use in accordance with the Council's Policy Development and Review Framework in Part 4 of the Scheme of Governance and that would be developed over the next six months

Having considered the content of the report, the Committee **agreed**:

- (1) to **approve** the funding allocations and investments in projects within coastal communities, as set out at paragraphs 4.4 to 4.6 to the report;
- (2) to **approve** that unallocated funds from the 2019-20 tranche be carried forward into the next Aberdeenshire bidding round; and
- (3) to **note** that a formal policy for the use of future allocated funds from the Scottish Crown Estate (Coastal Communities Fund) would be developed and consulted on with Area Committees, and then brought back to the Infrastructure Services Committee for consideration within 6 months.

14. CONSULTATION RESPONSE – REPLACEMENT OF EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL FUNDS

With reference to the Minute of the Infrastructure Services Committee meeting of 15 March 2018 (Item 15), where the Committee agreed that the Council should prepare for the introduction of non-EU programmes post brexit, there had been circulated a report dated 27 November 2019, by the Director of Infrastructure Services, which sought the approval of the proposed, Aberdeenshire Council response, to the Scottish Government's consultation on the replacement of European Structural Funds, post EU Exit, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

The report explained that as a member of the European Union (EU), Scotland received allocations of funding for the development of regions, businesses, rural areas and fishing communities from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and those funds would no longer be available after the UK left the EU. As such, the UK and Scottish Government had given consideration, to replacing those programmes with domestic ones.

Appendix 1 to the report provided the proposed response, which advocated that any replacement programmes for European Structural Funds were founded on the principle of a place-based integrated approach to development, with a significant degree of local management and control,

Having considered the content of the report, the Committee **agreed**:

- (1) to **approve** the proposed response to the Scottish Government's consultation on the replacement of European Structural Funds post-EU Exit, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report; and
- (2) to **acknowledge** that there should be a significant emphasis on the replacement of European Structural Funds being user friendly, in support of user groups and voluntary organisations.

15. DEVELOPING EXCELLENCE IN OUR NORTH COAST COMMUNITIES – MID TERM REVIEW

With reference to the Minute of the Infrastructure Services Committee meeting of 17 March 2016 (Item 17), where the Committee had agreed the budget and action plans for the Regeneration Strategy: Developing Excellence in our North Coast Communities from September 2016-2021, there had been circulated a report, dated 13 December 2019, by the Director of Infrastructure Services, which presented a summary of the process and outcomes of a mid-term review of the Regeneration Strategy: Developing Excellence in our North Coast Communities, and which confirmed the forward plans for the remaining plan period.

The report explained that the central review process had been with Ward Members and the Development Partnerships in Banff, Macduff, Fraserburgh and Peterhead and the feedback report on each town had been considered by either the Development Partnership or at a Ward meeting with the key elements of the review (headlines and outcomes) being presented as Section 4.5 to the report.

Having considered the content of the report, the Committee **agreed** to endorse the Mid Term Review as presented in Appendix 1 to the report.

16. PARTNERSHIP REVIEW – NORTH EAST SCOTLAND FISHERIES LOCAL ACTION GROUP

There was circulated, a report dated 27 November 2019, by the Director of Infrastructure Services, which sought to facilitate a review of Aberdeenshire Council's participation in the

North East Scotland, Fisheries Local Action Group (NESFLAG), in line with the Council's Partnership Policy, which required that a short partnership assessment and a short risk assessment must be undertaken before joining a partnership and every two years thereafter.

The report explained that the Council's continued participation in the NESFLAG partnership was important to facilitate the drawdown of European Maritime and Fisheries Funding (EMFF) in Aberdeenshire to deliver Local Development Strategies and the partnership assessment and risk assessment was presented as Appendix 1 and 2 to the report.

Having considered the content of the report, the Committee **agreed**:

- (1) to **endorse** the partnership review of the North East Scotland Fisheries Local Action Group as presented in Appendix 1 and 2 to the report; and
- (2) to **agree** that the Council would continue to participate in the partnership for a further three years.

ITEMS FOR NOTING

- (a) Minute of the Rural Affairs Working Group (RAWG) Meeting of 6 March 2019 (APPENDIX A).
- (b) Minute of the North East Scotland, Agriculture Advisory Group (NESAAG) Meeting of 26 September 2019.

