

BOARD MEETING

6 October 2021, 14:45 – 17:00

Visit Inverness Loch Ness Ltd, Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Visit Inverness Loch Ness Board Present

Joyce Arbuckle	JA	Emmanuel Dambier	ED
David Shayer	DS	Julie Dell	JD
Jo De Sylva - Chair	JDS	Jane Slaughter	JS
Raoul Curtis-Machin	RCM	Helen Carmichael	HC
Debi Mackenzie	DM	Marina Huggett	MH
Cheryl Campbell	CC		

Also present

Michael Golding	MG	VILN CEO
Sharon Mackay	SM	VILN Membership Manager
Jo Page	JP	VILN Digital Communications Manager

Apologies

Jane Slaughter	JS
Helen Carmichael	HC

BUSINESS

AGENDA ITEM 1

1. Welcome and Apologies

JDS welcomed everyone to the Board meeting and thanked retiring board members JA and GB for their contributions. A warm welcome was extended to the new directors appointed at the AGM. The new directors were offered the opportunity to participate in British BID's Director Training and to contact MG to progress.

AGENDA ITEM 2

2. Declaration of Interest

None declared

AGENDA ITEM 3

3. **Visit Inverness Loch Ness Goals and Objectives**

JDS outlined the goals and objectives of the Tourism BID:

1. Ensure that the destination remains competitive with other similar sized destinations both nationally and internationally
2. Continue to grow the value and importance of tourism to the local economy
3. Create confidence in the destination for tourism businesses to invest and create more quality, all year-round jobs
4. Enhance the visitor experience and reputation of the destination
5. Ensure the long-term sustainability of a viable and attractive tourism destination that visitors will value and return to

In order to achieve these goals, the organisation is committed to delivering initiatives, both independently and in collaboration with others, under six key objectives which are as follows:

1. To better market and promote the destination nationally and internationally
2. To undertake initiatives that will improve the tourism infrastructure of the destination, particularly that relating to outdoor activities
3. To promote and support new and existing sustainable events and festivals
4. To grow the value and importance of business tourism to the destination by attracting more conferences and business-related events
5. To provide business development opportunities for member businesses
6. To be a strong lobbying voice on local and national issues that matter to member businesses

The board noted the goals and objectives. There were no further questions or comments.

AGENDA ITEM 4

4. **Approval of Minutes**

The minutes from the board meeting on 16 June 2021 were proposed by DM and approved by RMC.

AGENDA ITEM 5

5. Sub-Groups

DM and RCM gave a little background on the groups they Chair and MG, in JS's absence explained Business Development. JDS asked which group the new directors would like to join. The following was agreed:

- ID - Finance and Governance
- C – Membership
- E – Business Development

It was noted that a review will take place at the Membership Subgroup on the draft Terms of Reference which will then be recommended for approval at the next board meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 6

6. Matters arising

It was noted the complete status of the four matters arising from the previous Board meeting. There were no other matters arising.

AGENDA ITEM 7

7. Finance Report

MG talked the board through the financial report and highlighted the following points:

The full accounts for year ending 31st March 2021 were expected to be circulated with the papers, however due to unexplained variance relating to annual levy income found by MG on Friday 1st of October, this has not been possible. The matter has been raised with Highland Council and Highland Accountancy Practice for urgent clarification. Full accounts will be shared with the board as soon as they are available. To mitigate this risk next year, MG suggested the Finance and Governance subgroup set a deadline for draft accounts completion, prior to approval at the full board in advance of the AGM. Had this been in place there would have been time to resolve the issue and mitigate against the problem that has arisen.

The current bookkeeper is stepping back from Visit Inverness Loch Ness as part of moving towards retirement. A successor was appointed however a letter of resignation was received 10 days prior to the board meeting. A longer-term solution for bookkeeping services will be sourced after the board meeting but MG added that rather than a small book keeper being sought he suggested a larger accountancy practice be appointed.

Directors have previously been made aware of significant challenges with Royal Bank of Scotland accepting a change to authorised signatories on the organisations current account. Due to a combination of outdated directors being listed, lost id's, slow processing, lack of response to complaints and repeated failures with Royal Bank of Scotland this issue has lasted two years. After discussion with the Chair, CEO and team it was agreed that this level of

service was unsustainable and a new bank would be sought. After research HSBC appeared to be the most suitable on price and service, it is planned to setup a new current account at the end of October and transfer service from Royal Bank of Scotland. There has been confirmation by Royal Bank of Scotland that there is authority for the administrator and former CEO to agree to the closure of the account when ready.

