

# Highland Tourism Partnership

Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2017  
Highland Council HQ, Inverness

## Minutes

<p><b>Present</b></p> <p>(GA) Graeme Ambrose, HTP Chair, Visit Inverness Loch Ness (CT) Chris Taylor, Visit Scotland (CP) Caris Pittendreigh, Highland Council (CS) Colin Simpson, Highland Council (JM) Jack Mackay, Forestry Commission (DG) Douglas Gibson, Visit Wester Ross (HT) Heather Trench, Cairngorms National Park (CM) Catherine MacLeod, Venture North (JR) John Robertson, Highland Council (FS) Felix Spittal, HIE (RW) Rob Ware, Skye Connect</p> <p>(CM) Craig Mills, North Coast 500 (IF) Iain Fairweather, Visit Nairn (GA) Gordon Adam, Member (JG) John Gordon, Member (DR) David Richardson, FSB (JP) Jon Palmer, Black Isle Tourism Team (RM) Robert Muir, HIE (MH) Marina Hugget, Tourism Excellence Consultancy (FC) Fiona Cameron, Highland Council (MQ) Mathew Quinn, Visit Scotland</p>		
<p><b>Apologies</b></p> <p>Anne Miller, HIE Maren Ebeling, SNH Mark Tate, Visit Cairngorms Chris O'Brian, Lochaber Chamber of Commerce</p>		
	<b>Description</b>	<b>Action</b>
1	GA welcomed the group, introduced attendees and highlighted the focus of the meeting as being 'development of tourism'.	
2	<b>Previous Minutes and Actions</b>	
3	<p><b>Action Plan</b></p> <p>CS introduced updated Action Plan and opened discussion for anything to be added/amended. Employment issues were discussed with shortage of applicants, low pay in comparison to other regions, skills shortages (notably chefs), and affordable housing for staff being the main issues needing addressed. It was requested that the Fairy Pools work be changed to 'underway'</p> <p>CS will look into collecting evidence on the skills issue from across the region by creating and circulating a survey</p>	<b>CS</b>
4	<p><b>City Region Deal &amp; Northern Innovation Hub</b></p> <p>City Region Deal</p> <p>JR presented an overview of the City Region Deal with a focus on the tourism related projects that are developing around destinations to improve areas for visitors, staff and residents. Projects intend to be widespread across the Highland Council region and to use the funding imaginatively for useful development.</p> <p>PRESENTATION ATTACHED</p> <p>CT: Footfall at TICs has decreased greatly and mobile connectivity is changing the way people access information</p> <p>The Wi-Fi project rollout across Highland will pick up some of the areas affected by the VIC closures. DR highlighted the Kylesku hotel as an area that needs help due to lack of connectivity affecting staff and bookings.</p> <p>The Castle Project wants to stimulate debate and gather as many views and opinions as possible.</p>	

	<p>CT is on the project board and confirmed that debates will take place alongside workshops, discussions, consultations across areas etc. He stated is important to provide something iconic that will draw people to Highland and spread visitors across the region.</p> <p>JR explained there are a lot of strict conditions around the use of the £20M for digital. The City Region Deal considers sustainability as a priority and will lever in private money on some projects e.g. Development land around the Road Infrastructure work (East link and Longman Interchange) being used as visitor facilities, and Wi-Fi splash screen generating income from advertising..</p> <p>Northern Innovation Hub FS presented the work and plans of NIH</p> <p>PRESENTATION ATTACHED</p> <p>The work targets skills, jobs, and young people and covers the Life Sciences, Food &amp; Drink, Tourism and Creative industries. Within tourism there is a focus on digital tourism development and adventure tourism research.</p>	
5	<p><b>Infrastructure Fund and LEADER</b></p> <p>FC gave an outline of LEADER funding and the opportunities for communities (outwith Inverness City and Badenoch &amp; Strathspey which falls in the separate Cairngorms LEADER area), also highlighting that there is an apparent demand in tourism but LEADER need representation from the tourism sector.</p> <p>Notes on LEADER: It is an EU fund for 2014-2020 and started awarding grants in 2016. It can cover 50% of eligible costs for projects (100% for non-profit projects). In total Highland LEADER has £8.8 Million which is split into different areas and types of funding. £1.7Million is ear marked for rural enterprise and farm diversification. Each geographical area has its own allocation for community projects and an additional amount is retained for projects that cross several geographical areas which could also include tourism projects. Of the 53 live enquiries, 30 are within tourism. There is a wide criteria and the Rural Enterprise Group (regional subgroup with knowledge from different sectors) ruled out B&amp;B/Self Catering funding where there is no market failure, however a lot of applicants can prove market failure and identify a demand. There is no way of fast tracking applications, and applications from community groups with volunteers struggle more. It was raised by the group that there is a lack of staff accommodation and affordable housing, partly due to the growth in homes being used as self-catering visitor accommodation (i.e. Air BnB). FC explained that expansion to property for use as staff accommodation would be eligible. The group queried whether grants were available to build property for tourist accommodation. FC confirmed this is possible but, a policy decision has been taken that LEADER will not fund detached properties that could be suitable for commercial mortgage facilities or domestic occupation. There is no developer contribution or enforcement through planning that would ensure a new building stays within the tourism sector</p> <p>FC expressed that it would be useful for LEADER to have contact with a group that has insight to the tourism sector, up to date information on regional demands etc. as the process for acquiring funds is long, setting a policy on what is needed in different areas would avoid wasting applicants and staff time and ensure that resources are best directed. It was agreed that it is important to develop a policy that will consider displacement and focus to develop Highland.</p> <p>LEADER will create a questionnaire to be completed by HTP members from a strategic perspective.</p> <p><b>Rural Infrastructure Fund</b></p> <p>The group agreed that it would be worthwhile to write a letter from the HTP, expressing interest and demand across the region, and so as to try and influence the terms and policies of the fund.</p>	<p>FC / CS</p> <p>CS / GA</p>

