

BOARD MEETING

25th October 2023, 13.00 – 15.30

Visit Inverness Loch Ness Ltd,

Hybrid Meeting Lovat Hotel and via Microsoft Teams

Visit Inverness Loch Ness Board Present

David Shayer	DS	Caroline Gregory	CG
Cllr Ian Brown	IB	Anna Low	AL
Jo De Sylva - Chair	JDS	Cheryl Campbell	CC
Ina Davies	ID	Jane Slaughter	JS
Russell Fraser	RF		

Apologies

Emmanuel Dambier	ED	Rebecca Holt	RH
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Also present

Don Johnstone	DJ	VILN CEO	
Sabine MacDonald	SM	VILN Administrator	

BUSINESS

AGENDA ITEM 1

1. Welcome and Apologies

JDS welcomed everyone to the board meeting and welcomed newly appointed VILN CEO Don Johnstone.

AGENDA ITEM 2

2. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

AGENDA ITEM 3

3. Visit Inverness Loch Ness Goals and Objectives

JDS outlined the goals and objectives of the Tourism BID.

The board noted the goals, objectives, purpose and competition law.

AGENDA ITEM 4

4. Director Business Updates

Directors were asked to provide a one-minute update on their business performance, as well as where relevant that of their sector. This will provide the board members with a picture of the wider business climate and inform the management team.

The following were highlighted in the updates:

- Revenue and occupancy up
- Bookings up for November and December
- Staffing still challenging, especially experienced staff
- Businesses considering or already have applied for a sponsorship licence to recruit from abroad, but it comes at a cost
- VILN renewal ballot consultations have been an opportunity to get to know other businesses
- Bookings strong for 2024
- More bookings closer to the time of travel
- Short term lets licensing a challenge for many businesses
- Many businesses closing due to challenges like STL, stress and poor health – also many older B&B owners retiring, leading to loss of accommodation options
- Noticeable increase in the US market and outdoor activities market
- Increase in visitors commenting on the good air quality
- Airport passenger numbers close to 2019 figures, expansion in car hire providers, retail and catering
- Mondays a lot busier than previously
- Highland culture and dinner experiences popular with groups
- Concern about pricing in Inverness possibly leading to a reputation as an expensive destination
- Challenges for small businesses including STL licensing, VAT rate, staffing and a possible visitor levy leading to extra admin

AGENDA ITEM 5

5. Matters arising

5.1 Board

Rebecca Holt has requested a 6-month sabbatical due to unforeseen pressures from work and life events.

The board agreed to grant a 6 month sabbatical.

It was agreed that Gail Cleaver would be appointed as an Advisor to the Board until March 2024, with a view to her applying for a director's position when advertised later this year. Gail has accepted this appointment and was invited to the board meeting, but unable to attend.

The board noted the complete status of the matter arising at the last board meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 6

6. Items for Strategic Discussion by the Board

6.1 Ballot – March 2024

As agreed by the board a ballot preparations update will be provided at all meetings.

DJ updated the board on the following key aspects:

Timeline and delivery management

- Project and activity continue to meet the timeline in the plan, however it has been identified that some of the deadline dates were mis-entered and information is/was due sooner than expected. To date all these earlier deadlines have been met.
- All information has been provided to Douglas Chisholm (Highland Council) to allow him to submit his report to the E&I Committee. He has fed back that our processes and plans are compliant, and they have no reason to object to our business proposal.
- A draft business plan needs to be submitted by end of day on 27th October to David Haas (Highland Council) for preparation of the report which goes to Inverness City Chamber. This is in hand.

Sectors, rateable value, and change management.

- Proposed alterations to levy amounts, bands and sectors.
- Including the UHI and Caledonian Thistle football ground has been flagged up as possibly problematic, the board agreed not to include these in the TBID.

Headline event

- Pre-Ballot event to be held at Aldourie Castle on 22nd February 2024. This is an alteration to the venue given in the Next Steps document and will be communicated to members.

