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New Nessie visitor centres go head to head

Jacobite Cruises are up against Loch Ness Exhibition Centre in a bid to attract more visitors to the famous Highland shores.

A monster battle for Loch Ness tourists is set to get under way in the Highlands.

Two rival businesses only yards apart are going head to head in a bid to attract visitors to new proposed tourist centres on the banks of the most famous loch in the world.

Jacobite Cruises want to build a £2.3m harbour attraction and councillors on Tuesday agreed to undertake a site visit to the location.

Meanwhile, the nearby Loch Ness Exhibition Centre at Drumnadrochit have £2m proposals to develop its existing waterside facilities. Their plans, next to the famous Clansman Hotel, would incorporate jetties for small boats and canoes and a shop. It will come before councillors for consideration in March.

The owners, the Bremnar family, have objected to the Jacobite proposal and want Highland Council to consider both plans together.

Robbie Bremnar said: "We think that they should be seen at the same time. I think that is common sense. It would be fairer for both parties to have parity, given the scale of the developments and the impact on the tourism industry here."

Loch Ness cruise operator Jacobite Cruises announced plans last year for a new harbour, car park and visitor facilities on land each side of the loch side A82 Inverness-Fort William road at Brackla. The venture promises to double the company's 12-strong full-time Brackla workforce. It would cover 4.4 acres and incorporate 81 car parking spaces.

Meanwhile, the Loch Ness Exhibition Centre is seeking approval for enhanced access, retail and catering facilities and parking. The plans include the Loch Ness and Caledonian Canal canoe trail and promise to create up to 40 peak season jobs.

The site to be developed by the centre is currently leased to Jacobite Cruises, which has announced its intention to vacate it for its new development.

Rod Michie, director of Jacobite Cruises, said: "We are obviously disappointed with the 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."