APPENDIX A

MINUTE OF THE RURAL AFFAIRS WORKING GROUP (RAWG) MEETING OF 6 MARCH 2019

RURAL AFFAIRS WORKING GROUP COMMITTEE ROOM 1, WOODHILL HOUSE, ABERDEEN WEDNESDAY, 6TH MARCH, 2018

- Present:** Provost W Howatson (Chair), Councillor M Buchan, V Harper, A Simpson, I Taylor, J Whyte, J Ingram
- Apology:** Councillor S Duncan
- Officers:** D McDonald, Industry Support Executive (Rural and Maritime) and M Thomson, Sustainability and Climate Change Officer, AC
- In attendance of:** F Van Aardt, SLE and E Mathie, Industry Support Executive (Food and Drink (seconded to ONE)).

1. DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Members were asked if they had any interests to declare in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct. No interests were intimated.

2. PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

In making decisions on the undernoted items of business, the Working Group agreed, in terms of Section 149 of the Equality Act, 2010 :-

- (1) to have due regard to the need to:-
 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
 - (c) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- (2) where an Equality Impact Assessment was provided, to consider its contents and take those into account when reaching their decision.

3. MINUTE OF MEETING OF 14TH NOVEMBER, 2018

The Minute of Meeting of 14th November 2018 was circulated and **approved** as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Derek McDonald advised that all matters arising will be covered in the agenda.

5. BULLETIN: SHARED MODERN APPRENTICESHIP IN AGRICULTURE

There had been circulated a report dated 26 February 2019 by the Head of Economic Development providing an update on the Shared Modern Apprenticeship (MA) in Agriculture pilot project. In 2017 Opportunity North East (ONE) initiated discussions with SRUC (Scotland's Rural College) to explore ways in which the number of MAs in agriculture in NE Scotland could be boosted. The concept of a Shared Apprenticeship emerged, in which several farm businesses 'share' an apprentice over the duration of the apprenticeship term. Approval was obtained from the ONE board in early 2018 for a significant financial investment to initiate and be lead funder of a 3 year Shared Modern Apprenticeship in Agriculture programme, subject to financial contributions coming forward from other sponsors and satisfactory progress in putting the fine details of the project together. The Shared MA was launched in summer 2018 and is unique to NE Scotland. The ultimate aim is to develop the Shared MA into a self-financing project.

All six places on the first year of the programme have been filled and early feedback from apprentices and hosts has been positive. Members will be kept informed on future progress.

6. BULLETIN: PROGRESS UPDATE ON RINGLINK PRE-APPRENTICESHIP

There had been circulated a report dated 26 February 2019 by the Head of Economic Development which provided a progress update on the Ringlink Pre-apprenticeship programme (formerly Ringlink Internship), an initiative to provide a paid, structured introduction to the land-based sector for new entrants – a project which Aberdeenshire Council had played a key role in setting up and which provided a launch pad for trainees to progress to a full Modern Apprenticeship (of Shared MA – see item 5).

In early 2018 Ringlink secured over £30,000 from Scottish Government to set up a winter intake programme (starting in January 2019) over and above the usual summer intake, when trainees start in June. As is the norm, the winter trainees securing a place started with a three-week induction training programme at Craibstone co-delivered by SRUC and Ringlink. A recurring theme in the project has been the difficulty in securing mentor/employers with the requisite capacity and commitment to provide a quality learning experience for trainees and the arrangements for the winter intake have proved to be every bit as challenging as for the summer intake.

In December 2018, Scottish Government announced a further contribution of £100,000 to enable the Pre-Apprenticeship model to be extended beyond the NE to the rest of Scotland. The additional funding will cover an initial cohort of 37 trainee (summer) starts in 2019/20 and will be delivered by Tarff Valley, Borders, and Highland Machinery Rings who will be working closely with and guided by Ringlink with assistance from Skills Development Scotland and LANTRA. As the Ringlink model is familiar to many the demand for places from prospective trainees is expected to be strong. The main challenge is expected to lie in finding and training sufficient numbers of capable mentor/employers located within reasonable travelling distance of the homes of the trainees.

