

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

**CITY OF INVERNESS AREA COMMITTEE –  
1st SEPTEMBER 2016**

Agenda Item	11
Report No	CIA/39/16

**Inverness & Loch Ness Tourism BID: Progress Report**

**Joint Report by Inverness City Area Manager and Tourism BID Chief Executive**

**Summary:** Inverness & Loch Ness Tourism BID was established following the successful ballot result on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2014. This report describes the progress for the period September 2015 – September 2016 with particular reference to the project activity undertaken.

The Tourism BID Business Plan identifies six areas under which it is committed to delivering a number of key objectives:

- The better marketing & promotion of the area
- Growing the value of conferences & business tourism to the area
- Improving with partners, access & infrastructure, particularly around Loch Ness
- Providing business development opportunities for members
- Supporting new and sustainable events & festivals
- Being a voice for the local tourism industry on matters of local and national concern

Outlined below is a summary of the progress made with key activities of these objectives over the past year.

**1. Marketing & Promotion**

- 1.1 The destination website [www.visitinvernesslochness.com](http://www.visitinvernesslochness.com) continues to be developed and grow. Key developments include deeper content, translation of the website in to native German and French, and the full integration of the 'Whats On Highlands' event calendar in to the site. The site had almost 26K visits in July 2016. By comparison the highest figure in 2015 was 18K in August
- 1.2 Continued investment in social media: The visitor Facebook page has now in excess of 31K likes, the Twitter following continues to grow with over 1,100 followers and other channels such as Instagram and blogging are an increasingly important part of VisitInvernessLochNess's (VILN) overall social media activity

- 1.3 Attendance at VisitScotland EXPO 2016: VILN once again attended EXPO in April. This year though as a result of support from VisitBritain, VILN had a much larger presence and were able to offer space on the stand to member businesses at a reduced rate. Six businesses took up the offer
- 1.4 Production once again of a tear off 'See & Do' map (updated to include hotels with restaurants) for accommodation providers. 100,000 printed, these remain extremely popular with members businesses and visitors

### **Marketing & Promotion in partnership with VisitBritain**

In January 2015 the then Sec.to the Treasury, Danny Alexander, secured £2M for the international marketing of Loch Ness and Inverness over a four year period, to be led by VisitBritain working in partnership with VisitInvernessLochNess and VisitScotland. After a period of planning, the initial activity started in September 2015 focusing on the key international markets of France, Netherlands and the US and on the shoulder/winter months. Key activities to date have included:

- 1.6 Attendance by VILN at Travel Trade Events: Destination Britain ( North America), Mexico, September 2015, Meet the French Travel Trade, Paris January 2016, UKInbound, Aviemore, February 2016, Explore GB , Liverpool, March 2016, ITB Berlin, March 2016, VisitBritain PR VIBE, March 2016
- 1.7 Fam trips for Media/Bloggers/Trade: Eleven visits to the area by groups from France, Netherlands and the US, all facilitated by VILN and including a one week long visit by Colleen Kelly, host of a major family travel show in the US.
- 1.8 Creative online campaign ( 'Tips for Monster Hunting') which resulted in 116K visits to the Loch Ness page on the VisitBritain website and reached 14M unique users
- 1.9 Production of media guide for the Inverness and Loch Ness area, distributed world wide
- 1.10 Translation of VILN website into native German and French

## **2. Conferences and Business Tourism**

- 2.1 Production of Business Tourism Directory for Inverness and Loch Ness. The directory gives an overview of the area, the facilities available including hotels, event venues, support services and how VILN can support potential event and conference organisers considering coming to the area
- 2.2 Attendance by VILN at IMEX Las Vegas in October 2015, IMEX Barcelona, November 2015, and IMEX Frankfurt April 2016
- 2.3 Helped to facilitate a number of conferences to come to Inverness, specifically the Golf Architects Conference (to take place October 2016) and the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> International Symposium of Energy Challenges & Mechanics (July and August 2016)

## **3. Access & Infrastructure**

- 3.1 South Loch Ness laybys: In partnership with the Forestry Commission, the past year has seen a further two laybys along the B852 on South Loch Ness opened up and made more accessible and attractive for visitors and locals alike. Completed in partnership with the Forestry Commission
- 3.2 South Loch Ness Trail development from Glendoe works entrance to Loch Tarff: Large funding application to the SSE Sustainable Development Fund was rejected earlier this year. However, following the go ahead for Stronlairst wind farm (a condition of which is that SSE construct trail up to the Glendoe works entrance) VILN will re-apply to the fund in autumn 2016, having secured £60K from the Highland Council Capital Discretionary Fund plus contribution of £19K from VILN towards the project. If successful, when completed, the project will link up with the Great Glen Way on the north side and thus create a 360 degree trail around Loch Ness of approximately 68 miles offering huge opportunities for events or spending a week's walking holiday around Loch Ness.
- 3.3 South Loch Ness Trail development at Dores: This project to take 3km of the trail 'off road' was due to be implemented early in 2016, but delays caused by LEADER not being open for funding applications until recently, meant that the project has been reviewed and it is now expected that it will go ahead at a reduced scale in September 2016
- 3.4 Loch Ness Scenic Routes project: In March 2016 VILN commissioned consultants to consider the potential of a number of locations around Loch Ness (and any others that consultation process suggested) as locations at which there could be some form of viewpoint or 'other intervention in the landscape' that will not only enhance the visitor experience of the area but also become a reason in its own right to visit the location. The cost of the study was met with contribution from Highland Council (£1K), HIE (£2K) and VILN (3K). Completed in July the report is presently being considered by VILN and public sector partners. Recommendations include investigating detailed options for an all ability overlook at the Falls of Foyers.