Admin and consultation

- To date 98 qualifying consultations have taken place (81 one to ones, plus 17 additional from member events). This falls short of the reported requirement for 50%, but the team and directors continue to work on it.

6.2 Administrative Processes, Project Planning & Data/Information Management

The CEO has already started a review of VILN's approach to administrative processes, project planning, general management and recording of activities and data/information with a view to making VILN more efficient, and to remove some areas of risk where we are heavily reliant on 'asking someone' when looking for information.

6.3 Members Communication Strategy

Following on from our Members Networking Events and Business Feedback around the consultations, some suggestions have been put forward for how VILN communicate with members, plan networking events etc. There was an acceptance from the members in attendance that they could do better and have a part to play. This information will form the basis of a strategic review which the CEO will conduct with the team in due course.

RF enquired whether more sectors or areas were going to be included in the TBID, such as Muir of Ord.

DJ explained that this was not planned for this ballot but considered for the next ballot.

Several directors suggested using other means of communication with members, such as a What's App group or Facebook community chat.

DJ answered that this will be considered subject to directors or sector ambassadors coming forward to assist with this.

There were no further comments.

The board approved the proposed alterations to levy amounts, bands and sectors.

AGENDA ITEM 7

7. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes from the board meeting held on the 31st May 2023 were approved by JS and seconded by ID.

AGENDA ITEM 8

8. Finance Report

DJ talked the board through the finance report and highlighted the following:

- Accounts for yearend 2022/23 have been supplied by the accountant for signing.
- As per the management accounts for 2023/24, there is a projected yearend deficit of £10.5k. The reasons for this will be reported in full at the next board meeting once the CEO has had the opportunity to identify the reasons.
- Payment of the work from home allowance has been discontinued.
- Payment of the telephone allowance remains in place. At present we have no alternative means (office phone/s) available for staff to make calls and VILN rely on staff use of personal phones.
- There were some anomalies in the claiming of expenses, mostly around what constituted 'work related travel'. These have been addressed.

The board noted the projected year-end outturn of -£10.5k

The board signed the annual accounts for 2022/23.

AGENDA ITEM 9

9. Performance Report

DJ highlighted issues with the current performance report spreadsheet, which mean that the CEO has been unable to provide the overview table which has been provided previously and there has not yet been time to investigate/fix the problems.

However, the CEO is comfortable that VILN continue to perform well against all KPI's.

There were no questions or comments.

AGENDA ITEM 10

10. Key Projects, Funds and Events

DJ updated the board on key projects, funds and events.

The board noted the projects and funds update.

DS suggested to also include traditional music events as well as food & drink.

DJ explained that there are plans to work with Inverness City BID on these types of events going forward.

Directors also commented that member businesses will appreciate the opportunity to sponsor events such as Shortbread Showdown and restaurant week.

There were no further questions or comments.

AGENDA ITEM 11

11. Sustainability

The CEO informed the board that reporting of activities/responsibilities in this area have fallen off since the departure of Bryony.

It is the CEO's intention to perform a full review of VILN's activity in this regard, and how we might better capture information from our member businesses.

VILN will also be looking to sign up and work with one of the globally recognised organisations in this field so that we can better recognise and share the great work being done by member businesses in the wider area of responsible/regenerative tourism.

Such a partnership would also provide us with access to knowledge, experience and tools to allow us to further develop the assistance we provide to members.

The board noted the Sustainability update.

There were no questions or comments.

AGENDA ITEM 12

12. General Updates

The board noted the general updates.

Alternative sites suggested for live cameras were RNLi Loch Ness subject to Wifi being available, Aldourie Castle and Dundreggan Centre for wildlife cameras.

There were no further questions or comments.

AGENDA ITEM 13

13. AOB

CG pointed out that the food and drink section on the website could be improved.

DJ explained that Jo is aware and this is in progress – also looking at assistance from UHI or HIE.

CG also suggested entering the new food and drink video into a marketing award.

There were no further questions or comments.

AGENDA ITEM 14

14. Meeting Review

NEXT BOARD MEETING

Date	Venue
17th January 2024	TBC