Members welcomed the continuing and exemplary commitment of Ringlink in attracting and training new entrants to the land-based sector and asked whether Gail Robertson (Group Operations Manager, Ringlink) could be invited to a future meeting of the Group. Derek McDonald advised that Gail's workload has expanded considerably due to the national roll-out of the pre-apprenticeship project but would, as requested, be invited. Members went on to ask whether information was available from colleagues in Education on the extent of positive career destinations for Aberdeenshire school-leavers within the land-based sector and whether there were differences between north and south Aberdeenshire

Action point 1: Derek McDonald to seek school-leaver data from E&CS on positive destinations within the land-based sector.

7. BULLETIN: IMPLICATIONS OF A NO-DEAL BREXIT FOR FOOD EXPORT HEALTH CERTIFICATION

There had been circulated a bulletin dated 26 February 2019 by the Head of Economic Development which provided an overview of some of the challenges facing the council's Protective Services team and local food exporters in the event of a 'no-deal' Brexit. Aberdeenshire Council Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) are active members of the Scottish Food Enforcement Liaison Committee Brexit Working Group which is striving to ensure food exporters can continue to trade as freely as possible despite a very significant increase in regulatory compliance measures. Other Working Group participants include Scottish Government, Food Standards Scotland, DEFRA and other local authority colleagues.

Under 'no-deal' the UK will leave the single market and become (to the EU) a 'third country' post-Brexit. Export tariffs will apply. UK food companies exporting to the EU will require Export Health Certificates (EHCs) to accompany consignments – at the present time EHCs are not required for the EU; accordingly there is no charge to businesses. This change is likely to have huge cost implications for food businesses continuing to export to the EU and also for local authority EHO resources, particularly for seafood exports (meat/animal product food inspection is carried out by veterinarians from Food Standards Scotland).

Aberdeenshire Council has a small pool of experienced and qualified EHO staff who already issue over 1000 EHCs per annum for seafood consignments to non-EU countries; eg Japan, Korea, China, USA). This is a charged service – around £80 per EHC. Current demand is already high (particularly in Peterhead and Fraserburgh, and especially for live shellfish) and so there is limited capacity to absorb higher workload levels. Research has been undertaken to predict the future flow of food consignments to the EU. The indications are that the increase in the number of EHCs required will be very significant, with major implications for local authorities and particularly for exporters unaccustomed to the process – and the associated cost of obtaining multiple EHCs.

8. PRESENTATION BY FIONA VAN AARDT, NE REGIONAL SUPPORT OFFICER, SCOTTISH LAND & ESTATES

Scottish Land and Estates (SLE) is a membership organisation which strives to demonstrate, promote and represent the contribution its 1800 rural business members make on farms, estates and rural businesses across Scotland. SLE's vision is for the true value and contribution of rural land-based businesses to be properly recognised and valued publicly and politically. Members range from large private estates to small rural enterprises. A small but highly active SLE policy team engages closely with government and is complemented by a network of regional Support Officers which deliver members services and advice. Based in Aberlour, Fiona Van Aardt is the NE Scotland Regional Support Officer and she went on to cite individual case studies of active members and the work they do in underpinning and catalysing the rural economy. For example Leys Estate near Banchory helps to sustain 117 separate businesses. SLE provides advice and guidance to members on business diversification and value-add opportunities.

SLE has an excellent track record in working constructively over many years with rural economic development partners and bodies in NE Scotland, including Aberdeenshire Council. Ms Van Aardt outlined future opportunities for SLE collaboration with the council and others, for example in tourism, expansion of the food & drink sector and in attracting major events to NE Scotland. Communication with members is a key consideration for SLE. A number of approaches are used, including an e-newsletter, the website and social media, blogs, 'walks and talks' and events to help share best practice and new ideas. Some current 'hot topics' were aired, including the forthcoming energy efficiency regulations for rural property, rural digital connectivity and the need for an enabling environment in respect of rural planning to encourage investment.

Ms Van Aardt concluded her presentation by kindly inviting RAWG to a local estate for a forthcoming meeting of the Group to gain a closer appreciation of how SLE connect beneficially with rural communities and enterprises and also offered to provide regular information and updates to the group. The Chair thanked Ms Van Aardt for her excellent presentation and kind offer.

