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Loch Ness centre plans treads water

A DECISION by planners on whether a multi-million pound visitor centre will be given the go ahead on the shores of Loch Ness has been deferred for a site visit.

And it is hoped a second monster project for the area will also be given the once over by planners and councillors at the same time.

Plans for the state-of-the art Jacobite Discovery Project - submitted by Jacobite Cruises - were put before a Highland Council planning committee on Tuesday.

The plans for the £2.8 million development were recommended for approval, but the committee has asked that a site visit takes place.

The project has been in the pipeline since 2009. Jacobite Cruises commissioned Cameron Webster Architects to present an "iconic, sustainable design that is sympathetic to its surroundings".

Rod Michie, director of Jacobite Cruises, said: "We are obviously disappointed with Tuesday's decision. We have been working with a team of architects and specialists to develop this proposal for a high quality tourist facility on the shores of Loch Ness.

"The Jacobite Discovery Project will greatly enhance the area's tourism offer whilst being a major boost to the local economy. We remain keen to start work on the project as early as possible.

"It will provide excellent, high quality visitor facilities located along Scotland's most renowned stretch of water."

The project will include a visitor centre, ticket office and tourist facility. It will also act as new headquarters for the company's cruise business, which now welcomes around 150,000 customers a year.

Inverness-based GH Johnston has led the Jacobite Discovery Project through the planning process, the masterplan design and stakeholder meetings.

Loch Ness Centre and Exhibition at Drumnadrochit has also applied to Highland Council for a £2 million expansion of its site.

It is expected planners will also carry out a site visit with councillors and for a decision on both applications to be made at a special meeting before members next meet on March 1.