

Agenda Item	5
Report No	CIA/23/21

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: City of Inverness Area Committee

Date: 26th August 2021

Report Title: Visit Inverness Loch Ness Annual Report

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Inverness City Area Manager

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report updates Members on the annual progress of the Visit Inverness Loch Ness Tourism BID.
- 1.2 The report provides an overview of the progress of the Business Plan voted for at ballot in March 2019. It is broken down by the departments included in the plan and supplemented by more detailed information on key projects.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. Note the annual report of Visit Inverness Loch Ness

3. Implications

- 3.1 There are no implications arising from this report.

4. Business Plan General Update

- 4.1 The Visit Inverness Loch Ness Business Plan saw significant progress despite the challenges caused by the pandemic. In April on 2020 the Business Plan was 33% complete – this includes single completion items and ongoing regular items such as networking events. By the end of March 2021 this had risen to 69% and at the time of writing the Business Plan is 76% complete.

4.2 The total membership number have slightly increased despite the pandemic, an increase of 1% in levy paying members and an increase of 13% in opt-in members – who join at the same rate as levy paying members included in the ballot. This indicates that the value provided has been recognised by members. This view is also further supported by the rate of payment for annual levy, which now totals 93% of the total invoiced amount. This is beyond the national and regional average, further supporting the view the member businesses have been appropriately supported throughout the pandemic.

4.3 The membership service has been provided consistently throughout. In total, each business has received 95 emails since the start of the pandemic. These have been used to support access to grants, advice on restrictions, access to high profile webinars and marketing updates. With consistent effort from the team the email database has grown from 250 to 540, ensuring local businesses are well informed throughout. The content was also provided through multiple industry news social media pages as well as a private members group. Business also received a biannual letter, ensuring that members were informed regardless of digital interaction.

A total of 22 webinars have been held for members including high profile speakers who could impact the future of businesses such as Kate Forbes MSP, Drew Hendry MP and Marc Crothall – Chief Executive of the Scottish Tourism Alliance. There have been more than 500 businesses in attendance at these events which have been well received. From one a member commented “not many small businesses owners in the world have the change to lobby their finance minister directly, thank you”, another applied and received a grant of £10k specifically because of the webinar by Visit Inverness Loch Ness.

Finally, surveys have been issued throughout ensuring that data led decisions can be made regarding support and key stakeholders were informed of the needs of businesses.

Marketing is a key deliverable within the Business Plan and as such a full update is provided below.

4.4 In previous years the Business Development Manager attended international events to promote Business Tourism visits to our destination. Due to the pandemic, there were no events held within the period. However, online events began to be offered in place of physical conferences and our destination was represented at more than a dozen such events. This included a range of presentation opportunities and virtual meetings, totalling more than 150 throughout the period.

5. Inverness City Recovery Marketing

5.1 The project is joint funded by the Inverness Common Good Fund, Inverness BID, Visit Inverness Loch Ness and was further supported by Highland Council. It was created to achieve a number of outcomes:

- To align marketing efforts for an effective recovery from Covid-19
- To overcome boundary lines and structural barriers between organisations
- To market Inverness as a whole city
- To support the survival of businesses
- To capitalise on the great interest in the city and destination
- To provide greater marketing collaboration with key projects and sites in the city such as the Victorian Market, Eden Court and Inverness Castle

- To provide a foundation for further future activity

5.2 In addition to the agreed financial commitment Visit Inverness Loch Ness contributed credit from previous paid for works. This led to three blogs being created

- <https://www.visitinvernesslochness.com/itinerary/Inverness-activities>
- <https://www.visitinvernesslochness.com/Top10ThingsToDoAtLochNessWithKids>
- <https://www.visitinvernesslochness.com/itinerary/DiscoverLochNess>

A credit was also used with Sky media to reach 130k local and regional people, encouraging them to support local because its “worth leaving home for”

- <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=384762029513755>

5.3 A staycation campaign was promoted through MFR, Tay FM and Northsound 1 which reached a total of 382k people with 5 opportunities to hear.

5.4 A “Welcome Back” campaign was promoted through the Inverness Courier include a 4-page wrap around which was supported by associated online adverts.

5.5 “See You Soon” campaign has been running from the 1st of July to promote the city to local, regional, national and UK audience. At the time of writing, it has reached 1,291,538 people, with more than half a million video plays and 14k click throughs to a specifically created blog that promotes the city and also acts as a stepping stone to explore more about the area.