Action point 2: Derek McDonald to liase with Ms Van Aardt to arrange site visit to SLE member estate for future meeting of RAWG.

9. PRESENTATION BY ELIZABETH MATHIE, ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL (SECONDED TO ONE), ONE AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND DRINK

Elizabeth Mathie has for over ten years been Aberdeenshire Council's Industry Support Executive (Food and Drink) and was seconded 3 years ago to Opportunity North East (ONE) to take up the position of Project Manager within the ONE Food, Drink & Agriculture team (led by Director Peter Cook). Prior to joining the council, Ms Mathie worked in the private sector with Macphie's of Glenbervie. Ms Mathie is very highly regarded by the Scottish food industry and is perhaps best known for running Grampian Food Forum for over ten years.

In 2020, the North East Scotland Food & Drink Awards will have been running for 30 years. The Food & Drink Network provides its 600 industry members with details of programmes and events (8 main events attended by 507 delegates from 198 organisations) to help them grow their businesses, access finance and advice and how to get their products in front of buyers, hoteliers and chefs and provide connections to Support for Aberdeenshire Business (SAB) and Environmental Health. In the 2018 awards, there were over 13 categories to enter, with 44 manufacturers entering (12 for the first time). Five years ago, a business survey revealed an increase in turnover by over £2 million for food and drink businesses assisted by the Network.

Details were provided of the ONE team and the Business Growth Programme and the presentation concluded with a summary of the wide range of projects undertaken on behalf of the sector by ONE, including the Shared Modern Apprenticeship, dairy industry work, food tourism, the Food Hub and initiatives for the seafood processing sector. Members' questions covered Brexit-related issues, investment finance and food exports.

The Chair thanked Ms Mathie for her comprehensive presentation.

10. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

No issues were raised.

11. DATES OF 2019 MEETINGS:

Members **agreed** they would welcome a site visit to a SLE member at the next meeting.

APPENDIX B

MINUTE OF THE NORTH EAST SCOTLAND, AGRICULTURE ADVISORY GROUP (NESAAG) MEETING OF 26 SEPTEMBER 2019

NORTH EAST SCOTLAND AGRICULTURE ADVISORY GROUP

COMMITTEE ROOM 5, WOODHILL HOUSE, ABERDEEN

WEDNESDAY, 25 SEPTEMBER, 2019

Present: **Aberdeenshire Council** – Provost W Howatson (Chair), Councillors S Duncan, J Hutchison, J Ingram, D Robertson, I Taylor and J Whyte.
Aberdeen City Council – Councillor N MacGregor
Angus Council - Councillors K Braes and B Myles.
James Hutton Institute – Prof K Thomson.
LANTRA – L Barron-Majerik
NFUS - A Connon and A Simpson
RSPB Scotland – M Prosdocihi
SAC Consulting – D Ross
SAOS – J Booth
Scottish Enterprise – G Ford and S Harrison
Scottish Forestry – J Watt
Scottish Government – J Stuart
Scottish Land & Estates – D Fyffe
Scottish Pig Producers – A McGowan
SRUC –C Daniels

Apologies: **Aberdeen City Council** – Councillors B Crockett and A MacKenzie.
Angus Council – Councillors C Brown and A MacMillan Douglas
Moray Council – Councillors D Bremner and T Eagle
ANM Group Ltd – G Rogerson
Visit Scotland - J Robinson

In Attendance: Peter Cook, ONE

Officers: D McDonald, Industry Support Executive ED & PS (Aberdeenshire Council)
M Kennie, Members' Support Administrator, (Aberdeenshire Council)
J McRobbie, Committee Officer (Aberdeenshire Council)

1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair welcomed everyone present to the meeting. Members were asked if they had interests to declare. No declarations of interest were intimated.

2. PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

In taking decisions on the undernoted items of business, the Partnership **agreed**, in terms of Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010:-

- (1) to have due regard to the need to:-
 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;

- (b) advance equality and opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and
 - (c) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- (2) to consider, where an equality impact assessment had been provided, its contents and to take those into consideration when reaching a decision.

