

The Highland Council

Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee 19 August 2015

Agenda Item	18
Report No	PDI/56/15

Local Food Network – Progress Report

Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure

SUMMARY

This report provides an update on progress being made towards establishing a Highland Local Food and Drink Network. The Committee is invited to consider the report and to:

- (i) note the progress being made; and
- (ii) agree continued support for the social media platforms and web site during their first year as set out within sections 5.0 and 6.0 of the report.

1. Introduction and background

1.1 This is the second phase of a project jointly funded by Highland Council and the Think Local Community Food Fund to develop an industry-led Highland Food and Drink Network that is inclusive, relevant, and adds profitability to Highland stakeholders. Phase 1 involved extensive consultation with the food and drink sector throughout the region to help identify industry needs and aspirations in terms of building a network that was fit for purpose in such a large and diverse area. One of the main priorities the consultation identified was the need to address the lack of effective communication between producers and providers, and as a measure to improve these linkages Highland Council launched an on-line network in May 2014 via social media sites Facebook and Twitter. The full Phase 1 report is available for information on the Committee bulletin.

1.2 While the social media sites have been well used, the proposal for the second phase of the project was to further build on the momentum generated and continue to develop the network. The main aims of this second phase were to:

- facilitate wider engagement in the network,
- further improve communication links within the sector,
- further promote businesses involved in local food and drink, and
- demonstrate the potential economic advantages of using local food and drink.

1.3 The project outcomes are described below.

2. Outcome 1 - www.highlandlocalfoodanddrink.co.uk

2.1 An interactive website <http://www.highlandlocalfoodanddrink.co.uk> has been developed to enable better communication and promotion within the food and drink sector; and crucially to provide a map-based listings of local food and drink producers and suppliers in the region. The website acts as a window for producers and local food and drink users to promote their businesses to a wider audience.

- 2.2 The website was launched at the Lunch and Learn events (described below), and for those involved in the sector it is free to register and provides the opportunity for businesses to showcase their connection with local produce.
- 2.3 To date, there are approximately 150 businesses currently registered and the site gets an average of 25 hits per day, with the most popular pages being “About us” and the blog indicating that there is a lot of interest from the industry, and from visitors looking for food and drink related businesses. It has a good Google ranking, with the most searched for feature being “food producers”.

3. Outcome 2 – Lunch & Learn Events

3.1 Seven “Lunch and Learn” events were held in February and March 2015 at the following locations throughout the Highlands:

- Duisdale House Hotel, Sleat, Skye
- Torridon Inn, Wester Ross
- Eilean Dubh Restaurant, Fortrose
- Kingsmills Hotel, Inverness
- MacKays Hotel, Wick
- The Crannog Restaurant, Fort William
- The Cairngorm Hotel, Aviemore

3.2 The events were advertised through promoted posts on social media and via Highland Council press releases. They were also promoted via the host venues and partner organisations, including Lochaber Chamber of Commerce, Visit Wester Ross, Visit Cairngorms, UniqueNess, Destination Skye and Lochalsh. Highland Council Ward Managers and Business Gateway were also invited to promote the events.

3.3 The table below shows that a total of 130 food and drink businesses attended the events, rather than the predicted 96. As the events were aimed predominantly at the hospitality trade, it was unsurprising that 50% of participants were from hotels, B&Bs and guesthouses. The event in Fort William was oversubscribed, whilst the lowest turnout was at the Black Isle event. The Skye event had a lower number of participants than expected due to heavy snowfall on the day.

Lunch & Learn Location	Number of Participants by Business type								
	Hotel/ B&B	Outdoor Activity	Other Caterer	Producer	Distributor	Shop/ cafe	Restaurant	Other	TOTAL
Aviemore	10	2	1	1	0	4	0	3	21
Fort William	9	3	0	3	2	4	4	3	28
Skye	9	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	13
Fortrose	5	0	0	3	0	1	1	2	12
Inverness	13	0	0	3	0	0	3	3	22
Wick	12	0	1	2	1	1	0	2	19
Torridon	8	0	4	2	0	0	0	1	15
TOTAL	66	5	6	15	3	13	8	14	130

3.5 Each event comprised a morning workshop looking at menu composition, pricing and the economic implications of substitution and the use of seasonal local produce. The Highland Local Food and Drink website was also introduced with a tutorial on how to register and upload information. Over lunch the chef and/or

owner of the host venue gave a talk on their experiences of using local produce and presented a locally themed lunch showcasing local seasonal produce.

