

**VISIT WESTER ROSS**  
**TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**  
**UPDATE & REFRESH**



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## **CONTENTS**

1. Executive Summary
2. Introduction
3. Wester Ross Tourism Overview
4. Visit Wester Ross Background
5. Opportunities & Challenges for Tourism in Wester Ross
6. Aspirations for Tourism in Wester Ross
7. A Narrative for Tourism in Wester Ross
8. The Role of Visit Wester Ross
9. Strategic Priorities for Visit Wester Ross
10. Delivering the Strategic Priorities
11. Monitoring & Evaluating Performance
12. Conclusion
13. Appendix 1 – List of Stakeholder Consultees
14. Appendix 2 – Suggested Content for a Tourism A- Z of Wester Ross

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Wester Ross is a largely rural area in the North West of Scotland with a resident population of approximately 6,000 people. The special relationship people have with the area's environment is internationally recognised through its designation as a UNESCO Biosphere.
2. Distribution, hotels and catering is the largest local employment sector.
3. We estimate that Wester Ross has approximately 5,300 visitor bedspaces available each night in peak season. Over 60% of these are in the non-serviced accommodation sector, although there is some evidence of B&B bedstock in the area increasing recently in response to growing visitor numbers.
4. In the past three years, the area would appear to have seen a significant increase in visitor numbers. Local tourism operators attribute much of this to the high profile of the North Coast 500 touring route initiative, which was launched in 2015. However, it is not the only reason for this increase which builds on strong performance over earlier years.
5. There are strong indications that the increase in visitor numbers and the North Coast 500 in particular have encouraged and supported new investment in enhanced visitor facilities and services in the area. As well as enhanced and new development in the visitor attraction and accommodation sectors, the area's food & drink, crafts retail and outdoor activities offers are considered to have improved significantly in recent years.
6. The increase in visitor numbers is warmly welcomed by the majority of businesses in the area. However, there are some concerns that it is creating additional peak season pressures on

accommodation stock and public realm infrastructure, and that North Coast 500 is attracting new types of short-stay visitors with limited awareness and understanding of local traditions, culture and way of life.

7. As the foremost private sector-led tourism body in the area, we recommend that Visit Wester Ross should aspire to work with partners to establish Wester Ross as:

“A distinctive and sustainable year-round Highland destination where skilled and committed people work together to provide all types of visitors with outstanding and easy-to-access experiences that encourage longer stays, enhanced spend and more repeat visits.”

8. In order to deliver this sustainable growth, we recommend that Visit Wester Ross should develop and promote a more coordinated and distinctive narrative about the area that can be used by all local operators to position Wester Ross as a high-quality, year-round destination that is a must-see component of any visit to the Highlands.

9. There would be advantages to Visit Wester Ross working with a more flexible brand that facilitates the use of different messages to different audiences in different campaigns. This may also enable individual businesses to align with the Visit Wester Ross brand more fully.

10. Given its limited capacity to lead and support projects, we recommend that Visit Wester Ross focus its activities on five main priority areas where it can have the greatest positive impact.

11. The first of these is facilitating stronger partnership working between local communities, local businesses and stakeholder agencies by encouraging a “Team Wester Ross” approach through:

- Producing a toolkit of Wester Ross factsheets for businesses and their staff to use as a reference resource to promote the wider area.
- Proactively promoting online links between local association websites.
- Organising a programme of events to facilitate exchange of information and best practice.
- Encouraging and facilitating informal referrals between individual businesses.

12. Secondly, we recommend that Visit Wester Ross should play a lead role in providing high quality information at all stages of the visitor journey. A key element of visitor information

provision should be a full review and update of the Visit Wester Ross website, supported by a more structured and strategic approach to use of social media to drive business to the site.

13. The third priority area on which we recommend Visit Wester Ross should focus is initiatives to extend the length of visitor stay and encourage repeat visits. In particular, we recommend focusing on the development of:

- Self-guided driving and cycling itineraries that take visitors off the main through routes.
- An online Wester Ross Viewpoints Trail along the North Coast 500.
- An audio guide to the area for drivers that incorporates local stories, music and dialect.

14. The fourth priority area for Visit Wester Ross is playing an advocacy role, particularly in lobbying for and supporting ongoing and enhanced investment in public realm infrastructure, and initiatives to support the recruitment and retention of staff.

15. Finally, Visit Wester Ross can also play an important role in gathering and collating information on the performance of local tourism businesses, disseminating information to local businesses to aid business planning, and gathering information from visitors. Regular online surveys will be the most cost effective means of fulfilling this role.

16. Although there are other areas in which Visit Wester Ross could make a positive contribution, its capacity to do so is limited by its reliance on volunteer support to deliver activities and projects. It must work in equal partnership with others to address priorities through a coordinated “Team Wester Ross” approach.

17. Given uncertainties regarding public sector funding, we recommend that Visit Wester Ross should primarily seek to fund its activities through raising additional income from both members and visitors to the area. This may require a change of mind set within Visit Wester Ross.

18. Monitoring and evaluation must be built into all of Visit Wester Ross’ activities in order to demonstrate delivery of priorities. Given the limited availability of existing baseline statistics against which to benchmark performance, we recommend using the regular online surveys mentioned in Point 15 above to provide comparisons of performance.

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

Visit Wester Ross have commissioned Tourism and Leisure Solutions to update and refresh the Wester Ross Tourism Development Strategy which they originally prepared in November 2015.

This Strategy was compiled following extensive consultation with local, regional and national stakeholders and sought to align itself with the business planning “rocket” format then in use by VisitScotland and the national Tourism Scotland 2020 Development Framework developed by the Scottish Tourism Alliance and supported by all national public sector tourism agencies.

In practice, implementation of the 2015 Strategy was superseded by events on the ground and, in particular, the launch of the North Coast 500 touring route initiative whose impact was significantly greater than anticipated. Indeed, North Coast 500 is seen by some as a game changer for tourism in the North Highlands, although it is not the only new initiative to have a positive impact on visitor numbers to the area.

Nonetheless, the day to day necessities of catering for and managing increased visitor numbers meant that Visit Wester Ross found it necessary to focus primarily on immediate operational priorities rather than longer term strategic activities. As a consequence, the 2015 Strategy was put on the back burner with a recognition that it would require review to reflect the changing environment of tourism in Wester Ross.

This update and refresh seeks to critically review the 2015 strategy in light of the new tourism reality in Wester Ross. It also aims to more fully recognise the capacity limitations of Visit Wester Ross, which remains a volunteer-led organisation with a minimal staffing resource.

The update and refresh has been prepared through review of the limited available statistics relating to tourism in Wester Ross in the past 3 years, identification of new key local projects likely to impact on tourism in the area, and consultations with key stakeholders to identify priority opportunities and issues that should be addressed in the update.

### **3. WESTER ROSS TOURISM OVERVIEW**

#### **3.1. Area Background**

Wester Ross is a largely rural area in the North West Highlands of Scotland. The way in which communities combine conservation of biodiversity with sustainable development of the landscape of coast, mountains and inland lochs is internationally recognised through its 2016 designation as a UNESCO Biosphere, a global network of over 660 special places where people and nature connect to inspire a positive future.

