



The Sutherland Partnership
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**MINUTE OF THE SUTHERLAND PARTNERSHIP TOURISM FORUM MEETING OF
FRIDAY 3 OCTOBER 2008, AT 1400 IN THE COMMUNITY CENTRE, DURNESS.**

PRESENT:

REPRESENTING

Durrant Macleod	North Highland Tourism (Trade Member)(Chair)
William Sutherland	Sutherland Partnership (Secretary)
Gordon Ireland	Highland Council Tourism
Ronnie Lansley	CVS North
Scott Armstrong	VisitScotland
Anne Sutherland	Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Elaine Lewis	Ben Loyal Hotel (Trade Member)
June McAuliffe	Falls of Shin Visitor Centre (Trade Member)
Evelyn Mackay	Geopark
Donald Mitchell	Highland Council Ranger
Irene Macleod	Springboard Scotland
Roger Glover	Assynt Tourism Gp/Cathair Dhubh Self-catering (Trade Member)
Kenny Graham	RSPB Scotland
David Inglis	Highland Council Licensing Standards Officer (to item 5)
Sally Dowden	Wild Scotland
Joan Campbell	North Highland College

1. Introduction and Apologies.

Durrant Macleod, chairman, welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly our speakers, David Inglis, Sally Dowden and (former SPTF chair) Joan Campbell. He also warmly welcomed back Scott Armstrong, after a two-year break, as VisitScotland representative.

Apologies received from: Colin Simpson (HC Tourism); Eilidh Smith (RSPB); Alison MacWilliam (North Highland College), Nick Lindsay (HC); Phil Tomalin (HC Ward Manager ES&E), Bruce Taylor (Highland Wildcat); Ian Mitchell (SNH); Fiona Mackenzie (Geopark); Neil McInnes (FC(S)); Cllr Linda Munro; Cllr Jim McGillivray; Frances Gunn (CVS North); Nicola Smith (Timespan); Andy Summers (HC Ranger); Andy Mackay (HC Ward Manager NW&C S).

2. Approval of Minutes of Meeting of 10 June 2008. The minutes of the meeting of 10 June 2008 were proposed by Ronnie Lansley, seconded by Irene Macleod, and approved.

3. Matters Arising.

North Highland Connections. William Sutherland, having reported his recent contact with Dr Graham Elliott, Executive Director of North Highland Connections, was tasked with renewing with him the ideas of an Environmental Festival and a "Great Railway Journey." **Action: WS**

Motor Fuel Prices. Assynt Tourist Group and Falls of Shin representatives expressed concern that the high price of motor fuel appeared to have adversely affected numbers of private car tourists coming here. **Action: All to monitor.**

Phoneboxes. William reported a Sutherland Partnership success in the matter of phoneboxes: HC had vetoed the great majority of those which BT had wished to close and remove, and many of the

community comments which had prompted the veto had come through Sutherland Partnership/VGES SurveyMonkey questionnaire responses. Group members had heard, though, that BT had gone through the “small print” and now proposed to remove the equipment, leaving only the box itself. William to investigate.

Action: WS

[pmn. This is a misunderstanding. Boxes whose removal has been vetoed by HC will retain their phones. But in some cases where the phone has been authorised for removal, the box itself may be allowed to remain, for decorative purposes. No further action?]

LEADER Update. William updated the Forum on progress towards implementing the new LEADER funding stream in Sutherland, with SP providing the local grant decision-making body, the Local Area Partnership (LAP). He will give further updates at future SPTF meetings as appropriate.

4. Chairman’s Remarks.

A transcript of these is at Annex A.

5. Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 – Guidance on Revised Procedures.

Mr David Inglis, Licensing Standards Officer, briefed on the new legislation. Key points were:

- Alcohol sales licenses will be renewed on a rolling basis, according to when the existing licence expires.
- New arrangements are inevitably complex, but there is lots of flexibility reference individual small operators’ plans. Mr Inglis can advise.
- Important to get applications right first time. Mr Inglis can advise, preferably before application made.
- Types of licence:
 - Personal (cost £50 – plus training costs of around £130 – lasts for 10 years.)
Supplemented by occasional licence applications, this type of licence may suit village halls (limit of 56 days per annum.)
 - Premises (likely cost around £200 per annum, compared with £75 for three years under former arrangements.)
- New charging arrangements are designed to ensure that administration is cost-neutral and that the taxpayer does not subsidise.
- Mr Inglis’s duties include checking compliance with the law. Penalties for infractions likely to be severe.

In ensuing question-and-answer session, the following points were discussed:

- Complaint about slowness of new administration procedures – strict deadlines for applicants, but very slow reaction from licensing authorities. Response: avenue for complaints is the local licensing forum (none here – based in Inverness.) Federation of Small Businesses also lobbying on this issue.
 - Comment on unsuitability of new, complex procedures for small operators such as B+Bs. Response: architects’ drawings of premises not essential – line drawings may suffice; using a personal licence, in conjunction with occasional licence, may suit small B+B operators better than premises licence. Mr Inglis available to advise.
 - Bring your own bottle arrangements permissible for village hall events.
 - With reference to children in licensed premises, licensee has considerable discretion, with cases being considered individually. Even previous Act’s requirement for under-14s to be out by 8 p.m. may not apply in some cases.
 - A group like SPTF is permitted to lobby the Licensing Forum. Mr Inglis will send William Sutherland their contact details.
- Action: Mr Inglis**
[pmn: Done. Licensing Forum member contact details distributed with these draft minutes]
- Springboard Scotland is considering setting up as a licensing training organisation.

