

**ARGYLL, LOCH LOMOND & FORTH VALLEY TOURISM PARTNERSHIP**  
**MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 19<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2006**  
**ISLE OF BUTE DISCOVERY CENTRE**

**Present:**

Cllr Billy Petrie (Chair)	Argyll & Bute Council
Cllr Eddie Carrick (Vice-Chair)	Clackmannanshire Council
Ian Cleaver (Vice-Chair)	Argyll & the Islands Enterprise
Cllr Len Scoular	Argyll & Bute Council
Cllr Paul Nelson	Stirling Council
Cllr Bob Spears	Falkirk Council
Provost Alistair MacDonald	West Dunbartonshire Council
Rowena Groves	Scottish Enterprise Dunbartonshire
Anne Urquhart	Trade Representative
Anne Craig	Trade Representative
John Cross	Trade Representative
Sue Fink	Trade Representative
James Fraser	Area Director, VisitScotland

**In Attendance:**

Eileen Calveley	Strategy & Partnership Executive, VisitScotland
John Beattie	Head of Information & Sales, VisitScotland
Martin Breslin	External Relations Executive, VisitScotland
Aileen Miller	Customer Relations Manager, VisitScotland
Aine Tindall,	Customer Relations Manager, VisitScotland
Fiona Hardie	Manager, Isle of Bute Discovery Centre

**1. Welcome & Apologies**

John Beattie from VisitScotland was welcomed and Martin Breslin, Fiona Hardie and Aine Tindall from VisitScotland were introduced.

Apologies were received from Cllr John Paterson; Ray Welham; David Webster; and Joan Shaw

**2. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved. Len Scoular noted that Western Ferries had previously expressed interest in running Clyde & Hebridean ferry services but had now withdrawn from the tendering process and some doubt remained about the final alternative bidder. James noted recent improvements to CalMac services which had been one benefit of the tendering process.

**3. Matters Arising**

- (i) **Finance** – Cllr Nelson raised a question relating to VisitScotland's view of Stirling Council funding negotiations. James noted that a considerable

amount of additional information had been provided as requested by Stirling Council. Council officers had noted that they were not satisfied that information provided met the needs of their “Following the public pound” process and further discussions would be taking place to take the matter forward. Cllr Carrick noted that Clackmannanshire Council wished to express its support for Mill Trail Visitor Centre staff and reassure them of the Council’s commitment to the service. Concern was also expressed that VisitScotland may close services as part of the Information & Sales Review. It was suggested that this could be debated as part of the later discussion on Information & Sales, but that there were issues relating to the impact of reduced funding levels.

James Fraser noted progress with finalising the budget. Some savings had been achieved relating to staff churn and funding for core activities was still in place.

- (ii) **National Parks** – The debate at the previous meeting with regards to providing support for the Argyll Atlantic Islands to become Scotland’s first Marine National Park was summarised by James Fraser. It was also noted that Holiday Mull had expressed support for this with conditions relating to support for infrastructure and livelihoods being available. Cllr Thomson invited questions regarding the progress of the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park and proposed setting up a meeting between Area Tourism Partnership members and National Park staff. He also noted the difference in approach which had been taken between the community led approach to establishing the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park and the Scottish Executive- led approach to establishing a Marine National Park. Sue Fink suggested that key questions would relate to the impact on the economy and infrastructure of having a National Park. Anne Urquhart noted that the Mull area appeared to be the preferred option for a new National Park and also noted that planning was a major issue within the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park as development was being slowed down and potentially constrained by the length of the process. Rowena Groves welcomed the suggestion of a meeting, particularly to address communications issues relating to planning. Cllr Thomson responded to criticism of the time being taken to address development issues, but stressed that decisions being taken are robust and in line with existing development planning frameworks inherited by the Park. It was noted that the National Park Authority is obliged to consult with SEPA, SNH and other relevant statutory bodies if there is any possibility that a development will go against the Sandford Principle. Cllr Thomson stressed that the socio-economic development of the Park is of major importance. It was agreed that James Fraser would arrange a meeting for members with the National Park Authority Chief Executive and key officers.

It was also agreed that support in principle for the Argyll Atlantic Islands to become the first Marine National Park should be offered, subject to caveats being included regarding the need for a positive approach to be taken to planning and socio-economic development. Cllr Nelson noted that he would not support this motion.

- (iii) **Wind Farms & Tourism** – James Fraser spoke to the previously circulated report. It was noted that Argyll Wind Farms are holding a

further meeting in the near future to discuss issues relating to wind farms in the Clyde Estuary.

- (iv) **West Dunbartonshire Regional Casino** – It was noted that the West Dunbartonshire bid for a regional casino in Bowling was, disappointingly, unsuccessful and was no longer being pursued. It is hoped that a revised focus can be given to future development of the site and SE Dunbartonshire are now giving this further consideration. Consideration is also being given to a smaller casino facility in Falkirk.
- (v) **Area Tourism Partnership Trade Representation & Elections** - Joan Shaw, Ann Urquhart, Bob Chicken and David Webster have all noted that they will be stepping down, so nominations can now be invited from businesses engaging in any way with VisitScotland for these areas. A postal ballot will be held if more than one nomination is received.

## 2. VisitScotland Activities

- (i) **Recent Activities** - James Fraser gave an update on some of the key highlights of VisitScotland's activities which were outlined in the report circulated. This included: -
  - **Challenge Fund** – it was highlighted that 14 approvals have been given to date to applications from the Partnership area with a further 4 in the current round which would bring the total level of approvals to £160,000.
  - **Event Scotland** – Grant awards to events in the local area were highlighted, including support for the Dunoon Mod, the Bell-Lawrie Scottish Series, the Scottish Pipe Band Championships and further support through the lottery fund for the 150<sup>th</sup> Alva Highland Games.
  - **European Funding** – Funding support from the West of Scotland European Partnership programme for marketing activities had now been committed.
  - **Industry Engagement** – National and local opportunities have now been pooled together and the recent emphasis has been on clarifying these to the trade, as there have been issues with understanding the range of activities.
  - **Marketing Activities** – Samples of promotional materials and calendars were made available to Partnership members.
  - **National Park Plan** – It was noted that good progress was being made with finalising the Park Plan.
  - **Living Landmarks** – It was noted that the Falkirk and Clydebank bids had succeeded in progressing to the next round.
  - **Development Activities** – It was noted that infrastructure constraints were seriously affecting tourism developments, particularly on island destinations, such as Islay.

- Tourism Training – The outcome of reviews of support for tourism business training in the Scottish Enterprise area was currently awaited.
  - SDT – It was reported that a £371,000 operating surplus had been generated from the four attractions operated by VisitScotland on behalf of Stirling District Tourism Ltd.
  - Tourism Investment – The scale of investment in local tourism continues to be very encouraging. De Vere's Mid Ross development is now progressing well and the first phase will open shortly, while there is serious interest in hotel development in Clackmannanshire. It was noted that there was also serious interest in the area from McKeever Hotels. A Heritage Lottery Fund application for restoring Ballengeich Cemetery in Stirling had also been successful.
- (ii) **Quality Assurance Update** - James Fraser highlighted some of the recent developments with VisitScotland's Quality & Standards activities. Progress with these schemes was noted. Rowena Groves noted that she would welcome further development of the EatScotland scheme to include an element of quality grading to provide incentives for improving quality.
- (iii) **TV Advertising** - The Area Tourism Partnership was shown samples of recent VisitScotland and local advertising campaigns. A concern was raised at the high profile of visitscotland.com in national adverts, as this was in effect a private company being supported by public funding. It was noted that this was part of long term arrangements made for the Public Private Partnership which had minimised the initial public sector investment in developing the site.

### 3. **Tourist Information & Visitor Centres**

- (i) **Tourist Information and Visitor Centre Performance** - Members noted the performance of tourist information centres in 2005/2006 and the first two months of the current financial year and the healthy operating surplus of £371,000 generated in the last financial year at the four attractions/visitor centres managed on behalf of Stirling District Tourism Ltd.
- (ii) **Tourist Information and Visitor Centre Development Programme** – James Fraser spoke to the previously circulated report on tourist information centre developments. It was noted that the Bo'ness TC development was almost complete and the official opening would take place in the last week in June. The Falkirk DVD was also almost complete and would be shown across the wider Falkirk Council area, including in shopping centres. The development of the Islay and Jura Discovery Centre was still a challenge and would depend on the outcome of a recent bid to Argyll & the Islands Enterprise for funding. A shortfall of £170,000 would still have to be overcome. It was suggested that a possible way to meet this would be the sale of Tyndrum information centre to an interested private sector bidder, but that this should remain confidential at the moment. It was noted that Stirling Council had invested £30,000 in the Tyndrum site and it was confirmed that this would

be redeployed within the Stirling Council area. However, funding had also been received from Argyll & the Islands Enterprise and the Partnership could express a view on how this should be invested. The Stirling Council element could be reinvested in Stirling, where a suitable property in the city centre has been made available for lease, subject to further discussions with Council officers on issues such as longer term revenue costs.

Members noted the good progress in delivering the relocated Bo'ness Tourist Information Centre at the Bo'ness & Kinneil Railway Visitor Centre; agreed to explore the potential of sub-letting the existing Bo'ness Tourist Information Centre building for suitable alternative uses in consultation with Falkirk Council; noted the progress with finalising the revised scheme for the Islay and Jura Discovery Centre; agreed to allocate £20,000 from reserves to prepare detailed tendering drawings and to cover the cost of re-submitting a planning application; noted the interest in purchasing one of the existing tourist information centres and the potential to recycle any funds generated to support the local tourist information centre development programme; and agreed to enter more formal discussions with Stirling Council to try and deliver a scheme for the main Stirling Tourist Information Centre in a more prominent location.

## **6. Transport Strategy Consultation**

Eileen Calveley spoke to the previously circulated report, prepared in response to the consultation on the government's National Tourism Strategy. It was noted that the content of the draft response was based on feedback received through the Tourism Action Plan workshops and earlier discussions with the Area Tourism Partnership. The questions set out in the consultation document invited fairly broad responses on strategic issues and particular projects would be covered in the future Strategic Projects Review. Subject to the Area Tourism Partnership's discussion, VisitScotland had already indicated that the information in the draft response would be incorporated into the VisitScotland overall response. However, it was proposed that there would be merit in submitting a more detailed response from the Area Tourism Partnership which would highlight some of the key local projects which could be taken forward into the future Strategic Projects Review.

Cllr Carrick highlighted the positive impact expected from the Clackmannan Bridge on the local economy.

Cllr Thomson requested that issues regarding subsidies for rail travel from London to Scotland should be considered to address the difference in cost between rail and air travel and encourage use of rail services.

It was also suggested that the of reducing the need to travel is directly in conflict with tourism aims to encourage travel. This will be elaborated on to address national aims of growing tourism.

Partners noted the excellent progress with a transport initiatives in the area; approved the input from the Area Tourism Partnership to VisitScotland's response to the National Transport Strategy with additional comments from the discussion on the draft response; agreed to submit a standalone response based on the attached draft paper; and agreed to share the final response

with partner bodies to ensure the needs of the tourist industry feature in their submissions.

## 7. **Area Tourism Action Plan**

James Fraser highlighted the completion of the Area Tourism Action Plan and spoke to the paper circulated on the results of the prioritisation exercise carried out on the 63 actions set out in the Area Tourism Action Plan. It was agreed that further discussion would be carried out to finalise the list of priorities and the outcome would form part of the framework for monitoring the implementation of the action plan.

## 8. **Information & Sales – The Way Forward**

- **Presentation by John Beattie, Head of Information & Sales** - John Beattie gave a presentation on the outcomes of the Information & Sales Review led by VisitScotland. Key points included:
  - The key focus has been on what the customer needs and expects from VisitScotland.
  - Short term progress has included the introduction of the ROSIE performance management system on a national basis and the development of a Knowledge Management System to record local knowledge in such a way that it can be accessed nationally.
  - The review has been carried out because of opportunities presented by the new national network, changing visitor needs and expectations and the impact of new technologies.
  - Primary research was carried out to gain consumer views of TICs. Findings included: high satisfaction levels (91%) with existing services; the human touch is very important; there are no major gaps, but TICs are sometimes seen as staid and boring; users are seeking inspiration; staff knowledge of wider areas could be expanded; users would like earlier opening to help plan their day.
  - The findings of research into the use of Information Technology included that IT is used more for research than for booking travel.
  - Research into other business sectors found that knowledge of customers is crucial; and that they must offer a range of channels which the customer can choose from.
  - Key conclusions were that TICs play a valuable role and staff are excellent ambassadors for Scottish tourism. However, we must respond now to trends, including new technology.
  - Five programmes are being developed as the Way Forward:
    - Outreach
    - Content
    - Partnership
    - Ease of Purchase

- Consumer Relationships

The following points were raised in the discussion following the presentation:

- The high proportion of the total number of enquiries nationally in the Partnership area was raised and it was noted that it is roughly in line with the proportionate number of TICs in the area. Some funding is available for further development, but it is limited and is generally allocated to developing national projects. James Fraser noted the importance of positioning tourism well in the new European Funding programmes.
- Cllr Carrick queried what could be done in the short term to reassure staff that their positions are safe. John Beattie outlined some of the measures which have been taken to keep staff involved in the process.
- Rowena raised the issue of Scottish Enterprise's role in Information & Sales developments. It was noted that the Director of Information & Sales had been in liaison with SE and HIE. Rowena requested that these discussions should also be held with local enterprise companies. She also raised the need to improve the basic technological infrastructure and John noted that VisitScotland take every opportunity to campaign for improvements which will allow improved access to IT.
- Anne Urquhart noted that the quality of information in non-dedicated TICs was not as good as in dedicated centres and asked for information on plans for further joint working. John confirmed that consideration would be given to further partnership outlets but linked to stronger service level agreements to ensure consistency in the quality of information provided.

Sue Fink queried whether any restaurant booking system would only use graded facilities as if they do not offer quality standards, it tends to lead to dissatisfaction and complaints. It was confirmed that this would be considered once the EatScotland scheme was well-established.

The Chairman thanked John Beattie for an interesting and informative presentation.

**Future Priority Actions** –It was agreed that this item would be moved forward to the next meeting.

**9. Date of Next Meeting**

To be confirmed.

**10. Any Other Competent Business**

Cllr Petrie thanked James Fraser for his commitment and trail-blazing work for tourism in the area over the last 23 years and noted that his extensive knowledge and enthusiasm was widely acknowledged and appreciated by all involved in the industry.

Eileen Calvey was thanked for her contribution to the work of the former Area Tourist Board and VisitScotland and wished well with her future career.

Anne Urquhart was thanked for her excellent contribution to the work of the former Area Tourist Board and the Area Tourism Partnership.

It was noted that Cllr Gillie Thomson would be stepping down as Chairman of the National Park Authority and he was congratulated for the excellent work he had carried out from the establishment of the new body.