The precise boundaries of Wester Ross are not clearly defined as it has never been an administrative area in its own right. This may be one reason why it has never enjoyed the same tourism profile as other areas of the Highlands such as Loch Ness or Skye. For the purposes of this report, we have defined it as the area outlined as Wester Ross in the Highland Council Local Area Plan.

This area has a population of approximately 6,000 permanent residents. There are three main villages – Gairloch, Lochcarron and Ullapool – and a large number of smaller villages and crofting communities scattered across the area.

The most recent statistics we have been able to source indicate that 65% of the local population are economically active, with distribution, hotels and catering being the largest economic sector in the area.

#### **3.2. Accommodation Sector**

An HIE Wester Ross Tourism Factsheet for 2002/03 indicated that, at that time, tourism in the area had an overall value of just over £50 million p/a. This factsheet also highlighted that over 60% of visitor accommodation was in the non-serviced sector (self-catering properties and caravans/camping).

An audit of local tourism products and services that we conducted in 2015 indicated that Wester Ross has approximately 5,300 visitor bedspaces available each night in peak season, of which just over 60% are in the non-serviced sector.

This matches STEAM (Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor) figures for the supply of visitor accommodation across the Highland region as a whole, which also show that just over 60% of available bedstock is in the non-serviced sector.

A number of stakeholders consulted during this strategy update suggested the local B&B sector has shrunk in size since the 1980s and 90s. We have been unable to source any detailed statistics that quantify any long term changes in B&B provision at local level.

However, anecdotally, the nature of the B&B sector appears to have changed since the 80s and 90s when significant numbers of local householders would informally open up their spare rooms to visitors for a restricted two-month peak period. There may now be fewer B&Bs overall, but they are more formal, professional businesses operating for a longer period over the year.

However, there is some evidence of new B&Bs opening in the area in the past 2 – 3 years. In particular, Wester Ross is well represented on the Air B&B website. Searches on Air B&B for Wester

Ross accommodation brought up over 65 different providers. While some of these are clearly long established operators who are merely using a new marketing channel, it would appear that a significant proportion are new to the visitor accommodation sector. This is borne out by anecdotal feedback from a number of stakeholder consultees.

### **3.3. Attractions Sector**

Statistics from the Scottish Visitor Attractions Monitor and other sources show that visitor numbers at local attractions were generally either static or declining during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, more recent statistics show a high level of growth in visitor numbers at the majority of attractions in the area since 2015.

Visitor numbers to Inverewe Gardens, the most visited attraction in the area, almost doubled between 2015 and 2017 taking its annual numbers back up towards their peak figures from the early 1990s and arresting a number of years of ongoing decline. This is due, at least in part, to the National Trust for Scotland's recent £2 million capital investment in the property.

Beinn Eighe Visitor Centre recorded its highest ever visitor numbers in 2017, while other well visited attractions such as Corrieshalloch Gorge and Torridon Countryside Centre show large percentage increases in visitor numbers in the past 3 years. Other less visited attractions such as Attadale Gardens and Gairloch Heritage Museum have also shown double digit percentage growth in year-on-year visitor numbers.

### **3.3. Reasons for Growth**

Stakeholders consulted in the process of compiling this report attribute a significant proportion of this apparent growth in tourism business to the high profile promotion of the North Coast 500 touring route, which covers a large area of the Northern Highlands and was launched in 2015. Over a third of the length of this route passes through Wester Ross, which makes up the first or last section of the route depending on the direction of travel.

The North Coast 500 Economic Baseline Study of June 2017 analysed traffic count data from the UK Department of Transport and Highland Council which indicated that traffic volumes on the route as a whole increased by 10% between 2015 and 2016. Data from traffic count sites in Wester Ross suggests a similar or slightly larger increase in traffic volumes in the local area.

However, almost all stakeholders with whom we consulted emphasised that, while North Coast 500 has had a major impact, it is by no means the only reason for growth in visitor numbers. External factors such as consumer concern about the safety of overseas destinations, favourable currency exchange rates, and media coverage of the Highlands in general through their use as locations for a number of TV drama series are all cited as having stimulated visitor interest in the area.

### 3.4. Issues Arising from Growth

Many stakeholders perceive increased visitor numbers to have created a number of pressures, which include the following.

- Increased traffic flows on local roads, which is causing damage to both surfaces and verges.
- Increased demand for public toilets, litter bins and caravan/campervan waste disposal facilities. This demand is currently not being fully met.
- Increased demand for accommodation during peak periods when supply has the least spare capacity.
- An increase in shorter one-night stays in the area, particularly by visitors following the North Coast 500.
- An increase in the number of visitors with little awareness or understanding of local traditions, culture and way of life and uninformed expectations of the local availability of tourism products and services.

Overall, the main concerns about increased visitor numbers relate to two main areas: Growing pressures on public realm infrastructure at a time when local authority spending is being reduced; and the adverse impacts visitor numbers may have on local communities and loyal repeat visitors who may perceive the area to have changed.

Nonetheless, local businesses are generally positive about increasing visitor numbers and are optimistic that there is potential to increase numbers further, particularly given ongoing and planned investment in new and enhanced visitor facilities in the area, including the following.

- Further investment in enhanced visitor facilities at Inverewe Gardens.
- The £2 million investment currently underway to create new, enhanced premises for Gairloch Heritage Museum.
- The major upgrade and refurbishment current underway at Gairloch Hotel.
- The creation of a permanent visitor facility for the Russian Arctic Convoys Museum and plans to develop a trail around this theme.
- The plans to create a retreat resort on Tanera Mor in the Summer Isles.

In addition, stakeholders perceive the quantity and quality of the area's food and drink and craft retail businesses to have improved significantly in recent years in response to growing visitor interest in and demand for distinctive local produce and products.

### 3.5. Summary

In summary, tourism in Wester Ross is currently enjoying increasing visitor numbers. This is due to a number of factors, of which the North Coast 500 is the most prominent. However, increasing numbers are highlighting a number of visitor management issues that need to be addressed to deliver both high quality visitor experiences and local community benefits.

#### **4. VISIT WESTER ROSS BACKGROUND**

Visit Wester Ross is one of a number of local tourism and business associations and community organisations with an active interest in developing and promoting tourism in the area.

It is the only such body that aspires to represent and support tourism interests throughout Wester Ross, rather than a smaller, more localised part of the area. As such, it is recognised as the foremost private sector-led tourism body in the area by agencies such as Highland Council, Highlands & Islands Enterprise and VisitScotland, and has sought to develop an area wide remit by liaising and working in partnership with other localised groups.

Visit Wester Ross developed out of the earlier Celtic Fringe tourism group, which primarily focused on the National Scenic Area of Wester Ross around Gairloch and Loch Maree. In 2005, Celtic Fringe collaborated with GALE (Gairloch & Loch Ewe Action Forum), a community-owned charitable development company, Lochcarron & District Business Association and Ullapool Tourism & Business Association to develop a Marketing Strategy for the area. Following this, Celtic Fringe changed its name to Visit Wester Ross in order to progress elements of the Marketing Strategy across all of the area.