The chairman thanked Mr Inglis for his clear talk, helpful responses to questions, and his evident willingness to advise tourism trade operators as necessary. His contact details are:

Chief Executive's Office
Market Square
Wick
KW1 4AB Telephone 01955 607774

Mr Inglis then departed.

6. Wildlife Tourism – “Wild Scotland” Study.

Sally Dowden talked to the group on this subject. Her organisation, Wild Scotland, has been engaged by North Highland Tourism to study and report on this topic. Key points:

- Wild Scotland is a membership organisation with 170 members, individual and corporate;
- It is a lobbying group as well a source of specialist expertise;
- NHT has engaged Wild Scotland to investigate the commercial potential of wildlife tourism;
- Investigation in progress – next stage will be workshops on 20, 21, 22 October – Sally sought suggestions as to likely invitees;
- VisitScotland research already suggests that although wildlife is not the main attraction for most tourists, it is a HUGE supporting attraction;
- HC Rangers an important service provider for wildlife tourism – and although their existence may inhibit setup of commercial wildlife tourism businesses, they greatly assist B+Bs etc by providing attractive activities for visitors (as well as locals);
- Caithness and Sutherland contain 25% of Scotland’s special bird protection areas;
- Sutherland needs more bird hides (possible objective of future SP Biodiversity projects?);
- Better publicity of short-term tourism events needed – e.g. chalkboards in TICs?

7. VisitScotland Report.

Scott Armstrong gave the VisitScotland report. Main points as follows:

- Tourist Information Centres have been rebranded “Visitor Information Centres” – VICs;
- This season, VIC visitor numbers are down 10% overall (2 VICs up, 14 down);
- New season marketing advertisement imminent;
- Two important new VisitScotland recruits are Sarah Grant and Alex Johnston – the latter being the replacement for Robin Murray. Scott will continue as the VisitScotland representative on SPTF, however;
- The VisitScotland Challenge Fund replacement funding stream is likely to have an intervention rate of 40%;
- Joan Campbell drew attention to the tourism-supporting potential of the events in the “Scottish Year of Homecoming” programme.

8. North Highland College Expansion.

Joan Campbell, welcomed back as a new part-time North Highland College (NHC) officer, briefed on recent developments in planning for the Burghfield Hotel project which will greatly enhance the Dornoch campus. Key points:

- NHC has won funding to design and deliver a 3-year UHI Tourism & Hospitality Management BA Degree to be based at the Dornoch Campus and rooted in the Highlands and Islands.
- Programme Leader is Cameron Taylor of Seabridge, with Joan Campbell as Assistant Programme Leader. Both tasked with designing and delivering their outcomes to the UHIMI.
- The degree will be academically rigorous but is intended to have a strong practical element and critical understanding of the industry with total commitment to excellence in customer service.
- Input from the trade is welcome. Hope to ensure interaction sufficient to allow pride of ownership to all allowing the industry to benefit from fully committed and qualified entrants grounded in the need for a full working knowledge in how to deliver quality and satisfy visitor needs.
- Aim is to start new course contemporaneously with opening of new campus – ideally September 2009;
- Course will include placements with the trade, as well as work in the new Dornoch Burghfield campus (which includes a training hotel)

- Close linkage with "Empowerment in the Community" programme also being run by NHC (based in Dornoch, but with training also taking place at remote sites.)

9. Geopark Update.

Evelyn Mackay, Assistant Geopark Officer, briefed on recent exciting developments in the Geopark. Main points:

- Staff effort has quadrupled – previously one part-time post (0.5FTE) now two full-time (Geopark Officer and Assistant Geopark Officer);
- Aim to be a positive force in the area, using geology as a springboard to support community involvement, economic development – and tourism;
- Work on a new Development and Action Plan is well advanced. Geopark Steering Group will consider this document at its last meeting of 2008;
- The above Plan is doubly Important: needs to persuade potential funding organisations to contribute to a new three-year funding round 2009-12, and also to help secure renewed membership of the European Geopark Network (currently have a “yellow card”, principally on grounds of future financial uncertainty.)

10. Other Members' Updates / Any Other Business.

The following points were raised:

- Gordon Ireland announced that Smyril Line will be running their Scrabster to Scandinavia service again in 2009;
- Springboard participated in the Caithness Regeneration Conference;
- Falls of Shin Visitor Centre is applying for Forestry Commission (Scotland) challenge funding to help fund their planned cycle trails project. June requested a letter of SPTF support for this project, to help make the case for this FC(S) funding [*pmn – letter of support written and sent*];
- RSPB Centre at Forsinard has recently received a substantial update and facelift.
- Joan Campbell notified of recent action by the Federation of Small Businesses on two items: fire regulations and performance rights for music. A summary of Joan's brief is at Annex B below.