The board noted that they are to await clarification before the Approval of the Accounts for Year Ended 31st March 2021

There were no comments on the income and expenditure update

The Board noted the upcoming change in bookkeeper

The Board noted the planned change of bank

AGENDA ITEM 8

8. Business Plan Progress Report

MG talked the board through the business plan progress report which is currently 76% complete, a 5% increase from the previous meeting in May, including repeat actions that have previously been fulfilled, while being half way through the Business Plan period – 30 of 60 months

The board noted the progress of the Business Plan at 76% complete.

The board noted the 10 outstanding Business Plan points

The board noted the aim to reach 88% complete by end of March 2022

MH asked what the plans are to update the Business Plan are. MG explained that we can be agile and fill gaps with grants and that will in part guide the work.

Raoul – sorry Michael had to leave room briefly...

There were no further questions or comments.

AGENDA ITEM 9

9. Performance Report

MG talked the board through the performance report highlighting the following points:

10.1 The Performance Report is included below and following the comments at the previous board meeting there has been an addition of a quarterly as well as monthly summary. This was considered to be more reflective of the overall trends.

10.2 The general department show steady progress in the completion of the business plan. Membership levels are steady and with a slight growth from new businesses starting. Opt-In

membership has grown slightly however there is a normal growth and attrition particularly around annual invoice payment time. Press coverage has been very strong in the previous quarter with a coordinated effort across the team to issue regular releases.

10.3 The marketing department shows the number of businesses listed on the website is steadily growing with the efforts of the team – now at 51% at this month end. Social media followers continue to show strong growth with the efforts of the Digital Engagement Manager, now totalling more than 60k for the first time in our history. There is also consistent growth on the other metrics for social media – note Q3 2020 included paid activity which increased the reach numbers, organic has however continued to have quarterly growth since taking in house.

10.4 The business tourism department has been significantly impacted by the pandemic however the number of meetings, presentation and enquiries is showing an increase with the plan to attend a number of events over the coming months dependant on restrictions.

10.5 The membership department is showing continued growth in total email newsletters issued, through a combination of increasing the percent of members subscribed and consistent at least weekly updates. There have has been a restriction from issuing surveys due to extreme survey fatigue from the large number issued by other organisations. In addition, there has been sufficient data to act as necessary. There is however a plan to issue a quarterly survey in October. Discussions are being held with the Membership Manager to discuss webinars, member events and an October bi-annual letter.

10.6 The infrastructure department now includes responsible tourism following feedback at the last meeting. There are two people counters on the South Loch Ness Trail however colleagues at Highland Council who operate and monitor the counters reported that one had failed in December 2020. However, on the single functioning counter people numbers had increased year on year, around 43% increase May to July 2021 relative to 2020. There is a new inclusion of data from the Loch Ness Ranger that is employed through Highland Council. This began in May 2021, currently the role finishes in October however there are plans to redirect funding from SSE to extend throughout the winter for continued activity.

JDS complimented the layout of the report and wished to pass her congratulations to the team as it has been a difficult period and great progress made

The board noted the performance report.

There were no further questions or comments.

AGENDA ITEM 10

10. Key Projects, Funds and Events

MG talked the board through key projects, funds and events.

To maximise the impact of active and planned projects, a strategy planning meeting took place within the team on Monday 4th of October. The team broke down the existing commitments and unassigned activity between the existing team and expected appointments to ensure there is a clear and achievable plan for delivery.

The Inverness Influencer Lodge first took place in October 2020 with four domestic influencers visiting the destination. The second half of the project was due to take place in September 2021 with a further 12 influencers planned to visit. Project partners VisitScotland were restricted from international marketing and as such the second half of the project has been postponed. An update is being sought from VisitScotland on the timeline for when the project can be delivered.

The Loch Ness Ranger project has developed into two strands

Following a successful application to NatureScot a 6-month Loch Ness Ranger post was in position from May – October 2021 through employment at Highland Council. The role has successfully delivered a range of positive impacts that has been felt by both visitors and communities.

There were plans for a Loch Ness Ranger to be delivered with partners at High Life Highland. Funding was approved for 50k of an 86k project cost, however due to an inability to complete the funding approval has been sought from SSE to redirect approved funding to extend the role through Highland Council. The overall period, outcomes and financial implications are expected to be minimally different to the original application, therefore we do not foresee any opposition from SSE. As the active post finishes at the end of October we are expecting an update in the near future from Highland Council on what the funds would allow us to support, before then seeking approval from SSE.

