

Applecross Tourism Group

Update for the Applecross Forum

November 2020

Meetings (still Zoom) have been taking place throughout the lockdown period and into the summer, reducing to monthly as the season got underway. Next meeting scheduled for w/c 16 November.

The meetings have been very productive, and the following projects were deemed to be high priority:

- a. Overnight parking
- b. Rubbish/dog litter
- c. Signage/interpretation
- d. Digital marketing for Applecross (website/social media)

As such, the following actions were agreed:

1. Information gathering

- NC500 Ltd will gather visitor data for all communities on the route in 2021 which will be extremely useful. Work is being done with tourism businesses in Applecross to gather data from 2019 to better inform the strategy.

2. Overnight Parking (motorhomes/vans and camping)

Now agreed to be called Overnight Parking. This has created some discussion amongst the group. JW produced a draft delivery plan with phased elements which was circulated to the group just prior to lockdown being lifted. The aim being that the preferred option for management of the overnight parking would be circulated to the community for approval.

3. Litter

JW presented examples of innovative litter collecting ideas that will work with the existing Highland Council bin collecting scheme, all of which were well received. However, there is much work to be done to ensure litter is better managed going forward. A proposal will be incorporated into a detailed plan for the following year.

4. Signage

The Junction. JW has been in touch with the Highland Council to ascertain what approvals need to be gained to simplify the signage at the junction. The Brown signs are due to be updated to be more relevant than the current three large signs. New signage can be produced for local businesses (all in one sign) if it is more than 1 metre from the road. JW is waiting on the Highland Council to provide possible options for doing this.

Tornapress. The Tourism Group, (and more so the Community Council) has also been in touch with the Highland Council to seek a resolution for the incorrect signage at Tornapress which is causing confusion and hazard for visitors. Clarity over signage will help alleviate the congestion over the Bealach road enormously and has been a point of importance within the community for some time. The Highland Council has recently been in touch to say that this has been taken over by a new member of staff who will be in touch shortly to progress things. Nothing to report following this communication.

5. Digital marketing

It was agreed in the Tourism Group that a website was needed for Applecross, to provide proper destination marketing but also to communicate the right message, and to let visitors know about how Applecross is working during the pandemic. It was agreed that this should be something that the group funds itself to ensure ownership of the work going forward. JW applied for funding through the Coronavirus Support Group, and through HIE but was turned down. There are other grant funds available and JW will progress this during the winter months.

In the meantime, social media has been established for Applecross to ensure the right message is getting out to the right audience. There is a group of enthusiastic people who are posting to social media and JW is overseeing the messaging.

Immediate measures to manage casual campers

All of the above was superseded for several months, as Applecross became a destination for 'casual campers' causing enormous destruction, littering and health hazards in the local area. There was very much a feeling in the community that emergency measures needed to be put in place to manage the

situation and so The Applecross Tourism Group, and The Trust stepped in to introduce a pilot scheme. This comprised:

- **Appointment of Applecross Ranger with immediate effect**
- **Production and installation of signage to provide information on where to camp, and how to conduct operations while visiting**
- **A designated tent area to encourage campers to move away from sensitive areas**
- **Groundworks to make sensitive areas less accessible**
- **Noticeboard at the designated camping area to provide information about littering, the environment, and on leaving human waste**
- **Removal of public bins at the Clachan area, the public car park, and Sand car park**
- **Supporting the ACC in managing the littering issues at the public toilets**

This was communicated amongst the Tourism Group and then to the community on social media at the end of July. There was unanimous support for all measures amongst the tourism group.

Overall, the above measures have been extremely successful, and it has allowed for a more managed situation at the Bay area. The results of the pilot scheme have been gathered and used to inform a detailed plan for the following year which is in progress.

There has been significant press coverage as a result of the measures, namely in the following places:

- Heart FM/LBC London Radio
- Ross-shire Journal
- BBC Alba

Going forward

The public bins have now been replaced as the pilot scheme has come to an end.

Work has begun in earnest on the Tourism Strategy and putting together a plan for next year and beyond. The Tourism Strategy, and any measures agreed to manage visitors going forward, will be presented at the Forum and have agreement from a majority of the community.

JW and Anne Beaton represent Applecross on the Visit Wester Ross committee, and JW represents Applecross on North Highland Initiative, both of which offer opportunity and valuable information, inclusivity into projects and campaigns, and support.

Saara Viitanen and JW have also become representatives on the Wester Ross Tourism Partnership, which should provide a cohesive platform in which to communicate to potential visitors, send out the right message to the right audience, and work in partnership.