11. Date of Next Meeting.

Next meeting was set for Friday 16 January 2009, at 1030. June very kindly volunteered Falls of Shin as the venue and this offer was gratefully accepted.

Signed on Original

W M SUTHERLAND
Sutherland Partnership Manager
Secretary, Sutherland Partnership Tourism Forum

Annex A: Chairman's Remarks

Annex B: Federation of Small Businesses' Responses to Members' Concerns.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT.

This has been a very mixed season for many people. I have been taking occupancy samples around the North Highlands and it is obvious that every area is different. Taking samples across a wide range of every type of establishment, it is clear that there are wide variations. Some are well down, some are breaking even with last year, others have gone up.

What is most obvious is that those depending on passing trade have suffered, especially in the early months, some saved by a good trade in September.

We must prevail through William's good offices and SP Transport Group to keep the pressure on regarding "Remote Area Post Code Dispensation" on fuel tax; this is not the time to let up but to increase the pressure. We have been encouraging John Thurso on this, and he has been acting on it since well over a year, and now has put out a petition around filling Stations for the public's view on this to strengthen the case.

What I find most distressing is how many people have stuck their head in the sand, I had put out a request to let me know of any disadvantage / downturns felt with the high fuel prices, explaining that the results would be used by SPTG to further and strengthen the case of dispensation in remote areas, to all NHT Members, and through Roger all Assynt Tourism Group Members, and through Assynt Crofters to all of the ACT Board.

Very few bothered answering.

Yet, when I was taking samples on occupancy levels, many moaned how they were down by a great amount due to the high fuel costs! one quoted 33%, so what does one have to do to make people help themselves!.

NHT Report

I have offered Joan space on the NHT Website Members Area, to advertise to our Members the learning services offered by the College.

I already hold Springboard info thanks to Irene, and expect to have this up and running in the near future.

NHT Has entered the Highlands and Islands Tourism Awards in three categories: New Tourism Business; Marketing Initiative; Tourism People Development.

NHT is currently involved in producing on-board advertising (thanks Scott) for the Smyril Line passengers, to further the work we did with them this year.

NHI had a film crew up doing clips for NHP (Mey selections, and for NHT, and this resulted in 9 excellent local clips around the North, these will be inserted shortly on the NHT Website, and also used for various Marketing purposes.

The Website is shortly undergoing upgrading of its structure, which opens up new doors and makes it sustainable to whatever we throw at it in the next few years.

With the generosity of HIE, there is a smaller repeat of the Food Fair that was so successful last year near Thurso, this is being held in Wick next week to the benefit of businesses, and I feel that negotiations should be made to persuade it moving away from the North East corner and sharing it around the rest of the North.

The NHT Conference is being held in Dornoch at the end of this Month, there are a number of very interesting and strong speakers, they will be showing the direction and successes of Tourism and of NHT in its 2nd full year (with much help from the Agencies, two of whom are here, thanks Scott and Gordon), and the NHT progress expected towards 2015 when every one is expected to have had a hand in helping "Scott" raise Tourism levels by 50%.

NHT expect to be able to employ a Product Development person in the future, and are working diligently towards this, this person will be able to bring various projects forward.

Director Robert Powell, also a Director of the H&LN group was recently brought in by HLN to attend a Tourism Trade Mission to China, initial scanty reports state it was very successful, so brush up on your Chinese!!

NHC, regret nothing to report there except that their Product Development Officer has been in place for a while now.

FEDERATION OF SMALL BUSINESSES RESPONSES TO MEMBER CONCERNS:

- Fire Prevention Act:

The FSB has been contacted by a number of members in the tourism business regarding the new fire regulations, which came into force a couple of years ago. Concerns mentioned include:

- Increased visits by fire authorities
- New demands and conditions being issued by fire authorities
- Being covered by fire law, when you were previously exempt
- Conflicting advice from different inspectors

The FSB in Scotland has referred the matter to the Regulatory Review Group (RRG) – which advises Ministers on improving business regulation. Over-zealous demands being made under the new regime could see small premises such as B&Bs and guest houses forced to close. The FSB is raising this issue with the Scottish Government and have asked for the regulations to be reviewed.

- Performing Rights Society

Under the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988, premises that do not have the appropriate tariff license from PRS can be prosecuted under civil law (the police will not be involved). With powers under the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988 PRS can back date charging for up to six years (no longer than this period of time).

FSB member informed the FSB that the PRS has been contacting hotels, B&Bs and micro-businesses enquiring if they hold the appropriate licence. A legal briefing from Abbey Legal has been asked for so members are clear about the legislation, and where or not it applies to their business.

In the long term the FSB has been speaking to the relevant government department and the official opposition party to gain support for micro-business exemptions to the legislation. This would exempt all businesses that employ less than ten employees. America has an exemption system for very small businesses and both Australia and Canada have similar systems.

Joan Campbell