An application was submitted and approved for the BID Resilience Fund Round 3 for a total of £15k. This will provide two outcomes:

Provision of a high-quality Digital Asset Management system that will act as significantly improved image library for member businesses. It also greatly improves speed of working on image and video related activity. The funding covers the costs until the ballot in March 2024.

It will also provide three months of PR support beginning in October with promotion of the AGM and recent activity. There are plans to trial the relationship before considering the suitability for longer term support.

The HIE DMO Fund has been approved for £296,682 over a three-year period ending at the ballot in March 2024. The funding will provide:

Two full time Destination Development Manager roles, who are tasked with increasing engagement with communities, identify needs led projects and raise funding to deliver solutions. This will improve our wider impact, reputation, visitor experience and return on investment for business members. Interviews are taking place on the two days prior to the board meeting with roles expected to comment in November.

A decreasing contribution towards staff costs over three years, as the organisation and its members recover from the pandemic

A contribution to business development activities such as member events and FAM trips

The Inverness City Recovery Marketing project is progressing well, with outputs including a range of blogs, sky ad, MFR campaign and a further 11 outputs planned over the rest of the financial year. This project is in partnership with Inverness BID and Highland Council, the next

meeting is due to be held in the second week of October to plan the activity remaining in the financial year.

VisitScotland launched a destination marketing fund, Visit Inverness Loch Ness was the only Highland DMO who qualified for the top tier of funding as it includes the city of Inverness. An application was submitted and approved for £80k, the highest of any highland destination. In line with the project guidelines the project will deliver marketing activity from November to March 2022 with three core themes – wellbeing, authentic experiences and workcations. The deliverables for this campaign include:

- Content Creation
- Influencers
- PR & Media
- Social Media Campaigns
- OTA Partner Campaign

The Membership Manager has delivered 30 lamp post banners in Inverness with sponsorship from a number of businesses to extend the campaign. The project received 5k of funding and has been almost matched through sponsorship. This successful activity was also featured in local media.

To build on this success a further application was submitted on the 30th of September to Scotland Town's Partnership – Scotland Loves Local fund. The application included three outcomes:

Extension of the existing banners

Newly installing banners in communities across the destination, which would be owned by Visit Inverness Loch Ness and without ongoing cost aside from basic maintenance. Greatly improving visitor connection with local places, connection with digital assets and general brand awareness

Refreshing the signage on the South Loch Ness Trail that is now 10 years old and in a poor state of repair. In addition to the condition of the signage, there is an opportunity to better connect visits with the businesses in the area, create a digital connection to our website and to increase our brand awareness

The application is for £15k which must be match funded, however this includes staff costs and there is flexibility to adjust quantities and the time period to match the award if successful.

The Projects and Funds Register shows the recently completed, active and forecasted activities. There is a forecasted total of £806,273 in additional revenue, equivalent to 4x one year of annual levy. With the new Destination Development Manager tasked with generating revenue for additional projects, this will continue to demonstrate an effective and impactful return on investment for members.

The board are asked to:

- i. Comment on the update

MH asked about the HIE DMO funding for the 2 new staff and what is the longer term plan? MG explained there are 3 aspects to DMO fund. 1, Fully funded. 2, part funded to cover exciting staff costs so have tapered covering of annual level and this had been built in and we can re channel to marketing and project spending and 3, allocate £4k to business development.

- ii. The Board noted the Projects and Funds update

AGENDA ITEM 11

11. Strategic Discussion Items

MG explain there had been a number of requests from members of the Inverness Hotels Association, who are not levy payers, to be listed on the Visit Inverness Loch Ness website. These hotels were listed on a previous version of the website, due to the enhanced visitor offering and also to create a strong working relationship with Inverness Hotels Association. With the creation of a new website in December 2020 listings for businesses, from a range of sectors that did not pay annual levy were not included onto the new site.

MG explained the range of options from declining the request, accepting the request or considering an agreement that could be formed with IHA:

- Inverness Hotels Association members will be listed on the Visit Inverness Loch Ness website
- In return the association members will support hosting and providing business events and influencers which benefit the city and the destination
- This agreement will not provide access to any of the other membership benefits

Benefits would include an improved visitor offering, improved ability to market the destination for business tourism, improved relationship with Inverness Hotels Association. While this is not financial there is a commitment to a mutually beneficial added value. If providing a positive response, an agreement such as this would be recommended to prevent the risk of “opening a flood gate” of non-paying businesses seeking a listing on the website.

