

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: City of Inverness Area Committee

Date: 30 August 2018

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

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

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Inverness & Loch Ness Tourism BID was established following the successful ballot result on the 14th March 2014. This report describes the progress for the period August 2017 – August 2018 with particular reference to the project activity undertaken. The report also notes key dates for the organisation in relation to the renewal ballot in 2019.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to endorse the continuing work and activities of the Tourism BID

3. Background

3.1 VisitInvernessLochNess (VILN) Tourism BID Business Plan identifies six objectives under which it is committed to delivering a number of key objectives:

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

3.2 Outlined below is a summary of Key activity over the past year.

4. Marketing and Promotion

4.1 Over the past year the destination website www.visitinvernesslochness.com has performed very strongly averaging 36K sessions per month. This compares to an average of 22K in 2016/2017 and 16K in 2015/2016. Despite this, VILN will launch a new website in the autumn this year which will reflect the changing customer expectations of a destination website.

4.2 Continued investment in social media: VILN now has almost 32K Facebook likes, 2,000 Twitter followers and 2,000 Instagram followers.

4.3 Attendance at VisitScotland EXPO 2018: VILN once again attended EXPO in April. This year was VILN's largest ever presence at the event with a 60sq metre stand dedicated to promoting the destination along with support of 10 local businesses. This built on the success of 2017 when VILN received two awards at EXPO, 'Best Destination Area' and 'Most effective Stand for doing Business'.

5. Marketing & Promotion in partnership with VisitBritain

5.1 In January 2015 the then Sec.to the Treasury, Danny Alexander, secured £2M for the international marketing of Inverness and Loch Ness over a four year period, to be led by VisitBritain working in partnership with VisitInvernessLochNess and VisitScotland. Over the past three years the campaign has been very successful, focussing on promoting the shoulder and winter months in the German, French and Dutch markets. Key activities in 2017/2018 included:

5.2 Attendance by VILN at Travel Trade Events including ITB Berlin (the largest event of its kind in the world), Explore GB, UK Inbound and VisitBritain VIBE, an event where there is the opportunity to meet with VisitBritain PR teams worldwide.

5.3 Media & Influencers visits: Over the past year VILN has facilitated 20 visits by international media and influencers. Most of these have been from key markets of Germany and France but also from Scandinavia, Canada and most recently Russia.

5.4 Continuing to build on the creative campaign: The campaign over the past year focused on showcasing through powerful imagery and messaging broader experiences available in the area beyond the monster legend eg. 'Come hunting for Nessie, stay for the Feast'. This was hugely successful resulting in 172K visits to the Inverness & Loch

Ness pages on VisitBritain, 68K competition entries, 1.8M video views and 15.4M online impressions.

6. Conferences and Business Tourism

- 6.1 Updating of the 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.
- 6.2 Attendance by VILN at IMEX America in October 2017 and IMEX Frankfurt May 2018 at which VILN had a combined total of 51 appointments. Also led London Buyers sales mission in October 2017. Over three days VILN had appointments with 8 of the largest agency buyers in the UK.
- 6.3 Continuing assistance to facilitate a number of conferences which came to Inverness in 2017, including the UK Peat Annual Conference, the Heritage Interpretation Conference, Trident Incentive and the Prestigique Vintage car Event.

7. Access & Infrastructure

- 7.1 Over the past year the focus has been on the construction of the last major section of the South Loch Ness Trail between Glendoe and Loch Tarff. In January 2018, £143K of funding was secured under the Scottish Government & European funded Improving Public Access Scheme. This together with £50K contribution from SSE and £60K from Highland Council Discretionary Capital Fund, ensured work commenced on construction in March. Work was completed at the end of July and an event to mark the completion took place at Fort Augustus and Loch Tarff on the 8th August. Its completion now enables the linking up of the South Loch Ness Trail with the Great Glen Way and the creation of a LochNess 360° Trail, a project which VILN aim to take forward in 2019. The concept of a LochNess360° trail has already gained significant interest in key European markets and in particular, Germany.
- 7.2 Work on a lesser scale on the South Loch Ness Trail has also been progressed over the past year at Dores. Here the project has been to take users off road on to a new short section of trail constructed to a minimum standard. It is hoped that this project will be completed late summer 2018.
- 7.3 Loch Ness Ranger: In May 2018 VILN secured £40K from SSE towards the funding of a Loch Ness Ranger for 23 months. VILN require to match fund this before the Ranger can be appointed, but on the basis that this is achieved over the next 12 months, the post holder will work with VILN, community groups and the public sector to help improve the visitor experience around Loch Ness. The Ranger will be managed by Highlife Highland.