5.6 A new partnership has been formed with LNER, this led to an influencer visit in June, which produced content reaching 114k people. The main activity is due to begin 23rd of August and lasting for one month. It includes a nationwide competition to win a visit to the area – hosted on www.visitinvernesslochness.com . There will also be a further influencer visit. All of this activity will be promoted through the Visit Inverness Loch Ness channels, with a following of 60k, and through LNER who have a following of 335k.

5.7 It was agreed that content was key to delivering strong campaign and to achieve the aims of the project, therefore two videographer were appointed to create new content for the city. An example of this content being used is this video, which was used as part of the See You Soon campaign <https://vimeo.com/580253843/ac98114108> . The content will be made available to the combined memberships of both BID’s

There are a number of active items currently being worked on

- 5.8
- Creation of a Business Events video for use at confereces
 - Creating fluid links between BID websites for better provision of information
 - Provision of an image library to share new content
 - High level new video
 - Further digital marketing
 - Influencer visits and sky ads campaign
 - Collaboration of provision of maps

5.9 The project has also been regularly working with key stakeholders for aligned marketing and to ensure a secure foundation is built that will serve the city for many years to come.

6. Marketing

- 6.1 A new website was delivered in November 2020 that aimed to improve the ability to discover the destination, greatly enhance mobile performance and other enhancements. The site was built by the same agency used by VisitScotland.
- Homepage <https://www.visitinvernesslochness.com/>
 - Discover Hub <https://www.visitinvernesslochness.com/inspire-me/discover-more>
 - Things to Do <https://www.visitinvernesslochness.com/things-to-do>
 - Accommodation <https://www.visitinvernesslochness.com/accommodation>
- There is also new favouriting function, allowing visitors to explore Things to Do and Accommodation, save their favourites and refine their visit both in advance and as they explore the area. This new addition greatly improves the usability and is ahead of other comparable sites which have lower functionality and often require a login. The site is currently experiencing year on year growth and will ensure a strong digital presence for the destination.
- 6.2 Social Media has been a significant area of growth, at the start of the pandemic there was a combined 46,000 followers, now this total 60,000 and is continuing to grow at a high rate. As a result, the average reach per month has more than doubled from just under 500k, now reaching over 1M people through social media per monthly organically – without any spend. Since the pandemic member businesses were mentioned 2,300 times in social media content – a number have directly thanked the team as the content produced bookings.
- 6.3 A project is under way in partnership with VisitScotland and Lochaber Chamber of Commerce. The first phase produced the “Winter Wonder Highlands” campaign, which marketed through VisitScotland channels to a landing page on VisitScotland.com to promote our area. The initial campaign reached 3.5M. The second phase will use the same methods and begins mid-August, lasting around six weeks with the aim to generate interest in Autumn visits. It is expected to reach a similar number of people to the first phase, the video can be viewed through this link <https://vimeo.com/578033134/0a454a324b>
- 6.4 The Inverness Influencer Lodge brought four domestic influencers to the destination in October of 2020. The influencers explored the area and created new content that could be used in marketing. It is planned for a second phase of influencers to be brought to the area from key international markets once restrictions allow.
- 6.5 The organisation has been approved in an application to HIE for the DMO Fund. This will secure the ongoing employed for 5 staff, totalling 4.2 FTE. In addition it will allow for appointment of two new full time Destination Development Managers, which will improve the ability to support communities, increase engagement and aid sustainable development. The posts are expected to be appointed in October 2021.
- 6.6 An application was made to VisitScotland for the Sector and Destination Organisation Marketing Fund. The application was made on behalf of the city and wider destination, with supporting letters from Inverness BID, Inverness Chamber of Commerce, Inverness Airport, ScotRail and LNER. It is hoped if approved marketing activity will take place from November 2021 to March 2022.
- 6.7 The organisation been active in the media throughout the period and in 2021 to date has average 2.5 mentions, comments or articles in the media per week.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Despite the incredible challenge of the pandemic the organisation remains in a strong position to continue supporting its member businesses and delivering its Business Plan. The developments in digital marketing and growing collaboration with key stakeholders means that while there may be many challenges ahead the necessary actions are being taken to be proactive and support the recovery of the city and wider destination.

Designation:

Date: 12TH August 2021

Author: Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and the Inverness City Area Manager

Background Papers: