Bettyhill Café and Tourist Information Centre

Business Plan 2018

Executive Summary

The Bettyhill Café and Tourist Information Centre is a full-service restaurant/cafe located at the east end of Bettyhill on the A836 adjacent to Strathnaver Museum. The restaurant features a full menu of moderately priced "comfort" food

The Bettyhill Café and Tourist Information Centre (TIC) is owned by the Highland Council leased to and operated by Bob and Lindsay Boyle.

Strathnaver Museum are undertaking an asset transfer to bring the facility into community ownership as part of the redevelopment of the Strathnaver Museum as a heritage hub for North West Sutherland.

This plan offers an opportunity to review our vision and strategic focus, establishing the locality as an informative heritage hub for the gateway to north west Sutherland and beyond including the old province of Strathnaver, Mackay Country and to further benefit from the extremely successful NC500 route.

Our Aims

- To successfully complete an asset transfer for a peppercorn sum from the Highland Council and bring the facility into community ownership under the jurisdiction of Strathnaver Museum.
- To secure technical services to draw appropriate plans for internal rearranging where necessary; to internally redevelop the interior of the building and have the appropriate works carried out.
- Seek funding to carry out the alterations and alleviate the potential flooding concern. Architecturally, the Café and Tourist Information Centre has not been designed for the current use and has been casually reformed to serve the purpose.
- To secure a local based franchise operation to continue to provide and develop catering services.
- To work in partnership with the Museum and other tourist operators to improve the information displays and promote facilities and services in the area while highlighting the potential for exploring NW Sutherland and as the eastern gateway to Mackay Country, the historic Strathnaver Trail and further afield. To capitalize on the popular NC500 route.

Mission Summary

We hope the Bettyhill Café and TIC concept can build upon the success of the NC 500. Currently the lack of catering establishments in the area and centres providing information of what the area has to offer fails to slow travelers down and encourage them to explore the areas off the road, to spend more time with us and to encourage visitors to repeat their visit at a later date.

The Bettyhill Café will provide accessible and affordable quality food, coffee-based products to cater for the ever growing cycling trade and respite to the residents and visitors. The integral TIC will market the area and form local alliances with among others the North West Highlands Geopark, Mackay Country Community Trust, NC500, Forsinard Flows Visitor Centre and local accommodation providers across Mackay Country to promote and highlight what the north Highlands has to offer. It will also promote the nearby Strathnaver Museum as an important and informative attraction.

Losing the current facility is a genuine possibility as Highland Council have indicated the current lease is unlikely to be renewed and the current leaseholders have indicated their intention to cease to want to renew the lease in the near future. Should Strathnaver Museum become the owners and the current leaseholders wish to continue their tenancy the Museum would hold all the same conditions until the current leaseholders decided to retire.

Bringing the facility into community ownership would secure the future. The café and TIC would be further integrated into the Museum and give the locality renewed benefits.

A coordinated cooperative approach to information and interpretation would be presented. With the ongoing refurbishment plans of Strathnaver Museum to their building and displays it is important to secure this obvious stopping point close to the road, maintain the availability of refreshments and direct people to the Museum and other attractions.

This purchase would provide a strategically placed visitor reception offering catering, comfort, rest and informative materials to guide the visitor and achieve an understanding of the importance of the history and heritage of the environment of the area while directing visitors to more detailed accounts of the specific interests. This would serve as a gateway to an environment unrivalled which has some of the most dramatic scenery in the UK. Community ownership of this facility will allow signposting to groups and organizations that are involved in interpreting the environment in all its guises. Landscape has an emotional density and there are diverse ways this is understood. Ownership of this facility will allow this concept to be introduced.

On land, the flora and fauna changes with the geology, coastlines are liberally interspersed with steep cliffs, small villages and communities each with a character and charm all of their own. All of these villages and communities are unique and have their own story to relate. They have cultures and traditions that are specific to them with ways of life that have brought about a distinct and individual character. There are threads of similarity that they share, a pride in their heritage, a determination to build on the strengths of local culture, society and economy, and a desire to develop any and all opportunities for sustainable community development.