Visit Wester Ross currently has approximately 160 member businesses and organisations spread across all tourism sectors and all parts of the area. It is managed by a volunteer committee who are supported by a part-time Secretary/Project Coordinator.

Visit Wester Ross works closely with local initiatives such as the UNESCO Biosphere and North Coast 500 and has representation on their managing bodies.

It maintains a website that acts as a comprehensive source of visitor information about the area and attracts 125,000 user sessions and over 250,000 page views per annum. Users can be segmented by country of origin, type of device used to access the website and how they came to the site.

It also provides an information service to local businesses updating them on national and regional campaigns and projects and gathering and disseminating information about local facilities and services.

## 5. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR TOURISM IN WESTER ROSS

Stakeholder consultees identified a large number of opportunities and challenges currently facing tourism in Wester Ross. The ones most commonly identified are as follows.

### 5.1. Opportunities

- Annual visitor numbers in Wester Ross are generally perceived to have been growing for some time. However, in the past three years, North Coast 500 in particular has accelerated the rate of growth.
- The profile of the Highlands as a visitor destination is currently higher than it has been for some time, due partly to its use as a location in films and TV programmes. If the Highlands tourism sector as a whole performs well, Wester Ross also benefits.
- While the majority of additional visitors come to the area during already busy times of year, there has also been a noticeable increase in off-season visitor numbers. This highlights the potential to generate more year-round tourism business, particularly at times when there is greatest spare capacity.
- Recent years have also seen new types of visitors coming to Wester Ross. While there are some challenges in adapting to the needs and expectations of these visitors, this demonstrates the potential to attract new visitor market segments to the area.
- A number of consultees highlighted a growing number of high-spend visitors coming to the area, particularly due to promotion of the North Coast 500. This is creating additional demand for higher value products and services, particularly those that are provided by local suppliers e.g. local food and drink and arts and crafts.
- There is some initial anecdotal evidence of first time visitors coming to Wester Ross for a short stay while following the North Coast 500 returning for a longer stay in order to explore more of the area. However, this pattern of repeat visits is still to be quantified.
- Improvements in the quality of local roads are making Wester Ross easier and quicker to access from other parts of Scotland. This offers potential to attract more day and short break visits into the area, some parts of which have already seen an increase in the number of regular, small niche group tours from Inverness and elsewhere.

- Wester Ross is well placed to benefit from growing public interest in environmental issues and eco-tourism, which has partly been stimulated by media coverage.
- The designation as a UNESCO biosphere provides an independent external endorsement of Wester Ross' natural and cultural heritage qualities. However, there is perhaps a lack of local business and visitor awareness of what biospheres are. They lack the public profile of National Park designations.
- There may be opportunities to highlight other external accreditations of elements of the Wester Ross visitor product. This will give them a quality badge and guarantee that may appeal to a number of visitor markets.
- The Wester Ross outdoor activities sector continues to grow in both quantity and quality of products. Marine tourism, cycling, mountain biking and walking in particular appear to offer potential for further growth.
- The SHAPE project that is allied to the Biosphere and aims to identify and promote new heritage and circular walking routes can be expected to assist growth in the walking market.
- However, the local activities sector is perhaps not as customer focussed as in other areas, as evidenced through its perceived reluctance to sell through booking intermediaries. There are opportunities to encourage a more coordinated approach to online booking across the local tourism industry.
- There is some evidence, anecdotal and otherwise, that new B&Bs are opening up in the area in response to growing visitor numbers. Air B&B appears to be a channel that many are using to secure bookings.
- There is ongoing capital investment in new and enhanced visitor facilities in the area which will help to make it more attractive to more visitors.
- The growth of social media has created new platforms and channels through which to reach new markets. However, many local operators are not embracing the opportunities it offers and don't appear to fully understand how they can use it to their benefit. This is an issue that could be addressed through skills development initiatives.
- Many consultees suggest creating new routes and itineraries off the NC500 and other main roads to spread visitors throughout the area and extend their length of stay.

- There may be opportunities to generate more revenue from visitors by charging for facilities such as toilets and parking. If these facilities are operated and managed by local groups such additional revenue can be ring fenced for local projects.
- Highland Council are taking a proactive approach to bidding for funding through the new Rural Tourism Development Fund. Wester Ross projects will be included in funding bids.
- UHI and local colleges are becoming more active in tourism. This may provide opportunities to attract more young people into the sector and to provide ongoing skills development training.
- It is widely recognised that collaboration and partnership working across all aspects of tourism are key to achieving sustainable growth in the sector. However, there still appear to be a number of barriers to achieving effective collaboration across the whole area.

## 5.2. Issues

- Growing visitor traffic numbers are causing damage to road surfaces and verges. There are also issues relating to driving etiquette, particularly on single track roads.
- Greater demands on public realm infrastructure such as roads and toilet facilities is coming at a time when local authority budgets in such areas are being reduced. Some consultees describe this as a perfect storm. Public toilet provision is an area of particular concern to many.
- The North Coast 500 has brought a growing number of motorhomes into the area, which has generated a number of management issues relating to wild camping, waste water disposal and littering.
- There is growing visitor demand for shorter lengths of stay, often one-night only if travelling on the North Coast 500. Some local B&Bs and self-catering operators are not adapting to cater for this change in demand.
- North Coast 500 has changed the destination profile of Wester Ross, making it more of a through destination rather than an end destination.

- There are some concerns that increased peak season visitor numbers are deterring some regular, loyal repeat visitors from coming back to the area.
- There are also concerns about visitors, particularly those on the North Coast 500, having little understanding of local traditions, culture and way of life and unrealistic expectations about the range and flexibility of products and services available in the area.
- There is very little spare capacity in the accommodation sector during the peak season which, in some parts of the area, now stretches from April to October. This can result in visitors who have not booked in advance being unable to find accommodation on arrival and having to sleep in cars.
- There are few providers of centralised online booking services covering a range of accommodation, particularly in the serviced sector. As a result, visitors can find it difficult to source accommodation when already in the area, particularly at peak season.
- Many local operators are not open all year round. It is not uncommon for hotels, restaurants etc. to close down in the winter. This reduces visitor choice off season and limits the potential to develop year round business.
- Many local businesses continue to struggle to recruit and retain staff due to the limited local population, the largely seasonal nature of the tourism sector and a lack of affordable housing for staff. As a consequence, some businesses are very reliant on overseas workers. There are some concerns about the potential availability of such overseas workers in a post-Brexit Britain.
- Lack of public transport is a barrier to people coming to Wester Ross. Visitors really need their own transportation.
- There are challenges in ensuring visitor information about the area is accurate and up to date, particularly online information. Up to date information is particularly important in encouraging visitor dispersal throughout the area.
- The issue of some form of “bed tax” to raise additional funding for tourism projects was raised by a number of consultees. However, views on this were very mixed.