- 3.6 In the afternoon participants took part in an IT workshop building on the success of the recently established Highland Food Network social media platforms. The main focus of this workshop was the use of Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn as business tools and not just communication platforms. After each event, participants were sent electronic copies of the menu spreadsheets used in the presentations and a social media workbook. A Youtube video on “how to register” on the website was also circulated.
- 3.7 Participants were invited to complete a very simple feedback form commenting on what actions they might take as a result of the workshop. Many participants said that they were going to use the menu-costing spreadsheets to plan better for profit. Many found the discussion on sourcing local food useful and said they were going to follow up on new business contacts. Participants said they were very inspired by the social media tools and had acquired new knowledge; many said the presentation included a lot of great tips to improve their social media profile, and said they were now less cautious of using social media and would use it to advertise and pursue business. The most enthusiastic comments were on the new website and people left motivated to make better use of social media. The events themselves were valued for networking and there was also good feedback on the post event material, which people said they would use at home to improve their social media skills and input their own figures into the active spreadsheets.

4. Outcome 3 – Learning videos

- 4.1 The final project outcome was the production of a series of learning videos capturing the core messages from the workshops. These were filmed at the Torridon Inn and are titled:
- Where can I get local produce?
 - Could breakfast make you more profit?
 - Why use local food in my menu?
 - Social media platforms for food and drink businesses, and
 - Social media strategy for food and drink businesses.
- 4.2 These short web based films are now posted on the website (<http://www.highlandlocalfoodanddrink.co.uk>) and promoted through facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/HighlandLocalFoodandDrink>). They will reach a much wider audience than those participants that were able to attend the events themselves and will have a much longer shelf life – enabling the celebration and promotion of food and drink throughout the year and beyond.

5. The Future

- 5.1 The Highland Local Food and Drink facebook page currently has over 700 followers and is managed in-house by Highland Council. The website is to be promoted by linking to other sites (Scotland Food and Drink, Experiencing Scotland, DMOs) as the more subscribers that are registered the better its functionality. The website will continue to be managed (maintenance, development, regular blogs and linking with Facebook) over the next year by Tuminds Social Media (funded by HC) with a view to making it sustainable via subscriptions after 1

year. This will not only be a tangible future asset for all involved in food and drink and tourism in the Highlands, but is a vital step towards enabling the online network to be managed by local “food champions” in the longer term as regular users of the sites are to be invited to upload blogs and articles.

6. Resource implications

- 6.1 Initial funding for 1 year (£2 - £3K) to support the maintenance of the Highland food and drink website and social media platforms (in-house) with a view to the web site being self financing in year 2. Funding is available from within the Development and Infrastructure revenue budget 2015/16.

7. Fit with the Single Outcome Agreement

- 7.1 The work helps the Council deliver SOA objectives supporting the rural economy and the environment.

8. Equality, Climate Change/Carbon Clever and rural implications

- 8.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report. Increased consumption of food grown locally should help reduce food miles and therefore carbon emissions. Supporting the consumption and availability of locally grown food will help support the rural economy.

9. Legal, risk and Gaelic implications

- 9.1 There are no legal, risk or Gaelic implications arising from this report.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is invited to consider the report and to:

- (i) note the progress being made; and
- (ii) agree continued support for the social media platforms and web site during their first year as set out within sections 5.0 and 6.0 of the report.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

Date: 3 August 2015

Author: George Hamilton, Head of Development and Infrastructure

Background papers:

1. Establishing a Highland Food Network: A Report for Think Local Community Food Fund. Rural Analysis Associated: April 2014.