6	<p><b>Business Barometer</b></p> <p>MQ presented the Visit Scotland Business Barometer surveys across the tourism related sectors that is in pilot stage, aimed at gaining data at sub regional levels to get a national picture for Scotland.</p> <p>PRESENTATION ATTACHED</p> <p>Individual parts of the survey are not compulsory to answer, and responses are anonymised. Visit Scotland is able to quickly produce automated results and compare different sectors. Results are shared with those who take the survey.</p> <p>The group showed firm support and will communicate through DMOs, and HC/HIE contacts to maximise business involvement.</p>	
7	<p><b>Air BnB</b></p> <p>CS requested a brief discussion on Air BnB and the affects to the industry and area. Highlighted loss of resident accommodation, lack of regulations, and negative effects of visitor trends as the main issues, but also agreed that there is a demand for accommodation in certain places so need to be cautious about damaging something that helps a lot of areas.</p> <p>The issues arising from Air BnB lead to wider issues on infrastructure and visitor trends that will affect Scotland.</p>	
8	<p><b>Destination Updates</b> (next page)</p>	

# Highland Destination Updates



[BITT Website Link](#)

New logo and brand launched with the strapline 'The Black Isle - savour the unexpected'. Members again had free tear-off maps to distribute, which carried the brand along with their own window stickers. It also features on Discover the Black Isle Facebook page and Black-Isle.info website. The group has missed the paid input from Lizbeth Collie, whose contract funded through Transition Black Isle's Development Officer post ended in April, but a steering group has continued to meet and has organised a networking event for November 14th. We haven't been in a position to compile a newsletter or follow-up membership renewals and so paid membership is currently 25 - but we are confident the networking event will address this and expect to be back up to around 50 by the year end. A new steering group will be elected, to meet bi-monthly, with individuals assigned to specific roles to see if we can collectively make up for the loss of Lizbeth's role.



*Unable to provide update, will look forward to update at next meeting.*



[Skye Connect Website Link](#)

Since its official launch in March 2017 as the island's new DMO, SkyeConnect has been working with a range of key stakeholders to develop the organisation and to work collaboratively towards addressing the issues of Skye tourism. Funding from HIE for a full-time project manager was approved in September and the successful candidate, Alistair Danter, begins his new role in December. A series of high-profile visits and meetings have included Fiona Hyslop, David Mundell, Malcolm Roughhead, and Kate Forbes MSP, and a discussion paper has now been produced by Highland Council entitle 'Skye and Raasay Tourism Infrastructure: A Dynamic Workshop Approach' to which SkyeConnect made a significant contribution. Following the appointment of the project manager, the organisation intends to invite applications for a management board. This will ensure full transparency for SkyeConnect to become the business and tourism hub at the heart of Skye and Raasay. We are grateful to HIE for funding the new project manager's position.

## venture north

[Venture North Website Link](#)

Continuation of our discovery series marketing using the three films funded by SSE, Visit Scotland and NDA.

We have a signage project with help from the council, having chosen 3 key sites.

We ran a third Digital "byte", which is a marketing workshop using different digital tools available (social media, blogs, website and making your own films).

Running the same music events leaflets.

We were at the Visit Scotland Expo to represent Caithness and Sutherland and are planning a return trip.

We also ran our third Taste North food and craft festival highlighting the great produce we have, we also had Nick Nairn as guest chef and worked with the Ena and Gordon Baxter foundation with our taste north

challenge , a local ingredient recipe competition.

We have also made Venture North information tabards for volunteers to wear to greet cruise ship passengers in Thurso.

We also continue to build our membership along with our website and social media presence



[VILN Website Link](#)

Presently in midst of Yr3 of the VisitBritain campaign activity. The new creative campaign was launched back in September. This time it is focused on encouraging people to stay longer in the destination. Other activity has included facilitating travel trade visits from Germany & France as well as a number of visits to the destination by bloggers/vloggers and journalists. VILN are also in the process of developing a new website which should be ready to launch in spring 2018.

South Loch Ness Trail: Await outcome of major funding application at end of November. If successful we expect the last section of the trail to be completed by June 2018. This will link up with the Great Glen Way and thus create the 'Loch Ness 360'.

Business Tourism: recently attended IMEX America and also organised a 'sales mission' in London at which we were able to meet with some of the largest agencies.



[Visit Nairn Website Link](#)

Nairn was very busy with tourists again this year. However, the loss of VS funding led to the closure of our TIP facility. While many do book accommodation online, a great many do not so this year we had numerous people trekking around B&Bs looking for accommodation. A manned facility enables a town to provide a welcome and to point visitors to shops, services and restaurants. Online, even when it works well, can't really substitute for a warm smile.



[Visit Wester Ross Website Link](#)

2017 has been one of the busiest seasons for years on the West Coast, with some businesses reporting over 30% of an increase on 2016, itself very busy. However, accompanying this has been a number of difficulties such as staffing problems for many businesses, and general litter issues. In particular, there have been problems in not only sourcing staff - but also where to put them in terms of accommodation. Several businesses have actually had to restrict opening hours due to the problem.

As far as litter is concerned, a significant amount of this stems from Motorhomes "wild camping" (*a ridiculous term, to my mind - how "wild" is it when you are talking about sending the night inside a fully heated, satnav equipped pleasure palace that costs more than many folks houses?*) - a side effect of the wild camping is that several campsite owners refuse to let visitors use their facilities to change water / dispose of waste unless this includes a stay overnight - many motorhome users object to this and will not pay.

But on the whole - an excellent year. Bookings for 2018 and even 2019 are already being made, and the current boom seems set for another year or two yet.