- There is lack of a clear and compelling tourism narrative about Wester Ross that will inspire people to want to visit it. There needs to be clear messaging about the area that all local operators can buy into and utilise.
- Wester Ross continues to be an area of small scattered business and communities that don't work with their neighbours. There needs to be a drive to encourage broader thinking and collaboration to promote Wester Ross, particularly as an off-season and long stay destination.

### **5.3. Summary**

While the majority of issues raised by consultees relate to visitor management in one way or another, it is encouraging to note that consultees identified more opportunities than issues, suggesting a generally positive feeling in the local tourism sector.

## 6. ASPIRATIONS FOR TOURISM IN WESTER ROSS

In order to identify priorities for tourism in Wester Ross, it is first essential to have a clear idea of what type of tourism industry local businesses, organisations and communities aspire to have in the area. This can best be summarised in a short, simple vision statement.

We suggest that Visit Wester Ross and partners adopt the following vision statement to provide a focus for future activities and priorities.

***“By 2025, Wester Ross will be a distinctive and sustainable year-round Highland destination where skilled and committed people work together to provide all types of visitors with outstanding and easy-to-access experiences that encourage longer stays, enhanced spend and more repeat visits.”***

The key elements of this vision statement are as follows.

- Timescale – The statement covers a 7 – 8 year period in order to take a long-term strategic approach that will enable projects and priorities to be reviewed and scheduled over a time period that recognises the capacity of local organisations and communities to deliver them. Rome wasn't built in a day. Wester Ross doesn't have to try to do everything at once.
- Distinctive – As a tourism destination, Wester Ross operates in an increasingly competitive domestic and international marketplace. In order to grow tourism it needs to present a distinctive and compelling visitor offer that differentiates it from other destinations, including those in the Highlands. What makes Wester Ross unique and different from better known destinations such as Skye, or Loch Ness, or Mull?
- Sustainable – Any growth in tourism must not damage the very elements of the area that visitors come to enjoy – the natural environment, the peace & quiet etc. - and must benefit local communities by managing any increases in visitor demand for products and services so that growth is long term rather than boom and bust. Through this, facilities and services can be put in place to maintain and enhance the natural, cultural and social environment.
- Year-round – Achieving a more equitable seasonal spread of tourism visits is key to creating a sustainable tourism industry which offers locals fulfilling full-time employment and reduces peak season pressures on local facilities and infrastructure.
- Highlands – As previously noted, when tourism in the Highlands as a whole performs well, so does tourism in Wester Ross. The Highlands have strong brand recognition in tourism marketplaces. Given its more limited market recognition, Wester Ross must seek to link into and benefit from the Highlands brand equity.

- **Skilled** – People are a key element of any visitor experience. Front line staff make or break a business or a destination. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that people working in the Wester Ross tourism sector have the skills required to meet and exceed visitor expectations and deliver memorable visitor experiences.
- **Committed** – Allied to the skills of front line staff is their commitment and willingness to go that extra mile. They need to know their area and have the confidence and openness to encourage and answer visitor questions and make recommendations. This will provide visitors with enhanced experiences and give staff more job satisfaction.
- **Work Together** – Partnership working and collaboration are fundamental to success in tourism. No tourism business or organisation operates in isolation from the rest of the sector. Tourism is a multi-dimensional industry in which a varied recipe of different ingredients have to come together to make the cake. If any ingredients are missing, the cake suffers and no one wants to eat it.
- **All Types of Visitors** – Tourism markets are increasingly segmenting, particularly as online communication channels enable visitors to pursue experiences tailored to their own interests and budgets. Wester Ross needs to be savvy in identifying all the specific market segments which it can attract and for which it can cater. It is unwise to put all its eggs in one basket by focusing on a small number of market segments that may change or decline in value.
- **Outstanding Experiences** – The visitor and the visitor experience must be the primary focus of the Wester Ross tourism industry, particularly in this age of social media and user-generated web content. The aim must be to deliver visitor experiences that are different from and more memorable than those they can enjoy elsewhere. Quality is one element of this, but what can Wester Ross deliver that visitors cannot experience elsewhere? This may be one single element or the way in which different elements come together.
- **Easy-to-Access Experiences** – It must be simple and straightforward for visitors to find information about Wester Ross and to book the experiences they want to enjoy there. The internet is key to this, being effectively a huge library of information, knowledge and recommendations. Wester Ross must have a strong and effective online presence that takes visitors through their journey from initial research of destination options, to deciding to visit, to actually visiting, and to coming back again. Online booking facilities can play an important facilitating role in taking visitors through all the stages of their Wester Ross journey.
- **Longer Stays, Enhanced Spend and More Repeat Visits** – This should be the objective of any tourism strategy. Tourism is an economic activity. The bottom line is about money and profitability. Individual visitors staying longer and spending more bring more money into the

local economy, reducing both the need to attract additional new visitors year-on-year and the industry's costs in servicing a high turnover of different visitors. Happy and satisfied previous visitors are much easier and cheaper to attract than new, first time ones.

## 7. A NARRATIVE FOR TOURISM IN WESTER ROSS

Persuading people to come to Wester Ross in preference to all the other destinations they could choose needs everyone involved in the local hospitality and tourism sector to say the same sort of things about the area so that potential visitors have no conflicting or confusing messages about what it has to offer and understand the essence of what makes it special.

This isn't about everyone using the same logo, the same strapline, or the same marketing. It's about telling a simple but coherent story through a few easily understood themes and messages everyone can use when communicating with people who don't know the area.

If everyone in Wester Ross works together to send out common messages about the area it stands a better chance of getting noticed in an increasingly crowded tourism marketplace.

So, what are the core messages that we recommend everyone in Wester Ross should put out to the rest of the world?

1. **Wester Ross is in the Scottish Highlands**, a region about which most people have some understanding and many have aspirations to visit. Chances are if people are not aware of Wester Ross, they will be aware of the Highlands.
2. **Wester Ross is accessible**. By car, it is about an hour from Inverness, the capital of the Highlands, and half an hour from the Isle of Skye. It is on the North Coast 500 touring route and the Kyle of Lochalsh railway line from Inverness. It is not miles from anywhere and difficult to get to. You can leave Edinburgh in the morning and be there by lunchtime.
3. **Wester Ross is a large area of distinctive coastal and inland communities**. It is big; it is spread out; it has variety. It is worth taking time to explore properly because it has a lot of stories and experiences to share.
4. **Wester Ross is not an empty wilderness with no facilities**. It is an area where you can actively immerse yourself in the scenery and landscapes rather than just passively look at them. It is an area where there is a lot to do and see.

5. **Wester Ross has a diverse eco-system** from the tiniest insects to the largest iconic birds and mammals. It is a land of butterflies, deer, dolphins, eagles, flowers and whales.

6. **The United Nations have recognised Wester Ross' unique mix of coastline, mountains, lochs and wildlife** and has designated it as a biosphere. This is an external, international endorsement of the quality of its bio-diversity.

7. **Wester Ross is not some romanticised Brigadoon. It is a living, breathing community with an authentic sense of place.** The friendly and welcoming locals are rooted in a rich heritage, but enjoy a lively contemporary culture of art and music. Visitors can enjoy traditional elements of the Scottish visitor experience but Wester Ross is also modern, creative and forward looking.

8. **Wester Ross changes with the seasons and offers memorable experiences all year round.** It is not a place just for the summer months. There are things to see and do throughout the year. The landscape changes; the wildlife changes, but the welcome is always warm.

Key to delivering the core messages outlined above is the inclusion of people in images of the area.

We suggest it is counter-productive to suggest that Wester Ross is a rugged and wild wilderness. A wilderness is somewhere with nobody in it and little to see or do. Wester Ross is a place of stunning landscapes with a unique biodiversity that people can go out and enjoy through activities like walking, cycling and kayaking or gentler pastimes like photography, gastronomy or painting.

Images of people engaging with Wester Ross are important to building up visitor association with the area. "These people look like me and I want to do what they are doing in that photograph". "I want to see for myself what these people are looking at".

We have previously commented that a common narrative does not mean everyone using the same logo or strapline. However, we suggest that there are advantages to improving the visibility of the Visit Wester Ross brand device by encouraging local business to incorporate it in their own marketing materials.

While we consider the brand device to be an attractive and accurate visual representation of Wester Ross, we recommend taking a more flexible approach to its "Live the Highlands" strapline by retaining the specific reference to the Highlands but using a variety of different messages or calls to action to suit different marketing campaigns. Examples could include "Easter in the Highlands", "Walking in the Highlands" or "Arts & Crafts in the Highlands".

Such an approach would enable Visit Wester Ross to more effectively target different market segments and encourage individual local operators to adopt the brand device and adapt it to the nature of their own particular visitor offer.

## **8. THE ROLE OF VISIT WESTER ROSS**

As previously noted, Visit Wester Ross is a volunteer-led organisation. Consequently, it has finite capacity to initiate and deliver projects. It is important to the delivery of quality projects and its own credibility that it does not spread itself too thinly and does not try to do more than it can deliver given its capacity constraints.

Based on stakeholder feedback, we recommend that Visit Wester Ross should focus on a small number of key priorities where it can make the greatest difference. We identify five main priority areas in which Visit Wester Ross can make a positive contribution that benefits the wider local tourism sector. These are -

- Encouragement and facilitation of partnerships, particularly between different communities in the area and between local businesses and external organisations.
- Provision of visitor information, particularly online information that visitors can access directly or through local tourism operators.
- Initiatives to extend the length of visitor stay and encourage repeat visits, particularly in the off season and shoulder seasons.
- Advocacy and lobbying on behalf of the local tourism industry, particularly in relation to investment in public realm infrastructure and skills development.
- Gathering and dissemination of information. Firstly to local operators to assist them to make informed business decisions and, secondly, to external agencies to provide evidence of any needs for investment and other support.

All of the above are linked and are not mutually exclusive. In particular, partnership working is fundamental to success in all of these priority areas. It is likely that Visit Wester Ross may lead on some priority initiatives and, in other cases, may play more of a supporting role, particularly in relation to stimulating industry awareness of activities and projects.

In the following section we recommend a small number of specific initiatives to address each these five priority areas.

## 9. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR VISIT WESTER ROSS

### 9.1. Encouraging & Facilitating Partnerships

Wester Ross remains an area of small, scattered communities whose isolation is reflected in their mixed track record of working closely with each other. It is notable that an area of 6,000 residents has several different tourism and business associations, focusing largely on specific parts of the area.

Visit Wester Ross already liaises closely with other tourism and business associations in the area and we recommend that this should continue to be a core element of its activities.

In particular, we recommend it should actively support and facilitate the development of stronger links between the different local associations and individual businesses in order to encourage a “Team Wester Ross” mind set where businesses proactively promote the wider area and provide referrals from one local area to another in order to retain visitors in Wester Ross longer. This could be done in a number of ways including –

- Producing a toolkit of short but informative factsheets about Wester Ross that can be used as a one-stop reference resource by local operators and their staff across the area to encourage visitors to explore more of it and respond to visitor queries. E.g. Major Events in Wester Ross; Where & When to Spot Wildlife; Heritage Sites in Wester Ross etc.
- Proactively promoting on-line links between different local association websites to provide a stronger overall message about Wester Ross as a destination. E.g. “If you’ve enjoyed visiting Lochcarron, click here for information on other parts of Wester Ross”.
- Sharing information and best practice between different associations through regular joint forums and member meetings, as well as familiarisation visits to different parts of the area. E.g. “Welcome Ullapool has worked with Highland Council to install additional litter bins in the village. How did they go about this and could you do the same in your village?”
- Encouraging and facilitating informal one-to-one referrals between operators in different sectors and different parts of the area, perhaps through “speed-dating” events where they get to know each other. E.g. “If you heading to Gairloch, there is a great campsite at X. Will I give them a ring to book you in? Don’t forget to stop at the Y art gallery along the way?”

In simple terms, provide reference information and organise regular events to bring together operators from across Wester Ross in order to build up their knowledge of the wider area and to develop their one-to-one links with operators in other parts of it.

In addition, given budget cuts, Highland Council is increasingly seeking to work in partnership with local community groups to operate facilities such as public toilets and parking. Some local communities have already entered into such partnerships with the Council. Sharing community

experiences of these partnerships could help other local groups to understand how they operate and could identify other areas where they could work, for example, provision of electric charging points for cars.

While such partnerships have significant resource implications for local groups, they also offer them scope for income generation through compulsory or voluntary charges, the income from which can be retained locally to support and help fund other local initiatives.

## **9.2. Provision of Visitor Information**

Visit Wester Ross already provides extensive online visitor information through its website which, as previously noted, attracts over 125,000 user sessions per annum. However, given the limited resources available to manage the site, it appears to have added content in a rather ad-hoc manner. This gives the site a somewhat busy and unstructured appearance.

Consequently we recommend undertaking a strategic review of website content in order to provide a stronger overview of the area built around the core messages of the area narrative that we have previously outlined. In particular, we recommend organising information under the following main menu options.

- Why Come to Wester Ross? – an overview of the area promoting it to first time visitors and informing their expectations.
- Planning Your Visit – product and travel information, preferably with some form of booking mechanisms.
- During Your Visit – regularly updated info on events, special occasions, weather etc.
- After Your Visit – encouraging visitors to share experiences and recommendations.
- An A- Z of Wester Ross – a comprehensive database of local products, services and experiences. (In Appendix 2, we suggest some subject headings for this A- Z).
- Keep in Touch – data gathering to build up profiles of visitors and collect their contact details for online marketing.

Allied to this restructure of the website, we recommend developing a coordinated social media strategy to drive business to the site using all appropriate platforms. In particular, we recommend greater use of visually driven social media channels such as Instagram and Flickr in order to build up visitor awareness and appreciation of local landscapes, heritage and wildlife through what are effectively the recommendations and enthusiasms of their peers.

If funding is available, it would undoubtedly be beneficial to commission specialist external support to review the website and use of social media. We understand such specialist support is available within Wester Ross and is already working with a number of local operators.

Finally, while enhanced online information provision is the main priority, there is still demand for printed visitor information. We recommend that Visit Wester Ross aims to work in partnership with companies that distribute tourism leaflets locally in order to brand displays with the Visit Wester Ross logo and offer incentives that encourage local operators to undertake more widespread local distribution of their promotional leaflets.

This could also encourage greater promotional collaboration between different operators through producing joint leaflets. The South West Ross Arts & Eats Trail is an excellent existing example of

such collaboration which produces joint leaflets and online information. It would be good to see the Trail extended across the wider Wester Ross area.

### **9.3. Initiatives to Extend the Length of Visitor Stay and Encourage Repeat Visits**

Given concerns about visitors on the North Coast 500 staying for a short time in Wester Ross and adding to existing pressures on the most popular locations at peak times of year, we recommend that Visit Wester Ross works in partnership with others to develop a suite of downloadable self-guided itineraries that encourage visitors off the main through routes into quieter parts of the area.

There are a number of initiatives in this field already underway or about to be launched including –

- The SHAPE heritage trails project which aims to create guided and self-guided walking routes.
- The work of the Highland Council Access Officer around the core paths network.
- The UHI PhD studentship that aims to document heritage sites, objects and landscapes around the North Coast 500 and develop a new digital app for visitors.
- The North West Highlands Snorkel Trail which links 9 marine habitats suitable for underwater exploration.

In addition, there is an extensive amount of information about informal mountain biking routes in Wester Ross on MTB enthusiast websites and forums.

Therefore, we recommend that Visit Wester Ross initially concentrates on working with local community groups to identify and promote driving and on-road cycling itineraries.

In particular, we recommend developing itineraries that encourage visitors off the main A-class roads on to quieter B-class and unclassified roads to places such as Diabeg, Red Point and Cove. Key to doing this will be identifying stories about people and points of interest along each itinerary. This will help to make the itineraries heritage as well as landscape experiences, aligning with the aims of both the SHAPE project and North Coast 500.

At the same time, we recommend working with North Coast 500 to develop an online Wester Ross Viewpoints Trail to encourage visitors to stop and spend longer at key locations along the route where they can gain a greater appreciation of the area's landscapes and heritage. We recommend working with local communities and groups to identify key viewpoints for inclusion on this Trail, which will aim to slow down visitors passing through Wester Ross and encourage them to want to see more of it.

If funds are available and it does not duplicate or cut across the work of the UHI PhD studentship project, we also recommend developing an Audio Guide to Wester Ross for drivers, focusing on North Coast 500 and adjacent facilities. This should be an experiential guide telling stories, pointing out places of interest and providing snippets of local traditions in music, song and dialect as visitors drive along itineraries.

The guide should be –

- Accessible at all times, even in areas without 4G coverage.

- GPS-activated to provide location specific content.
- Bluetooth-enabled to facilitate use in car audio systems.

Obviously external funding and specialist external expertise will be needed to develop such an audio guide. We are aware of a number of suppliers in both the UK and overseas with proven experience in this field.

#### **9.4. Advocacy & Lobbying**

This is an area in which Visit Wester Ross has traditionally been very active, acting as a voice representing the tourism sector across the whole area.

It is self-evident that there are some elements of the visitor experience in which Visit Wester Ross does not have the capacity, resources and specialist skills required to deliver successful initiatives. For example, it cannot repair roads or create car parks.

Given this, we recommend that Visit Wester Ross should focus on gathering, collating and sharing the views of local tourism operators on issues of priority local concern with statutory agencies such as Highland Council, Highlands & Islands Enterprise and Historic Environment Scotland.

Visit Wester Ross should aim to work in constructive partnership with such agencies in order to help develop solutions to any priority issues and should also work with local groups to encourage them to implement agreed solutions.

At present, the key priorities being raised by local stakeholders relate very much to the maintenance and development of the public realm infrastructure and the recruitment and retention of staff. The former is under pressure due to ongoing local government budget cutbacks. The latter is strongly affected by the limited economically active local population and a lack of affordable housing.

In the case of public realm infrastructure, given the current realities of public sector funding, we recommend that Visit Wester Ross should seek to stimulate local debate and develop coherent policies about ways in which the user - i.e. the visitor – can be encouraged to make a greater financial contribution towards maintaining local services and facilities.

Evidence from other parts of the UK indicates that visitors are not opposed to compulsory or voluntary additional charges if the income they generate can be shown to be ring fenced for local initiatives that improve the quality of the visitor experience. Many visitors are happy to put a little more back into the communities they visit. Visit Wester Ross is perhaps the best placed industry group to lead the debate on how that can best be achieved locally.

In terms of the recruitment and retention of staff, we recommend that Visit Wester Ross liaise with local operators to identify and quantify specific skills shortages in the area and their impact on the quality of service delivery and Wester Ross' capacity to handle further increases in visitor numbers. From there, Visit Wester Ross could have a key role to play in lobbying and working in partnership with other agencies to address them.

The issue of affordable housing is one that is well beyond the remit of Visit Wester Ross. However, again, it can play an important role in collecting and collating information about the scale of this issue in order to inform and influence planning policies and the use of public sector resources in this area.

### 9.5. Gathering & Dissemination of Information

Building on our recommendations above on advocacy and lobbying, we suggest that Visit Wester Ross has a key role to play in gathering and disseminating information in three ways.

Firstly by gathering and collating information and feedback from local operators about business performance, trends in the marketplace and issues arising from them. This is essential to creating a hard evidential base to support advocacy and lobbying.

We recommend that Visit Wester Ross initiate a quarterly online Business Barometer Survey of its members to provide up to date information on business performance and confidence, and identify any issues and opportunities that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. This could be a simple, free Survey Monkey questionnaire of 10 standard questions which are repeated each quarter to provide seasonal and annual comparisons.

Secondly, we recommend that Visit Wester Ross aims to play an intermediary role in disseminating information and market intelligence from national and regional agencies to local members in order to help them make informed business decisions.

The 2015 Tourism Development Strategy noted that stakeholder consultations identified that local businesses can feel remote from regional and national agencies and often have limited awareness and understanding of their tourism strategies. In our view Visit Wester Ross can play a key role in bringing agencies and local businesses closer together to work in partnership.

Finally, we note that there is still a lack of up to date statistics relating solely to tourism in Wester Ross. Some quantitative information is available from sources such as published visitor numbers at local attractions and user profiles on the Visit Wester Ross website. However, information on aspects such as motivations to visit, spend patterns and the visitors' satisfaction with their experience of the area is much scarcer with indicative information only being available at a larger regional Highlands level.

Therefore, we recommend that Visit Wester Ross develop an annual online Visitor Survey that can be accessed through its website or via links from the websites of individual local operators. This should be a relatively short post-visit survey that asks key questions such as –

- Where do you normally live?
- Have you been to Wester Ross before?
- Why did you decide to visit Wester Ross on this occasion?
- How long did you spend in Wester Ross?
- Where did you stay in the area?
- What did you like most about Wester Ross?
- How could your experience of Wester Ross be improved?

Such a survey could be incentivised to increase response rates and should provide helpful information that can inform business decisions. Perhaps there could be potential to involve local schoolchildren in developing the survey questions and analysing responses to them?

In summary, while we appreciate that Visit Wester Ross can be asked to input to a wide range of projects and initiatives, we strongly recommend that it restricts its activities to the five priority areas outlined above as these are the areas in which it can potentially make the greatest contribution to developing tourism in Wester Ross.

## 10. DELIVERING THE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

As highlighted more than once elsewhere in this report, Visit Wester Ross is a volunteer-led organisation whose volunteer committee is supported by a single part-time Project Coordinator. This severely restricts its capacity to initiate and lead projects.

In the preceding Section 9 of this report, we highlight a number of priority areas where Visit Wester Ross would benefit from external specialist support to deliver priority activities. Specifically, reviewing its website and social media strategy, and developing an audio guide to Wester Ross for drivers. External funding support is likely to be needed to deliver both of these priorities to their full potential.

Elsewhere, most of the other priority activities identified can be delivered through closer partnership working with other local groups and associations so they can play an equal role in –

- Encouraging industry use of a common narrative for Wester Ross
- Organising and promoting member events and forums.
- Developing referrals from one part of Wester Ross to another.
- Providing localised content for the updated Visit Wester Ross website.
- Developing itineraries to retain visitors in the area.
- Gathering information from local businesses and visitors to the area.
- Disseminating information out to their members.

Put simply, in its current format Visit Wester Ross will struggle to deliver activities in all of the five priority areas identified. However, in our view, activities can be delivered through collaborative working with other local groups on what become joint priorities. Just as partnership working is key to the success of tourism in Wester Ross, it is also essential to the delivery of this Strategy Update and Refresh. “Team Wester Ross” must work together to deliver any area-wide tourism strategy.

In terms of funding to assist the delivery of activities, there may be some scope to seek funding support from public sector agencies for specific activities, but this is likely to be limited given the financial climate under which they are currently operating. Securing project funding from other sources tends to be a lengthy and cumbersome process that can tie up a lot of staff resources – resources which Visit Wester Ross doesn’t currently have.

Consequently, we recommend that Visit Wester Ross should concentrate on raising additional funds from both its members and visitors to the area. This may mean Visit Wester Ross both adopting a more commercially-driven approach to fund raising by charging members for optional services and support, and taking over the management of visitor facilities such as car parks and toilets in partnership with the local authority and charging for their use.

The latter approach in particular is likely to result in Visit Wester Ross incurring increased staffing and management costs. However, at the same time, it will directly help to enhance the visitor

experience on the ground and will raise the profile of the organisation as one that delivers tangible projects. In addition, as previously outlined, managing public facilities would enable Visit Wester Ross to ring fence profits to support local projects. As such, there is likely to be limited visitor resistance to charges.

This approach may require a substantial change of mind set within Visit Wester Ross but, in our view, it is a practical response to the current realities of declining public sector budgets, not to mention the forthcoming post-Brexit withdrawal of EU funding sources.

## **11. MONITORING & EVALUATING PERFORMANCE**

All projects and activities must have clear objectives against which they can be evaluated to assess if they have been successfully delivered. Ongoing monitoring of performance against objectives helps to identify and address areas where performance may not be delivering objectives.

In the case of Visit Wester Ross, there are two main types of performance indicators that can be used to evaluate the impact of its activities.

Firstly, there are indicators relating to the performance of Visit Wester Ross as an organisation. Key indicators include the following.

- Membership Numbers.
- Financial Position.
- Number of Campaigns and Activities Delivered or Supported.
- Number of Businesses and Organisations Attending Meetings and Events.
- Number of Businesses and Organisations Responding to Surveys
- Level and Profile of Traffic to the Visit Wester Ross Website.
- Retention of Users on the Visit Wester Ross Website.
- Number of Click Throughs to Other Local Websites from the Visit Wester Ross site.

These are all indicators for which baseline statistics either currently exist or can easily be established. They are all SMART indicators that are directly measurable.

The aim of Visit Wester Ross should be to stimulate growth in each of these indicators. Rather than set arbitrary targets for growth, we recommend that each performance indicator is reviewed annually to identify areas in which Visit Wester Ross is performing well and areas where performance needs to be enhanced. This will help to inform the business planning of the organisation.

The other type of performance indicators that we recommend Visit Wester Ross should utilise relate to the overall performance of the tourism sector in the area. Such indicators are more difficult to establish as there is very limited current statistical data available on the tourism sector in Wester Ross. However, there are some existing indicators against which industry performance can be benchmarked including the following.

- Visitor Throughput at Local Attractions (as published annually in the Scottish Visitor Attractions Monitor and other sources).
- Traffic Counts on Local Roads (as published by the UK Department of Transport).

- Visitor Ratings of Local Facilities and Services on TripAdvisor and Other Review Websites.

In addition, data from the recommended quarterly Business Barometer Survey and annual online Visitor Survey should provide a level of quantitative and qualitative data that can be used to build up a picture of the wider industry performance. For example –

- % of Business Survey Respondents Reporting an Increase in Business Levels.
- % of Respondents Reporting an Increase in Future Bookings.
- Business Responses Identifying Any Changes in Visitor Profiles or Behaviour.
- Changes in the Average Length of Stay Identified through the Visitor Survey.
- Analysis of Visitor Satisfaction Levels Identified through the Visitor Survey. E.g. % of Respondents Identifying Specific Areas Needing Improvement.
- % of Visitors Repeat Visiting the Area.

Such data will help to fill existing gaps in hard information about tourism in Wester Ross and will provide benchmarks against which industry performance can be monitored and evaluated.

However, realistic data will only be generated if there are high response levels to both surveys. From experience, visitors tend to be enthusiastic about completing surveys and sharing opinions and experiences, businesses less so particularly if they are asked to provide confidential business data. Close partnership working with other local groups and organisations is likely to be key to ensuring good response levels to the Business Barometer Survey.

## **12. CONCLUSION**

In the absence of detailed current data relating to tourism in Wester Ross, this Tourism Development Strategy Update & Refresh has largely been informed by feedback from stakeholder consultees to whom we extend our sincere thanks for the time and input they gave.

Given the consistency of opinions and information shared by stakeholders, we have a high degree of confidence that this update reflects the current position of tourism in Wester Ross and addresses opportunities and issues arising from it.

Visitor numbers to Wester Ross have undoubtedly increased significantly in recent years for a variety of reasons. This is largely welcomed by local stakeholders and businesses, although there are concerns about negative impacts that need to be addressed through better visitor management.