Strathnaver Museum's vision of creating a heritage hub for north west Sutherland requires leading and influencing the social challenges which face some of the most fragile and spread out communities in the Highlands one of the most sparsely populated districts in Europe, greater in area than the city of London but home to fewer than 2000 people. Ownership of a diverse facility with enlightening information about the unique communities that inhabit Mackay Country demonstrates commitment to the whole area and an obligation to the responsibilities of the Bettyhill gateway community.

The facility will be divided between the cafe/restaurant function and the information exhibition function. The restaurant will feature dining room seating for approximately 50 patrons. The cafe/coffeehouse will provide a full-service dine-in and carry-out coffee-based beverages. The intention is not for the museum to run the catering establishment but to franchise this aspect to a local interest.

Museums vision for the franchised catering facility

While we would provide a full restaurant menu throughout the year it is acknowledged that there is a lack of catering establishments in Bettyhill and the closest competitors for

A sample copy of a menu currently featured at the Bettyhill Café and Tourist Information Centre is attached in an appendix at the end of this document. We envisage this being improved and redirected towards as much local produce as feasible, sourcing from a select group of restaurant suppliers with direct sales relationships established with fresh produce, meat, and seafood distributors. While the Bettyhill Café and Tourist Information Centre will initially focus upon the continuing dining and coffeehouse, future expansion efforts will focus upon providing a full-scale varied menu.

The casual dining/full service restaurant market is a growing industry on the NC500, with annual expected increases in revenue outpacing 5% yearly. More and more people are choosing to eat out. Specialty coffee is a growing industry especially to the growing cycling market.

Marketing Strategy

The most important element of our marketing strategy is the delivery of a quality product. Our food, beverage, and information products must first sell themselves through word of mouth. Next, the packaging of the Bettyhill Café and Tourist Information Centre's concept and external messages have to fit our positioning. Open daily and with the community encouraged to use the facility for events and learning. Our vision is a similar establishment to The Pier café in Lairg 40 miles south.

Pricing Strategy

Our food, drinks, and entertainment options will be priced to give us an attractive margin while at the same time offering value to the consumer. We want repeat business. We also want the experience to remain fresh. Therein lies why the food, beverages, information displays will be relatively flexible.

Promotion Strategy

We will promote our company name almost more than the product itself, because to be successful we have to stand for integrity, excellent menu offerings, and first class interpretation. Therefore, our promotion strategy includes focusing on events and messages that match:

- Advertising placed strategically and carefully;
- Social media;
- Web networks.

Target Market Segment Strategy

The Bettyhill Café and Tourist Information Centre will appeal to those who desire a sophisticated yet casual eating, informative experience. The business will also meet an under-served need for a friendly dining/coffeehouse establishment for the numerous residents in the area, particularly visitors to the immediate area. Our customer's dining and needs are critical to the success of the Bettyhill Café and TIC. As a supplier of a

full-service experience, the Bettyhill Café and TIC must appeal to people who are interested.

We anticipate from our experience of running the Museum that our customers are well educated and interested in partaking of new experiences. Keeping the menu and the offerings "fresh" will remain a constant challenge to the business. Segments of the target market tend to dine out, visit coffee shops, and seek local information. They tend to choose comfortable, affordable venues, and repeat appearances at places that offer familiar scenery with new twists.

We will encourage community 'diversification' uses e.g. elderly outings and youth café during quieter times. We anticipate it will be well used (as it is at present) by locals.

Strategy and Implementation Summary

The Bettyhill Café and TIC's strategy is based upon targeting and serving the tourist and population living in and passing through Bettyhill.

The facility's location puts it into close proximity to a substantial market. We think our value proposition is quite clear and quite easily distinguished from most others in the market. We will offer affordable and accessible menu items and information as measured by their inherently natural value, at an affordable price that will encourage regular visits.

- The first category of our sales strategy is to establish and maintain a position with our primary constituents: We will depend upon keeping these people happy with our food and beverage products and information options.
- Our second strategy is to utilize the potential of the information interpretive area.
- Our third strategy targets the visitors to the historic site.
- Fourth, the restaurant will target local regular lunch and dinner entertaining.

Objectives

The prime function of the Bettyhill Café and TIC is to welcome, inform and encourage visitors to visit Strathnaver Museum and stay and explore Mackay Country through the provision of relevant assistance and services.