3. MINUTE OF MEETING OF 24 APRIL, 2019

There had been circulated and was **approved** as a correct record, the Minute of Meeting of 24 April, 2019.

4. MATTERS ARISING

There had been circulated a report by Industry Support Executive, Aberdeenshire Council providing an update on actions taken since the last meeting on 24 April, 2019.

The Partnership heard further that in respect of the proposed tour of the James Hutton Institute (Item 6), that the November meeting would be held at the Institute.

In respect of Item 8 of the April 2019 meeting, it was highlighted that Steve Harrison, Project Manager, Scottish Enterprise, was in attendance to give a presentation on Technology Enabled Farming.

5. PRESENTATION: LANTRA: A USER'S GUIDE - LIZ BARRON-MAJERIK, SCOTLAND DIRECTOR, LANTRA

On behalf of the Partnership, the Chair welcomed Liz Barron-Majerik, Scotland Director of LANTRA to the meeting.

The Partnership heard from Ms Barron-Majerik of origins of the organisation, established to provide expert training and qualifications for land-based industries, as a one-stop shop to signpost and access a network of approved training providers, from basic training to gaining a full qualification.

There was discussion of the comparisons with providers elsewhere in the UK; the elements which might be considered to make LANTRAS the provider of choice; the funding of the organisation and its working with other training providers to widen the options available to those employed in land-based industries; the evolution of, and continuing support for, modern apprenticeships; consideration of a new programme, the "pre-apprenticeship"; the need to skill up a new workforce for the challenges of 2020 when it was estimated that 33,500 additional workers would be required; the potential requirements to alter land use practices to meet the changing demands and expectations; and the range of land use activities for which a developed career path was being developed.

The Chair, on behalf of the Partnership, thanked Ms Barron-Majerik for a very detailed and informative presentation.

Action point 1: D McDonald to circulate presentation slides

6.UPDATE: TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED FARMING AND THE RURAL ECONOMY IN SCOTLAND BY STEVE HARRISON, PROJECT MANAGER, SCOTTISH ENTERPRISE

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of 24 April, 2019 (Item 8), the Chair, on behalf of the Partnership, welcomed Steve Harrison, Project Manager, Scottish Enterprise back to the meeting to provide an update on technology enabled farming and the rural economy.

Mr Harrison spoke of the joint initiatives which were being considered, including the development of a funding bid to the Scottish Government, to address the challenges of operating in an increasingly digital world, within a geography where technology may not be accessible, easy to implement, or specifically shaped to be of benefit to the users.

Many areas would require to be considered, including increasing awareness of the costs of investment; the needs of the sellers; understanding both what was required and how to achieve it; time to choose, access, and implement any technological solution; and access to finance to fund any resource requirements. Any solutions would need to be developed in consultation with the users, and input from a range of stakeholders was invited.

Any rural digital economy was wider than land-use activities and would encompass other areas such as health, tourism, food and drink providers and retailers, and there was a need to lead the technology providers, not struggle with software recommendations from sellers who may not fully understand what was required; to aid in this, data would continue to be collected. In addition, progress would be pursued in terms of the infrastructure provision challenges in the north east of Scotland.

There was discussion of the costs; the time concerns over trying to choose, learn, and implement new technology, especially in land-use activities; the range of data currently available and its ownership in any future developments; learning points which might be determined from the use of drones, not necessarily fully understood at the original point of purchase, and remaining a “novelty” as opposed to a working tool.

The Partnership, noting the call for pathfinders to be involved in the further discussion of the proposals, **agreed:**

- (1) to thank Mr Harrison for an interesting and informative update; and
- (2) that all interested pathfinders contact Scottish Enterprise to support the stakeholder involvement.

Action point 2: Derek McDonald to circulate the presentation slides;

Action Point 3: Interested stakeholders/ pathfinders contact with Steve Harrison to progress this matter.