8. Business Development

- 8.1 World Host: In 2017 through the support of VILN, Inverness & Loch Ness became only the second destination in Scotland to achieve World Host Destination status. A total of 53 business and 240 staff completed the training. Since the award VILN have continued to support this programme of customer training for frontline staff.
- 8.2 The Digital Tourism Scotland Programme: Over the past year VILN have continued to support this programme aimed at raising the digital skills and abilities of tourism

operators. To date VILN has facilitated 15 workshops with over 130 attendees.

- 8.3 VILN Conference: In March 2018, VILN held its first annual conference for members. Titled 'What's beyond the horizon?', the conference was attended by over 100 people who heard from a number of high profile speakers including digital expert Daniel Rowles and adventurer Dave Cornthwaite.

9. Events & Festivals

- 9.1 For the 3rd year in succession VILN sponsored the Etape Loch Ness, in recognition of the importance of the event to the area in terms of economic impact and raising destination awareness.

10. Advocacy

- 10.1 Over the past year VILN has continued act 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 VILN networking events, monthly member newsletters and social media.

11. Renewal ballot 2019

- 11.1 Following discussion with Election officials of Highland Council it has been agreed that the renewal ballot date for VILN next year will be the 7th March 2019. Key dates of the ballot process are:

1. Formal notification to Highland Council of intention to put BID proposals to ballot – by Thursday 4th October
2. Highland Council to confirm that it is or is not vetoing the BID proposals – by Thursday 27th December
3. Ballot Holder issues ballot papers – Thursday 24th January 2019
4. Day of ballot – Thursday 7th March 2019
5. Count and declaration of result – Friday 8th March 2019

12. Implications

- 12.1 **Resource** - There are no resource implications directly arising from this report. The Council contributed £10,000 towards VILN in the year 2017/2018 from the Development & Infrastructure Service's Tourism Development Budget and also £1K from the Aird & Loch Ness Discretionary Budget towards improvements in the South Loch Ness Trail in 2017. This equated to 6% of the total VILN revenue. The Council has committed the same £10,000 contribution for the financial year 2018/2019. In addition to the Council contribution, VILN received £20K contribution from the Common Good Fund towards support of attracting more business tourism and conferences to Inverness in 2017/2018 and has also committed the same sum for the financial year 2018/2019.

For the year ending 31st March 2018 VILN made an operating surplus of £16,253 based on a total revenue (from levy and 'opt-in' members) of £182,633. The surplus is due to the timing of income and expenditure relating to primarily the South Loch Ness Trail project. By comparison, in the year ending 31st March 2017 VILN made an operating surplus of £2,872 based on a total revenue (from levy and 'opt-in' members) of £189,050 plus other operating income of £235,366. Much of this additional income pertained to contribution from VisitBritain and Knitfest in 2016.

- 12.2 **Legal** – All Grants are subject to Terms and Conditions which ensure that the objectives of the grant award are protected
- 12.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)** – All relevant Council Policies are applied in considering applications for grant.
- 12.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** - All relevant Council Policies are applied in considering applications for grant.
- 12.5 **Risk** – None
- 12.6 **Gaelic** -None

Designation: Inverness City Area Manager & Tourism BID Chief Executive

Date: 2nd August

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

Background Papers:

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

Graeme Bell (Chair), Inverness Airport

Marina Huggett, Achnagairn Castle

Dorothy Maclean, The Loch Ness Inn

Claire Christie, Morag's Lodge

Joyce Ardbuckle, The Kingsmills Hotel

Rosie Wylie, Historic Environment Scotland

Robbie Bremner, Loch Ness Centre & Exhibition

Robbie Rapson, Beastie Boats, Loch Ness

Lyn Forbes, Loch Ness Shores

John Martin, Moyness Guest House

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

John Frid, Inverglenn Guest House (co-opted director)