Stakeholders expect visitor numbers to continue to increase and, on the positive, highlight ongoing investment in new and enhanced visitor facilities in the area. However, on the negative, they have concerns that declining investment in public realm infrastructure will impact adversely on the quality of the visitor experience and increase pressures on local communities.

While Visit Wester Ross can make a valuable contribution to enhancing the tourism industry in the area, it alone cannot address all of the issues and opportunities currently facing the sector. If there is one message that we would like readers of this report to take away it is the fundamental importance of collaboration and partnership working across all of the tourism sector in every part of Wester Ross. An area of scattered, often isolated communities must come together to work towards common objectives in commonly agreed ways.

Secondly, we would emphasise the importance of the local tourism sector being open to new ways of working be it through enhanced use of social media, the development of more robust online booking mechanisms or partnership working to manage local facilities. Visitor behaviour is constantly changing and the social and economic environment in which tourism businesses and organisations operate is constantly changing.

Wester Ross has to look forward and adapt to and work with these changes. This can be challenging and can require new ways of thinking and working, but it is necessary to achieve long term and sustainable growth in the local tourism sector.

We hope this document will help to secure such growth.

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**May 2018**

## **Appendix 1**

### **LIST OF STAKEHOLDER CONSULTEES.**

The following stakeholders were consulted in the process of preparing this report. The majority of consultations were conducted face-to-face, while some were conducted by telephone or, in one case, by email correspondence.

Douglas Gibson, Visit Wester Ross

Craig Mills, North Coast 500

Judith Fish, Applecross Inn

Ann Fletcher, Applecross Inn

Sue Grocock, The Coalshed and B&B Operator, Applecross

Henry Robertson, Hartfield House Hostel, Applecross

Archie Maclellan, The Applecross Trust

Fran Cree, Visit Wester Ross and B&B and Self Catering Operator, Gairloch

Natasha Hutchison, Wester Ross Biosphere

Laura Hamlet, SHAPE project

Karen Twist, Kinlochewe Hotel & Bunkhouse

Alec Cormack, Visit Wester Ross, Lochcarron & District Business Association & Attadale Gardens

Karen Buchanan, Gairloch Heritage Museum

John Lavelle, Welcome Ullapool & North West Outdoors

Mat Webster, Visit Wester Ross & Scottish Youth Hostels Association

Jenny White, Visit Wester Ross & Self Catering, Poolewe

Noel Hawkins, Living Seas Project Manager, Scottish Wildlife Trust

Martin Price, SHAPE project & UHI

Alison French, Visit Wester Ross & Sea Kayak Plockton

Colin Simpson, Europe, Tourism & Film Officer, Highland Council

Kevin Frediani, Property Manager, Inverewe Gardens, National Trust for Scotland.

Alison Gainsford, Highlands & Islands Enterprise

Jacky Brooks, Regional Marketing Consultant, National Trust for Scotland

## Appendix 2

### SUGGESTED CONTENT HEADINGS FOR AN A – Z OF WESTER ROSS

In Section 9.2 of this report, we recommend restructuring the Visit Wester Ross website to include a comprehensive database of local products, services and experiences under the title, “A – Z of Wester Ross”. Below we outline some suggested content headings for this A – Z.

It should be appreciated that some of these headings will duplicate each other and are different terms that users may search under to source the same information.

- A Access; Accommodation; Achiltibuie; Achnahaird Bay; Achnasheen; Achnashellach; Activities; An Dun; Applecross; Arctic Convoys; Ardmail; Art Galleries & Studios; Arts & Eats Trail; Attadale Gardens; Aultbea; Autumn
- B Badachro; Bagpipes; Balgy Falls; Banks & Money; Bealach na Ba; Beaches; Bed & Breakfasts; Beer; Beinn Eighe; Big Sand; Biosphere; Birdwatching; Boat Trips; Book Festival; Booking Ahead; Books; Bowls; Brochs; Loch Broom; Buses; Butterflies
- C. Camping; Camusnagaul; Canoeing; Car Hire; Caravanning; Loch Carron; Castles; Ceilidhs; Children; Churches; Clearances; Climbing; Coast; Coffee & Cake; Coigach; Conservation; Core Path Network; Corrieshalloch Gorge; Coulags; Cove; Crafts; Craig Forest; Crofting; Cruise Ships; Cycling
- D Dancing; Deer; Destitution Roads; Diabaig; Dining; Diving; Doctors; Dolphins; Drinking; Driving; Dundonnell
- E Eagles; Eating; The Environment; Events; Loch Ewe; Exploring
- F Lochan Fada; Families; Ferries; Field Sports; Fionn Loch; Fishing; Flowerdale Glen; Flowers; Food & Drink; Footpaths
- G Gaelic; Gairloch; GALE Centre; Garages; Geopark; Golden Valley; Golf; Great Wilderness Walk; Grudie Oakwood; Gruinard; Guitar Festival; Gulf Stream
- H Haggis; Hamish Macbeth; Heights of Kinlochewe; Helpful Hints; Highland Games; The Highlands; Hillwalking; History & Heritage; Horse-riding; Hostels; Hotels
- I Insects; Inverewe Gardens; Inverlael Forest; Inverness; Isle Martin; Itineraries
- J Joy
- K Kayaking; Kilts; Kinlochewe; Kishorn; Knitwear; Knockan Crag
- L Lael Forest; Laide; Leckmelm Arboretum; Leisure Centres; Letters; Liatach; Little Loch Broom;

Locals; Lochs; Lochcarron; Loopallu; Luxury

M Markets; Loch Maree; Marine Wildlife; Mellon Charles; Mellon Udrigle; Melvaig; Memories;  
Midges; Mountains; Mountain Biking; Museums; Music

N Nature Reserves; North Coast 500

O Off Road Driving; Otters

P Parking; Passing Places; Perfume; Petrol Stations; Photography; Playparks; Plockton; Police;  
Poolewe; Porpoises; Porridge; Port Henderson; Postie Run; Pubs

Q Queen of the Highland Lochs; Queen Victoria; Queenies

R Radio; Rain; Rassal Ashwood; Recommendations; Red Point; Reiff; Relaxation;  
Rhododendrons; Rivers; Roads; Romance

S Safety; Sailing; Salmon; Scenic Areas; Scoraig; Sea Food; Seals; Self Catering; Sharks; Shieldaig;  
Shinty; Shopping; Single Track Roads; Skye; Slattadale; Sleeping; Slioch; Snorkelling; Solitude;  
South West Ross Arts & Eats Trail; Spring; Sportives; Stac Pollaidh; Strathcanaird; Strathcarron;  
Strome Castle; Summer; Summer Isles; Sunshine; Swimming

T Tartan ; Television ; Theatre; Toilets; Top Tips; Torridon; Tours; Tracks & Trails; Trains

U Ullapool; Useful Contacts

V Victoria Falls; Visitor Information

W Walking; Weather; Websites; Wester Ross; Whales ; Whisky; Wi-Fi; Wild Camping;  
Wilderness; Wildlife; Winter

X Xtreme Sports

Y Yawning; Youngsters

Z Zzzzzzz