## **4. Business Development**

- 4.1 World Host: Over the past 12 months VILN has continued to offer members the opportunity to undertake the World Host Customer Training programme at a subsidised rate. A total of 22 workshops have been delivered and 240 people have completed the training equating to 60 businesses. As a result, VILN expect Inverness & Loch Ness to achieve World Host Destination status in autumn 2016
- 4.2 Digital Tourism Scotland Programme: In February 2016 VILN were commissioned to support HIE in delivery of the programme which aims to raise the digital skills and abilities of tourism businesses. Working in partnership with the Programme Manager and HIE, VILN have undertaken a survey of tourism businesses in the area to identify the present levels of digital skills and in October 2016 a programme of workshops will be rolled out to the industry

## **5. Events & Festivals**

- 5.1 Knitfest: Over the past 7 months VILN have been instrumental in the management of the first knitting festival in Inverness which will take place between the 29th September – 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2016. An innovative festival for the international crafting community it is inspired by the hugely successful Danish Strikkefestival
- 5.2 The Loch Ness Etape: VILN was a support sponsor of the event in 2016 and is committed to sponsorship again in 2017
- 5.3 The World Canal Conference: VILN is sponsoring the Tourism Award at the conference in September 2016. The award is the 'The Pioneer Award' and '*acknowledges businesses and organisations that are paving the way in growing tourism or creating sustainable income streams linked to the world's canals*'
- 5.4 The Social Travel Summit 2016: Brought to Inverness by VisitBritain and iambassador, the world's leading professional travel influencer network, the conference will bring together leading online travel influencers and travel industry decision-makers from around the world. The conference takes place between the 19<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup> September and VILN have worked closely with iambassador to facilitate and organise the event

## **6. Advocacy**

- 6.1 Over the past year VILN has acted as a voice for the local tourism industry on issues of concern to them. To ensure that all members are aware of this opportunity, VILN has encouraged comment through a number of communication channels such as networking events, monthly member newsletters and social media.

## 7. Resource Implications

- 7.1 There are no resource implications directly arising from this report. The Council contributed £10,000 towards VILN in the year 2015/2016 from the Development & Infrastructure Service's Tourism Development Budget and has committed the same sum for the financial year 2016/2017. The Council also contributed £4.5K from the Major Events Fund towards the cost of hosting Knitfest and £10K from the Ward 13 Discretionary Fund towards improvements in the South Loch Ness Trail. In addition to the Council contribution, VILN received £5K contribution from the Common Good Fund towards support of Knitfest and £20K in support of attracting more business tourism and conferences to Inverness.

For the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 VILN had an operating surplus of £29,531 based on a total revenue (from levy and 'opt-in' members) of £179,052 plus other operating income of £122,449. The large operating surplus was due to a great extent on the assessment of need by VILN to set aside monies to cover salaries and operational costs in April and May, given that the timing of the levy collection by Highland Council means that limited revenue is available to VILN before the June levy payment. However, the projection was cautious and it is anticipated that the surplus in 2016/2107 will be much less. The operating income was much higher than in 2014/2015 due primarily to contribution from VisitBritain, in addition to HIE, Highland Council and the Common Good Fund.

For the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 the projected total revenue is expected to be approximately the same as in 2015/2016. However, the projected other operating income will be greater than in 2015/2016 due to greater contribution from VisitBritain and additional contributions from the Common Good Fund (£23,400 to date approved) for applications by VILN on behalf of conference organisers who are the end recipients of these monies. Acting as the facilitator for applications on behalf of conference organisers is helping to attract more conferences to the area and will enable the destination to compete more effectively for conferences with other destinations in Scotland.

- 7.2 There are no Legal, Equalities, Climate Change/Carbon Clever; Risk, Gaelic or Rural implications arising directly from this report.

### **Recommendation**

Members are recommended to endorse the continuing work and activities of the Tourism BID

Designation:

Author: Graeme Ambrose, Chief Executive, Visit Inverness Loch Ness Ltd

Date: 15<sup>th</sup> August 2016

## **Appendix 1: The Board of Directors, Visit Inverness Loch Ness Ltd**

Colin Marr (Chair), Eden Court Theatre and Cinema

Ian Whitaker, Cawdor castle

Dorothy Maclean, The Thistle Hotel

Claire Christie, Morag's Lodge

Joyce Ardbuckle, The Kingsmills Hotel

Rosie Wylie, Historic Scotland

Robbie Bremner, Loch Ness Centre & Exhibition

Marina Huggett, Achnagairn Castle

Graeme Bell, Inverness Airport,

Frank Spencer-Nairn, Culligran Cottages,

Cllr Helen Carmichael (co-opted director), The Highland Council

Margaret Hutcheson (co-opted director), Daviot Lodge B&B