

BOARD MEETING

31st January 2024, 13.00 – 15.30

Visit Inverness Loch Ness Ltd,

Online via Microsoft Teams

Visit Inverness Loch Ness Board Present

Ina Davies – Vice Chair	ID	Gail Cleaver	GC
Cheryl Campbell	CC	Tony Story	TS
Jane Slaughter	JS		

Apologies

Emmanuel Dambier	ED	Rebecca Holt	RH
David Shayer	DS	Caroline Gregory	CG
Cllr Ian Brown	IB		

Also present

Don Johnstone	DJ	VILN CEO	
Sabine MacDonald	SM	VILN Administrator	

BUSINESS

AGENDA ITEM 1

1. Welcome and Apologies

DJ welcomed everyone to the board meeting and welcomed newly appointed directors Gail Cleaver and Tony Story.

Until a new Chair is appointed, DJ will take the board through the items on the agenda.

AGENDA ITEM 2

2. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

AGENDA ITEM 3

3. Visit Inverness Loch Ness Goals and Objectives

DJ 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 growth and increased occupancy
- Rising costs a challenge
- First quarter has been challenging, but optimism for the summer
- Extending the season remains a challenge
- Loss of Loganair routes at Inverness Airport
- Summer numbers looking strong
- Plans to introduce new technology at Inverness Airport to scan luggage, so passengers can leave electronics in their bags
- Recruitment still a challenge
- Increased costs for businesses, especially wages and utilities
- Increased demand from groups
- Bookings are looking good for the year ahead and into 2025
- Still many challenges for self catering businesses, especially STL licensing – new businesses having to wait for a licence

AGENDA ITEM 5

5. Matters arising

5.1 Board

DJ highlighted the following updates –

- Resignation of Russell Fraser & Anna Low as Directors
- Resignation of Jo De Sylva as Chair and Director

Appointment of a new Chair

Due to the number of apologies received, the board decided to postpone the appointment of a new Chair and hold a follow-up meeting to discuss the position of Chair. DJ to send out possible dates for this meeting to choose a date when a majority of directors can attend.

DJ also asked directors to consider appointing a company secretary.

The board noted the matters arising.

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
 - All responsibilities of VILN have been completed on time, and to the satisfaction of the Highland Council's Election Team.
 - Ballot notices were sent to all Eligible Voters, by post, on 18th January 2024
 - Ballot packs, including voting papers, were sent to all Eligible Voters on 25th January 2024
- Headline event
 - Final details are being added to the Pre-Ballot event to be held at Aldourie Castle on 22nd February 2024. Information on how to attend will be sent to members in the next few days.
- Further pre-ballot activity

- Ten drop-in sessions have been scheduled around the VILN area which will be attended by the CEO to provide members the opportunity to discuss anything they feel pertinent ahead of the ballot.
- The VILN Team will be reaching out to eligible voters by phone to ensure they have received their papers, and to encourage them to vote. Any assistance from Directors on this would be appreciated.

The board noted the above update.

6.2 Loch Kemp Hydro Scheme

DJ informed the board that VILN have been approached by Brian Shaw of the Ness District Salmon Fishery Board to highlight concerns over proposals for the Loch Kemp Hydro Power Scheme. We have also been asked by two members for a view on the proposals.

A meeting is planned with Brian Shaw to discuss their objections. As they are due to begin a public campaign under the banner of “Save Loch Ness” on week commencing 5th February 2024, it is likely that VILN/directors will be approached for comment. Until such time as we can gather sufficient information and consult with our membership, then our position will remain one of neutrality.

The board agreed to consult members in a member survey.

There were no further comments.

6.3 Affric & Loch Ness National Park Proposal

An application has been made for the formation of the above named National Park. The proposed area overlaps part of the area we represent to the North West, which is largely unpopulated, and despite the name it only butts up against a short section of the northern shore of the loch. To date, there has been no communication between VILN and those proposing the National Park.

DJ will reach out to the proposers for discussion on this. Our position on the application will remain neutral until we can gather further information and feedback from any members who it may impact, however we should object to the inclusion of ‘Loch Ness’ in the title of the park as this could cause confusion.

The board discussed the proposal and several directors highlighted the benefits and opportunities it would bring to the area.

JS advised caution as some local businesses had voiced strong opposition to the plans.

The board agreed that fact finding would be essential and members should be consulted to establish their views.

There were no further comments.

AGENDA ITEM 7

7. Confirmation of Minutes

This was carried across to the next meeting to give all directors time to read the minutes of the previous meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 8

8. Finance Report

DJ talked the board through the finance report.

The board noted the finance report.

There were no questions or comments.

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.

ID highlighted the importance of KPI's. DJ will share the current KPI's with the board for comments.

There were no further questions.

AGENDA ITEM 10

10. Key Projects, Funds and Events

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

- The 'Food & Drink Fortnight' is currently running from 29th Jan to 11th Feb 2024 and is being run in partnership with Inverness City Centre BID.
- Funding has been secured to allow VILN to employ a part-time Active Travel Officer. Recruitment is underway and the post will commence from 31st March 2023. The

primary focus for this position will be gap analysis and seeking opportunities for promotion and expansion of Active Travel Activities across the area.

- The Highland Shortbread Showdown 2024 Final will be held on 17th March 2024. We have seen an increase in the number of areas signing up to take part in this event, which highlights it's continued popularity.
- The board were asked to encourage participation in, and attendance of events.

The board noted the projects and funds update.

There were no further questions or comments.

AGENDA ITEM 11

11. Sustainability

DJ updates the board and highlighted the following:

- A funding application is sitting with SSE for circa £230,000 over 3 years to fund a full responsible tourism benchmarking, gap analysis and improvement programme across the area. This will include all aspects of responsible tourism, which includes carbon footprint, accessibility, inclusivity, social and economic impact.

The board noted the Sustainability update.

There were no questions or comments.

AGENDA ITEM 12

12. General Updates

DJ explained that the main focus for the team over the last 3 months has been the ballot and member consultations, which has allowed for little more than BAU activity.

The board noted the general updates.

There were no further questions or comments.

AGENDA ITEM 13

13. AOB

GC highlighted that the proposed date for the next board meeting will clash with Scottish Golf Tourism week and suggested to set an alternative date to allow as many directors as possible to attend.

The board agreed that the next board meeting should be on 27th March and should be a hybrid style meeting.

There were no further questions or comments.

AGENDA ITEM 14

14. Meeting Review

NEXT BOARD MEETING

Date

27th March 2024

Venue

Culloden Visitor Centre (Robertson Room)