- To increase the movement of visitors within the locality.
- To generate income and keep operating costs to a minimum.
- To develop networks with other Tourist Information Centres and attractions.
- To enhance visitor enjoyment and encourage repeat visits and longer stays.
- Provide residents with local and national information and services in order to demonstrate the benefits of tourism to the local economy.
- To liaise with and support local tourism providers.
- To gauge customer satisfaction with our service.
- To promote accommodation establishments.
- To make the Café a community hub.

Who are our customers?

- Local residents
- Local stakeholders
- Day visitors
- Domestic tourists
- Overseas tourists
- VFR (Visiting friends & relations)
- Visitors in transit

Services to be offered and Information operating procedure

- Information on local and national attractions and events.
- Local and national accommodation bookings, over the counter, by telephone or via email.
- Transport information – rail, coach and local buses.
- Agents for bus companies.
- Local events.
- Books and maps.
- Stamps and Souvenirs.
- Holiday information service available throughout the year.
- Distribution of literature.
- Coordinating and updating events listings.

Retail operation brings in revenue to offset the TIC's running costs. Items on sale range from 10p to around £20. Mark up on books and maps is 35% and other souvenir items generally carry a markup of over 100% unless recommended retail prices have been given. We will strive to review and renew our range of saleable items and to this end visit trade fairs to keep pace with new trends. We also visit other TICs to exchange and pool ideas on saleable ranges, pricing and best practice. Visitor guides are sent to enquirers who have the opportunity to purchase relevant literature e.g. maps, guidebooks in advance of their visit.

Improvement plan

Short-term targets

- Increase TIC income by placing greater emphasis on saleable items and reviewing the amount of free literature.
- Re-design the area for exhibition and interpretation
- Investigate areas where there is potential for commissionable earnings.
- Increase contact with stakeholders
- Encourage local visitors into the TIC by use of competitions and events.
- Continue development of training

- Keep in touch with comparable TICs to see if they have better suppliers/deals/goods and to monitor best practice.
- To proactively promote visitor movement within Mackay Country with information on events, activities, trails, walking networks, historical sites
- To undertake a regular check on signposting
- To undertake 3 monthly literature checks and servicing of the Visitor Information Points

Long-term targets

- More space in new TIC will enable us to explore more retail activities and thereby increase income.
- Train staff to meet expected growth in visitor numbers as part of the wider project.
- Make display space chargeable to businesses.
- Electronic till for stock control and trend analysis
- To continue staff training
- To encourage the display and sale of locally made goods and crafts.

Performance indicators

- Net Cost of Tourism service per resident
- Increased value of retail sales at TIC divided by number of visitors (2% above inflation)
- Value of Tourism per head of population
- Customer satisfaction with TIC service – Target 90%

Changes likely to affect the TIC service

The traditional role of the tourist information centres in answering enquiries at the counter is likely to decline. The facility increasingly has to compete with the internet as more visitors gain their information from the web and book direct on-line, reducing information centre income. Local authorities have no statutory requirements to provide a tourism service.

Increase business opportunities for tourism enterprises starts with a warm welcome to visitors by satisfying their orientation needs. The Tourist Information Centre (TIC) will enhance the enjoyment of the tourists' visit, entice them to stay longer, and spend more money throughout the economy. The TIC will also provide a venue to gain more knowledge and appreciation of Mackay Country and its people.

Moreover, the stakeholder collaboration is necessary to establish and operate the information centre which will serve as a catalyst for advancing partnerships throughout Mackay Country's tourism industry and serve to better tourism services through the pooling of valuable expertise and resources.

Visitor services are probably the single most important group of activities that a community offers its visitors because these activities make the visitor feel welcome and well served. To successfully meet the challenges of providing visitor services of international quality, it is essential that we embrace three vision statements concerning hospitality, leadership and teamwork. These are:

1. The Highland cultural concept of welcome, "welcome all visitors enthusiastically".
2. Scotland & Mackay Country is a land of heroes, it is time to nurture & promote tourism heroes and committed volunteers "do not be afraid to lead or participate".
3. Nature's conception of partnership, of the community working together for the betterment of all "all for one, one for all".