Any proposed agreement would need to be approved by the Inverness Hotels Association and their Chair has been informed about the intention to raise this item for discussion at the board meeting.

Areas of potential concern include the principal of listing any business not paying an annual levy or opt in membership. There may be requests from other such organisations. Members may not approve of such a position.

It should also be considered whether any agreement should be time bound, for example in line with the next ballot in March 2024.

A meeting has been requested with the Chair and Manager of Inverness BID. The meeting is suggested to focus on two priorities

Overcoming the boundary line between the organisations that is detrimental to the visitor experience, businesses and operation function of the city. The Inverness City Marketing Project provides a temporary solution however with Inverness BID going to ballot in March 2023 there is an opportunity for a more structural solution.

Seeking efficiencies and opportunities for partnership and closer ongoing working

The board are invited to discuss the position and any priorities that should be included in this meeting. The total duration of the initial meeting is expected to be around 1 hour; therefore, it is recommended the agenda be concise to be effective.

Due to additional funding being received there is a surplus of unallocated funds in order to reach the agreed reserves of £50k at the end of the 2021 – 2022 financial year. An update on the unallocated balance and items for discussion will be presented at the meeting.

The board are asked to:

- i. Comment on the request from Inverness Hotels Association
Hotels association

Debi – does VILN have direct correlation for events or just a choice of options

MG – independent assoc ina/marina suggested

Marina – what numbers of hotels not part of VILN – roughly 6

Sharon – confirmed 6 and named them

INA – part of agenda at last meeting for IHA – initial general feeling businesses paying into BID – partnership of 2 BIDS.

AL – why not opt in members

SM – to provide list of what that cost would be

MG – hotels listed website only and not other benefits

INA – owners point of view hard to pay for 2 BIDS

MG – wider strategic discussion – better serve values of inv city BID – ballot march 2023

David shayer – current client base – private business smaller businesses – difference of opinion B&B worried about hotels coming in

Marina – fine balancing act – very careful not to disengage levy paying members – lots of consternation of overcapacity esp over winter months – clearly outline pros and cons – members see bid as marketing –

DS – members that have no choice

MG – suggested conservative position right now – not able to list at moment, strategic work in place and further discussion, proactivity doing something about it

JD – what do city bid offer? Are they not being listed?

MG – we are tourism and city BID different remit – we have more focus marketing

INA – asked opinion – city BID more infrastructure based

DS – shows sign of VILM success people wanting to be involved

JDS – new website superior, why people are attracted

MG – holding answer – research – broader scale BIDS – leverage discussion and more satisfaction deal – members clear on what getting

JDS – discuss at section 12.2

MG – explained joint meeting of 2 BIDS

INA – suggest go back to hotels wanting to join and ask more information on what those wanting to join would be looking for from VILN

MG we will send useful info for that discussion

DS- happy to work with BID – what do we get back?

MG – general relationship/ good communications / city marketing project went well and good partnership, financial benefit and marketing benefits
 DS – do our members go on their website, anything ack from BID
 MG – we are putting general listings – not businesses – unless opt in – we have pages and links on city website (need to check that) collaborative Map idea
 DS – no boundary line – discounts and member benefits idea
 MG – take points forward to inv BID
 JDS – any points to take to joint meeting?
 No comments – JDS to said send after if think of anything

ii. Comment on the meeting with Inverness BID
 DS asked what the benefits we get from City BID are. MG said there are financial and marketing benefits and a relationship benefit.

iii. Comment on the unallocated funds

Need to take this to the next Finance and Governance meeting as to how best to spend these unallocated funds.

AGENDA ITEM 12

12. HR

The team meets weekly on a Monday afternoon to discuss work progress, provide updates and resolve matters. A further social call takes place on a Friday to ensure the team maintain positive mental health. In addition, flexibility of working hours is offered where possible to support a positive work life balance.

13.2 An update has been received from Forestry and Land Scotland, as the landlord, to say that they will be providing a phased return for their staff at a maximum capacity of 30%, however Visit Inverness Loch Ness will not have any access until January 2022. This is subject to change depending on guidance and there is not yet an indication of the expected office capacity. There is no financial impact as rent is not being charged until access is provided, in addition, operationally the team have managed for 18 months from home. However, it is socially challenging and there are plans for a physical full team meeting to take place later in October, then a further meeting following the appointment of new staff later in the year. JDS suggested the office capacity to be kept under review. MG suggested the Finance and Governance group look at a contingency plan for alternative office space.

