

Visit Inverness Loch Ness Ltd AGM 2019

Chairman's Report

Another busy but successful year for VILN not least because of course in March we went to re-ballot. The result was 115 in favour, 43 against on 45% turnout -much the same as in 2014 (123 in favour, 29 against) and strong mandate by members for the continued work of VILN. We are still the only Tourism BID in Scotland but more destinations are now following our lead – Moray Speyside goes to ballot in December as does Tweed Valley in the Borders.

Marketing:

2018-2019 was the final year of the 4 year Visit Britain campaign. It has been of immense success and importance to the destination – and remember the £2M fund for Visit Britain to market the destination in key international markets, particularly in the shoulder months, only came to VILN back in 2015 because we were and are a BID, and not a voluntary membership organisation

Some key statistics for the campaign: over the 4 years it resulted in 479K visits to the Inverness & Loch Ness pages on the Visit Britain website, 288 million online impressions (references to Inverness and Loch Ness) 115K competition entries and 6.7 million completed video views.

Legacy: 1) the superb photographic assets which are available for members to use and which Visit Britain continue to use themselves to promote the UK tourism product word wide eg. campervan image taken in Strathfarrar 2) the contacts that VILN have established with Visit Britain PR teams worldwide as well as influencers and bloggers

The legacy is particularly useful to us this year with our new influencer project which aims to spread visitors more throughout the destination and away from the honey pots, highlighting hidden gems. The project has been made possible with the award through the Visit Scotland Growth Fund of £21,500 for this project.

Over the past year we have also of course invested in the new visitinvernesslochness.com website, launched in October 2018, the previous site no longer fit for purpose. Much more content and image led, in August 2019 it received 44,500 unique sessions. We have also developed and launched the new Loch Ness 360 website which, although it is early days for, is seeing a steady growth in visits too, particularly now that we have launched the new Loch Ness 360 Challenge event as of last week.

And, we have continued to continued investment in social media which through much more targeted content and engagement is growing steadily - Facebook 33.5K likes, 2K twitter followers and our real star performer Instagram 4K followers – In August there were 127,359 impressions on 17 posts – 24,000 more than our previous record set in May.

Access & Infrastructure

Following launch of completed South Loch Ness Trail last August, the past year activity has centred on taking forward the development and marketing of the LochNess360°. To date this has entailed 'on the ground' updating signage on the SLNT, the installation of more way markers, 2 footfall counters and most recently further improvements to the quality of the trail at Dores. And with regards to marketing, development of the LochNess360 website, attendance and promotion of the trail at EXPO and most importantly development of a map for users of the trail.

Events & Festivals

Due to the uncertainty around re-ballot this year, we took the decision not to sponsor the Etape Loch Ness for a fourth year. However, as you are aware from the recent PR we will in May 2020 stage the first LochNess360 Challenge with SSE as the main sponsor. Their support is fantastic and we are confident that with it the event will grow to become another iconic event for the area, like the Etape and Marathon.

Business Tourism

Another busy year for Alan selling our destination worldwide. In October 2018 he once again attended IMEX America, the largest industry event of the year. Our presence there was influential in securing 2 incentive programmes for the area, in May 2019 Interopa , September Spectra, and of course the Bachelorette US reality TV show.

In November 2018 VILN were in China for Destination Britain China. Our first time, Alan had over 100 pre-scheduled meetings with tour operators from China and Hong Kong. Still a new destination for us but a massive new market of which we are only 'scratching the surface of'. We are returning again this November with Visit Scotland.

In June this year Alan was at M&I Forum Europe in Croatia. This was an intense 4 day tradeshow which focusing solely on MICE business with buyers from traditional and emerging markets. The events included pre-scheduled meetings with pre-qualified and matched buyers. This is the second time we have attended an M&I Event, the first being the one held in Edinburgh in 2015. 160 suppliers and 150 UK & European buyers attended the Forum. All 1-2-1 meetings are pre-qualified in that we have the options to select buyers we would like to meet and similarly, buyers have the option to select suppliers they would like to meet.

Business Development

Sadly the DTS programme finally came to an end in April this year. A great programme which approximately 100 VILN member business have been able to benefit from. With its end we are no longer facilitating any courses but are directing those looking for courses to the excellent Business Gateway Digital Boost.

Advocacy

We continue to work closely with Highland Council, HIE, Forestry & Land, Inverness Hotels Association, Visit Scotland and the Scottish Tourism Alliance.

VILN have also spoken up for the area on key issues and challenges for tourism over the past year - skills shortage, labour availability, infrastructure, the impact of campervans and most importantly on the issue of the possible introduction of some form of transient tax, submitting the views of members to Highland Council, and the Scottish Government through the STA.