A tourist information centre is a necessary and vital component in the promotion of tourism. Moreover, it is widely recognized in the international tourism community that information centres play a vital orientation component by informing the visitor about the full spectrum of opportunities a destination has to offer, to address the "information anxiety" that confronts many visitors and potential visitors there is little to no provision of comprehensive tourism information.

Tourist arrivals are hugely seasonal, with the vast majority visiting during the three main summer months although this is changing. Attracting visitors during the winter months is currently a hot topic of discussion, with special events proposed to stimulate demand.

There is growing trend worldwide for TICs to be more than the traditional outlet for tourism brochures and visitor information. This new generation of TICs have become the showcase for their respective communities – the point of welcome for visitors, displaying history, industries, arts, crafts, and activities which are relevant to visitors and characteristic of the town, state, or country. These TICs play a vital role as interpretive centres. The exceptional increase in interest in genealogy is another example which could be better addressed by the local touch.

Benefits

Benefits this project of asset transfer and community ownership will bring are numerous and interrelated.

The existence of our locally owned, community organizations act as 'anchors' for the process of empowerment and is about everyone living in the community having the opportunity to get involved. Empowerment helps to unlock that potential. Fundamentally, it is about people taking collective action to make change happen on their own terms.

Having ownership of this asset in our community will help:

1. **Deliver Social & Economic Purpose, because it:**

- Protects key local services / facilities that may otherwise be lost.
- Provides a physical base for provision of local services.
- Allows generation of income that can be re-invested locally.
- Provides jobs, training and business opportunities.
- Can reverse economic decline in an area and attract investment.
- Enables more intensive use of assets and services when control is closer to community.
- Allows better stewardship of local assets because the community owns and uses them.
- Allows groups to make major alterations / extend / re-furbish (usually the ability to carry out such works is limited in a lease)

2. **Change Attitudes and Relationships, because it:**

- Gives the group credibility with funders / other stakeholders.
- Heightens the group's profile and improves perceptions of it.
- Instils a renewed sense of pride and confidence in the community.
- Provides local people with a meaningful stake in the future development of the place in which they live and / or work.
- Can increase participation - membership, volunteering and attendance at meetings.
- Encourages, through its success, further ideas and activity – ripple effect!

3. **Move towards financial self-sufficiency, because:**

- The organisation can generate income from the asset.
- Ownership avoids rent payments.
- There is incentive to invest in building to reduce running costs - e.g. energy efficiency.
- It gives our balance sheet strength.

4. **Build organisational sustainability through:**

- Independence / control over the future of the asset allowing you to make long-term plans.
- Leverage, enable negotiation of further investment.
- The development of skills and capacity locally that taking on and managing a building encourages.
- Attracting new people with additional skills.
- Building long-term support from community.

Capacity to deliver

Management Summary

The Bettyhill café and information Centre is owned by a limited liability corporation.

Benefits of Community Ownership

Identified factors to help success.

- A vision and clear set of priorities determined by the local community.
- Strong ongoing presence in, and support from, the community (i.e. being truly community-based through meaningful community involvement).
- Adequate financial and business planning when acquiring assets.
- An increasing focus on enterprise to develop sustainability of the asset and realise further opportunities.
- Ensuring that assets are fit for purpose.
- A constructive approach to asset transfer and community control of assets on the part of public bodies.
- Strong working relationships with local agencies.
- Capacity and leadership within the community – the skills and time to make an asset work, a history of voluntary and community action, and technical and community development support.
- Effective governance - clarity of role and function and community buy-in, with adequate democratic control.
- Financial sustainability - including fit-for-purpose external investment.

Identified factors which make success more difficult.

Although there are many benefits to community ownership we need also to be aware of the stumbling blocks that make success more difficult. These stumbling blocks can be:

- Failure to think through real objectives and make a plan.
- Acquiring an asset that is or becomes a liability.
- Resistance to asset transfer from public bodies, protracted negotiations for acquisition, lack of aftercare and unnecessary restrictions on use.
- Difficulties in recruiting volunteers, stress and burnout, and lack of support.
- Problems attracting suitable finance.

Site conditions and constraints we have to ascertain.