7. PRESENTATION: ONE – PETER COOK

The Chair, on behalf of the Partnership, welcomed Mr Peter Cook, Director of Food, Drink and Agriculture, ONE (Opportunity North East) to the meeting which thereafter heard about ONE’s evolution as an instrument promoting the economy of North East Scotland and in particular of the current priority, and future work, regarding land-based industries. These included the construction of a Bio-Hub at Foresterhill, Aberdeen and a Food Hub, being developed as part of the Aberdeen City Region Deal, which would impact on consideration of the diversification of the food market, aimed to counter the decline in market share evidences since its peak in 2015. Support continued to be given to the set up and nurturing of new SME businesses, often labour intensive with a low value primary process focus, and engagement with the industries themselves would continue to be crucial in the delivery of real assistance.

Mr Cook spoke of the various funding options, including, at present LEADER resources, which could be relevant and of the demonstrated success of mentoring and highlighted the advent of developing sensor technology which might also be applied both to some of the processes in land based activities and those relating to food and drink.

The focal point for all activities, physical constructions or otherwise, for the Food Hub was to bring research and product expertise together and a Director had recently been appointed to develop the project.

There was discussion of the falling market share of meat production, in the context of needing to rebut high profile campaigns boosting vegetarian or vegan food choices as the most sustainable for the planet, without taking into context the beef production in a cool, northern European grassland dynamic, or the unsuitability of hill farming geography for arable production; and the carbon footprint, and potential quality concerns, of importing from other countries versus the promotion of more local, sustainable and sometimes seasonable sources.

The Partnership **agreed:-**

- (1) that a specific presentation on the developing Food Hub be requested; and
- (2) to thank Mr Cook for an interesting and informative presentation.

Action Point 4: Director of Food Hub to be invited to present to a future partnership meeting.

8. BULLETIN: DIMBLEBY REVIEW OF UK FOOD & DRINKS SECTOR

There had been circulated a report dated 18 September, 2019 by the Director of Infrastructure Services, Aberdeenshire Council, providing an update on the Dimbleby Review of UK Food and Drinks Sector, the first in 75 years and which may lead to the development of a national food strategy.

The Review was very wide ranging and was to consider (a) the delivery of safe, healthy, affordable food, regardless of where people live, or how much they earn; (b) the sector's robustness in the face of future shocks; (c) how to restore and enhance the natural environment for the next generation; (d) the sector's foundations on a resilient and sustainable agriculture sector; (e) its contribution to our urban and rural economies, delivering well-paid jobs and supporting innovative producers and manufacturers; and (f) whether it could be undertaken in an efficient and cost-effective way.

Noting that the Review was likely strongly influence the shape of structural fund support for food and drink in the UK post-Brexit, with a call for evidence anticipate later in 2019, and the reports which had already been done in North East Scotland which could assist in this process; the Partnership **agreed:-**

- (1) that when evidence is sought, the Partnership respond directly;
- (2) that a member of the Review team be invited to present to a future meeting of the Partnership; and
- (3) to note, in all other respects, the terms of the report.

Action Point 5: invite a review team member to an appropriate meeting of the Partnership.

9. BULLETIN: EU:MERCOSUR TRADE AGREEMENT

There had been circulated a report dated 18 September, 2019, by the Director of Infrastructure Services, Aberdeenshire Council, providing information regarding the signing, on 28 June 2019 of a revised EU trade agreement with Mercosur, which was the largest deal ever struck in tariff reduction terms, with some estimates anticipating a reduction in EU export duty to Mercosur of around €4bn per annum.. It was highlighted that whilst Agricultural produce was identified as a key component when negotiations began around 20 years ago, and access on competitive terms to EU markets for beef, poultry, sugar, coffee, fruit, orange juice and ethanol has been eagerly anticipated by Mercosur producers, serious concerns have been expressed on the implication for beef market stability and the potential impact on already marginal financial margins.

It was **agreed** to note the information contained in the report.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mrs Ford, Scottish Enterprise, spoke of a piece of engagement work, into which participation was invited, looking at the positive impacts which access to funds under the LEADER project had fostered in North East Scotland, and invited input from any who had experienced the system as an enabling process.

The Partnership **agreed** welcoming the study, to encourage the sharing of experiences to support the survey.

No other business was raised.

12. DATE OF FUTURE MEETING

It was **noted** that the next meeting would be held on Wednesday 27th November, 2019, meeting at the James Hutton Institute at 10.00 a.m.