The board noted the HR update

AGENDA ITEM 13

13. General

MG highlighted the following points:

General

- A meeting took place to define the purpose of the Loch Ness Tourism Strategy. The CEO facilitated a one-hour meeting with key stakeholders and will share a draft summary of the conversation to form the purpose of the strategy. This will then allow a specific delivery plan to be formed.
- Visit Inverness Loch Ness is involved in the River Ness Hydro project, led by Highland Council and SSE, it will be a renewable energy source and a STEM education centre. There will also be the chance for visitors to interact with the facility. Visit Inverness Loch Ness is working with Highland Council and Brian Beattie – Creative Director of the Inverness Castle Project, on the visitor information provision at the site.
- Visit Inverness Loch Ness has been invited to provide a video for the upcoming Highland Climate Change Conference. The video will summarise some of the sustainable actions and plans of the organisation. In addition, with the recruitment of two new posts there will be additional resource to work on this agenda in the future.
- There are meetings taking place with Trees for Life, a rewilding charity based in the destination, with the aim to work together on both the organisations carbon offset plans, but also to promote the opportunities to the tourism sector. This is hoped to form part of a wider sustainability plan.
- 14.5 There remains plans to install live cameras across the destination which would stream on the Visit Inverness Loch Ness website. This would better connect visitors with the destination and also promote year-round visibility of the weather and seasons. There is interest from a number of businesses however the progress was held until a response was received from Historic Environment Scotland about Urquhart Castle. It is understood this is being raised centrally within their organisation to review a broader approach to live cameras, including our enquiry. It is hoped a response will be received in October and conversation will restart with other sites following the conclusion of the peak season.
- 14.6 The team are working with Inverness Outlanders to strengthen digital ties, on the website and social media, as well as investigate a potential event in 2022. The plans are well formed but at the early stages yet and the board will be updated as both items progress.
- 14.7 The CEO presented an annual update to the City of Inverness Area Committee, the update was well received and well viewed, with around a dozen comments received in the week following.
- 14.8 A presentation was given to a cohort of Norwegian and Swedish local authorities who are hoping to begin a coordinated range of BID's, with tourism being an important part. There is the potential for the attendees at the meeting to visit our destination and find out more when travel permits. .

The board noted the general updates.

The following comments were made:

RAOUL – trees for life – queried new visitor centre what are plans

Marina – sustainability – KOP 26– clear statement to what our plans are and what we are encouraging our businesses to do. MG explained draft strategy and above bus plan activity – bigger pic view for board to discuss. Suggested ongoing meeting point – make part of new role in taking it forward.

AL made an observation that as a business they have put in green strategy things – blog for the traveller to travel sustainability

MG discussed water fountain points – pushing this part fill up your bottle plan – starter project for new staff

JDS – sustainable visitor idea – how to be good traveller signs

MG – agreed good idea as did marina – new post to take that on

DS – social contradictory message – server issue –

MG – look at this point and feedback – solar panels idea

Roaul – visitors travelling un sustainably – visitors paying a voluntary levy

MG – effective solution and possible –

JDS – laphroig example – visitor reason to come back to see their tree

AGENDA ITEM 14

14. AOB

JDS asked if the BID levy could be paid by direct debit. MG explained history that that wasn't encouraged in the past but would revisit the question with HC if the Board agreed which they did.

AL asked if we could as an organisation lobby for the lower tax rate to continue as is the case with UK Hospitality. MG to speak with STA and look at doing locally

Networking event – after some discussion about a blended networking event, virtual or face to face it was agreed we should try a face to face event before Christmas.

Newsletter – DS asked could it be more visual and less text

DS More use of QR codes for use in marketing where all members could be on a scannable map – Google maps to make it easy to click and go. JDS suggested to put this in the newsletter MG added there could be smaller sector focussed posts with QR codes and happy to look at combining this with our itinerary's and possible sector groupings.

MG noted all comments

AGENDA ITEM 15

15. Meeting Review

16.1 To conclude the meeting the board are invited to comment:

- What went well about today's meeting?
- What could be better at the next meeting?

JDS asked the new directors Cheryl – straight forward, pace and pre information, interesting, good opportunity to speak Emmanuel – clear and interesting and would like to take on training for directors.

NEXT BOARD MEETING

Date

8th December 2021

Venue

Remote through Microsoft Teams

NEXT BOARD MEETING

Date – 8th September 2021

Venue – Virtual via Microsoft Teams