- The size and shape (or 'footprint') of the site.
- The current condition of any existing structures and flexibility for re-developing these.
- Topography / drainage
- Restrictions on its re-development due to its being listed, within a conservation area or having other designations.
- Whether or not the site has key services in place (gas, electricity, mains water, sewerage)
- Any key issues in relation to securing a building warrant (for example are there adequate fire escape routes?)

- The likely environmental impacts associated with re-developing and operating from the site, and potential for reducing these to a minimum.
- How easy it will be to ensure site security as required, for example are there neighboring users who might 'keep an eye out' at different times.

Costs:

As we are continuing on a journey, it is highly likely that other actions may occur and we will consider gaps and new ideas with a constant revaluation of the circumstances. We will readjust as the challenges and opportunities emerge.

Needed Finance & Funding Identified

The facility is presently functioning and although we are unable to obtain operating accounts we understand the business is viable with reasonable profit margins. Our costs are estimates based on the development and improvements planned.

- Building survey to establish structure   £1500
- Transfer of Asset - Legal Fees   £1000
- Purchase of current leaseholders equipment – at their retirement.   £2500
- Work to tackle flooding – We have been advised that an appropriate way to deal with potential flooding of the building, (considering the recommendations made in the flood incident report carried out by the Highland Council in 2014, have been completed) have all the electrics moved above potential flood level and a cement level reached to allow water to cause no harm. Within 1 year   £2000

Aspiration after acquisition
- Architectural fees for redesign – within six months of Franchise
- Renovation & refurbishment of building within 2 years

Proposed Funders

- Scottish land Fund (Only available for purchase- We anticipate this will be peppercorn sum)
- LEADER- depending on time scales
- Caithness and North Sutherland Fund
- SSE
- Big Lottery

Where this asset transfer is coming from

- A Report to Strathnaver Museum – October 2016 by HISEZ Just enterprise advises the museum acquire ownership of the café

- Recommended action 13 in the Redevelopment Action Plan 2014 - 2018 Improved orientation / signage to be provided in the TIC and car park

- The Community Empowerment Act will help to empower community bodies through the ownership of land and buildings, and by strengthening their voices in the decisions that matter to them. It will also improve outcomes for communities by improving the process of community planning, ensuring that local service providers work together even more closely with communities to meet the needs of the people who use them. The Bill was passed by the Scottish Parliament on 17 June 2015 and received Royal Assent, becoming an Act, on 24 July 2015.

SWOT ANALAYSIS

Strengths	Weaknesses
❖ The facility is situated within a beautiful and unspoilt yet fairly accessible location on the A838 NC 500. ❖ A well-established facility ❖ A Fully fitted facility in useable condition ❖ Dedicated and committed Trustees, staff and volunteers ❖ High levels of customer satisfaction achieved ❖ Well established and trusted provider ❖ Good reputation ❖ Support of local community ❖ Free parking ❖ caters for a wide customer base and offers a wide range of leaflets and directional information ❖ The facility has public facilities	❖ The facility has restricted opening times ❖ Not a modern attraction ❖ Dated information displays ❖ Lacking in technology - not interactive enough for a younger audience ❖ Isolated location
Opportunities	**Threats**
❖ location ❖ Increased PR activity ❖ Use of new technologies to assist with marketing and fundraising strategies and the delivery of lifelong learning activities ❖ Redevelopment of the information displays and visitor facilities ❖ Sponsorship opportunities ❖ Third party partnerships working opportunities ❖ Outreach to community groups ❖ Lottery funding etc ❖ Partnership project development	❖ Loss of the facility ❖ Not moving with the times ❖ Little investment in the redevelopment of the displays and visitor facilities

Political/Legal/Legislative	Economic/Environmental/Ecological
❖ Employment law, e.g., Health & Safety ❖ Local economy – scale of unemployment ❖ Pensions	❖ State of national economy ❖ State of local tourism market ❖ State of international markets, e.g., world recessions ❖ Change in trends and visitor expectations
Social/Socio-Cultural	**Technological**
❖ Change in consumer tastes/preferences ❖ Substitution – direct/indirect competition for time and disposable income ❖ New culture – change in technology for new generation ❖ More money = less time ❖ Demographic structure – ageing population/decline in birth rates ❖ Single person culture	❖ Pace of technological changes ❖ New interactive and hi-tech attractions ❖ E-commerce ❖ E-marketing