

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**CITY OF INVERNESS AREA COMMITTEE –
10th SEPTEMBER 2015**

Agenda Item	17b
Report No	CIA/48/15

Inverness & Loch Ness Tourism BID: Progress Report

Joint Report by Inverness City Manager and BID Chief Executive

Summary: 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 September 2014 – September 2015 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 activities:

- Marketing & Promotion
- Conferences & Business Tourism
- Access & Infrastructure
- Business Development
- Events & Festivals
- Advocacy

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

1. Marketing & Promotion

- 1.1 Rebranding as VisitInvernessLochNess (VILN): It was important that following the establishment of the Tourism Bid that the two areas were brought together and marketed as one destination. Following the tendering process the award of contract was made in November 2014 and the new brand launched in January 2015. This has been well received by the membership and makes very clear to visitors that the two areas are 'one destination'.
- 1.2 Launch of the new website www.visitinvernesslochness.com : The contract for a new visitor website was awarded in January 2015 and launched to members at the Botanics in March. Much ongoing development continues to be undertaken but with approximately 250 member businesses now listed on the site, it is fast becoming 'the' destination website for the area.
- 1.3 Spring marketing campaign in partnership with Inverness Airport, Flybe and VisitScotland: Completed June 2015. Although too early to say, based on statistics from the promotional activity undertaken by VisitScotland this would seem to have been a very successful campaign aimed at increasing visitor numbers from Ireland through Dublin, a key airport linking Inverness directly to the United States. A database of over 6K contacts was collected which the Tourism BID can use for further e marketing campaigns.

- 1.4 Attendance at EXPO 2015: VILN attended VisitScotland trade EXPO in April 2015 on behalf of member businesses. They did so as part of a 'Highland aisle' with the branding facilitated by VILN and with financial contribution from Highland Council (£2,750) as well as VILN and other destinations (total contributions £3,750)
- 1.5 Production of tear off map 'See & Do' map for accommodation providers within the VILN: 100,000 printed, these have proved extremely popular with members and it is planned to reprint the same number in 2016/2017
- 1.6 Support of the Affric-Kintail Way: VILN made a small financial contribution to the marketing of the new Affric-Kintail trail launched in April 2015

2. Conferences and Business Tourism

- 2.1 In November 2015 VILN recruited Alan Rawlinson, a very experienced business tourism professional, as the Business Tourism manager. Since then he has been focused on working with all key stakeholders, public (Highland Council, HIE and VisitScotland) and private sector as well as the City Centre BID to attract more conferences, events and business tourism to Inverness and Loch Ness.
- 2.2 Amongst specific activities undertaken has been, in partnership with VisitScotland, attendance at IMEX (one-stop-shop for planners looking to book and organise worldwide meetings, events and incentive travel programmes) in Frankfurt in May and facilitating the Edinburgh MI Forum familiarisation trips to Inverness and Loch Ness in July 2015. He is also presently working closely with other key stakeholders to bring a major new conference / event to the area in September 2016 which is expected to attract 2-3 thousand attendees.

3. Access & Infrastructure

- 3.1 South Loch Ness laybys: In partnership with the Forestry Commission, the past year has seen three of the laybys along the B852 on south Loch Ness opened up and made more accessible and much more attractive for visitors and locals alike. This project is continuing in 2015/2016 and a further two laybys are expected to be improved before April 2016
- 3.2 North side Loch Ness laybys: Having established land ownership and agreement in principle from the landowner, plans are also now being progressed, again in partnership with the Forestry Commission, to improve visibility and access to Loch Ness at two laybys on the north side. Talks with Transport Scotland have identified the most suitable laybys and it is hoped that by May 2016 improvements at one will be complete.
- 3.3 South Loch Ness Trail improvements: A total of £32K has now been secured towards a project to take 3km of the trail at Dores 'off road' making it not only much more attractive for users but also safer. The funds have been secured from Highland Council Ward 13 Discretionary Fund (£10K) plus contributions from VILN (£12K), the landowner (£5K) and two local groups (5K total). To complete the project a further £40K is required which it is hoped to secure from LEADER Funding, but work will nonetheless proceed early next year on

the basis of what has already been secured.

The completion of this project still leaves a 10km section of the trail to be developed from Loch Tarff to Fort Augustus if it is, as originally intended, to link up with the Great Glen Way on the north side and thus create a 360 degree trail around Loch Ness. This would extend the full length of the trail to 34 miles. It is hoped to complete this link over the next three years.

4. Business Development

- 4.1 World Host: In December 2014 VILN rolled out to members the opportunity to undertake the World Host Customer Training programme. With the cost subsidised by the BID, to date 72 persons from 32 businesses have completed the course. It is expected by September 2016 that 63 businesses will have completed the programme and the destination will thus become recognised one of only 11 in Scotland with World Host destination status.

5. Events & Festivals

- 5.1 Events: As part of the commitment to support new and sustainable events, over the past year VILN has supported the Loch Ness Etape through facilitating member offers for cyclists and information on the areas attractions and things to do. It also provided PR support for the Man versus Horse event on the south side of Loch Ness in April 2015.

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 and monthly member newsletters.

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 2014/2015 from the Development & Infrastructure Service's Tourism Development Budget and has committed the same sum for the financial year 2015/2016. A grant of £10,000 has also recently been awarded in 2015/2016 to VILN from the Ward 13 Discretionary Fund towards improvements in the South Loch Ness Trail (see above under Access & Infrastructure for more detail).

For the year ending 31st March 2015 VILN had an operating surplus of £1,270 based on a total levy revenue of £171,819 plus other operating income of £24,003.

For the year ending 31st March 2016 the projected total levy revenue is expected to be slightly greater reflecting the number of new businesses (52 to 31st March 2015)) which have become subject to paying the BID levy over the past year. This also brings the total number of levy paying businesses up to 415.

The projected other operating income will also be greater with, in addition to Highland Council, contributions from the Common Good Fund (£20,000 towards the attracting of more business tourism and conferences to Inverness) and HIE (an estimated £10,000 also towards business tourism/conferences). Forestry Commission Scotland has again committed an estimated £10,000 of in kind contribution towards the Access and Infrastructure projects around Loch Ness.

- 6.2 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

Signature:

Designation:

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

Date: 19 August 2015

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

Colin Marr (Chair), Eden Court Theatre and Cinema

Nicol Manson (Vice Chair), The Waterside Hotel

Dorothy Maclean, The Thistle Hotel

Claire Christie, Morag's Lodge

Joyce Ardbuckle, The Kingmills Hotel

Rosie Wylie, Historic Scotland

Robbie Bremner, Loch Ness Centre & Exhibition

Donald Somerville, Inverness Leisure

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