THE NORTH HIGHLANDS PRESS PAUSE PILOTS
Community Led Tourism

Sept 2023

BE L*CAL

SCOTO
Scottish Community Tourism

What is Community Led Tourism?

Historically many communities have felt that tourism happens to them - rather than with or for them.

But as more and more communities across Scotland form local development trusts, take ownership of assets, and are providing visitor facing services and experience there is a growing sense of tourism being not just something that communities can embrace but also something that can deliver many positive benefits and can help address priority issues such as social isolation, retaining young people, showcasing local producers and crafters and preserving artefacts and assets.

SCOTO has categorised two types of community tourism in Scotland.

Community Led Visitor Services and Experiences *– delivered by social enterprises and using assets owned by the community*

Community Led Destination Development and Promotion – *where business and community interests work together to ensure tourism works for the community*

The SCOTO Press Pause Initiative

In June 2023 NHI commissioned SCOTO to undertake 'Press Pause' pilots with two communities – later agreed as Lochcarron and Thurso.

SCOTO's Press Pause Initiative has been designed to support geographic communities to take time to review their own current situation and reflect on what could be done differently so tourism becomes a force for good. For them.

'Press Pause' takes place in a community and facilitates reflective conversations with individuals at a face-to-face workshop where key business and community interests are represented.

Each workshop generates key findings and SCOTO then provides recommendations and suggests next steps for the community and opportunities for community led tourism services and experiences drawing on best practice from elsewhere and recalibrating how tourism could be delivered and measured locally.

Why Press Pause?
The Strategic Context

The National Framework for Economic Transformation (NSET) has a vision *"to create a wellbeing economy: a society that is thriving across economic, social and environmental dimensions, and that delivers prosperity for all Scotland's people and places. We aim to achieve this while respecting environmental limits, embodied by our climate and nature targets."*

Scottish Communities are being **empowered** to do more for themselves **- to own assets and strengthen their voice**

Scotland Outlook 2030 – the national tourism strategy – is seeking *"responsible tourism for a sustainable future"*. Responsible tourism covers four themes – reducing carbon, inclusion, biodiversity and communities.

Scotland has provided the strategic context for a new way of doing tourism with communities to the fore.

Why Press Pause?
The North Highlands

In the North Highlands, even prior to Covid, various marketing initiatives and the social media explosion had attracted significant numbers to the area and while many businesses were benefitting and new businesses emerging some communities were feeling overwhelmed.

Post Covid, there has been a sense of trying to recover to 2019 levels but for many getting off the hamster wheel and focusing on how things could be different feels hard to do.

By taking time to pause and collectively reflect on tourism in the local area, there is scope for individual communities to consider what perhaps isn't working as well as it might and how things could be done differently to benefit the community and make tourism a force for good for everyone.

SCOTO & NHI Press Pause
Lochcarron & Thurso Pilot Communities

LOCHCARRON
- Located in the North Highlands of Scotland on the west coast
- Situated within the Wester Ross Biosphere
- Large village with key visitor services
- Population of c900
- Rail access – on the Kyle Line
- On the A890/A896
- On the NC500
- 65 miles from Inverness
- Has a community development company and local business association
- Visit Wester Ross DMO

THURSO
- Located in the North Highlands of Scotland on the north coast
- Situation in Caithness and Sutherland
- Major town with key visitor services
- Population of c7390
- Rail access – on the Far North Line
- At the end of the A9 and junction with A836
- On the NC500
- Ferry Port for Orkney
- 110 miles from Inverness
- Has a community development trust
- Venture North DMO

SCOTLAND

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The Approach

- Mystery shopper appraisal of the community as a visitor destination – online and in person
- Face to Face Workshop
  - Facilitated conversations between businesses and community interests
  - Collective consideration and critical appraisal of what is and isn't working for the community
  - Reflections on what could make a difference
  - Insights on what is happening elsewhere
- Feedback and Recommendations Report
  - Development of a Community Led Tourism Activity Plan
  - Community Owned Place Brand and Visitor Proposition
  - Community Led Local Tourism Impact Measurement Template

The Workshop Content

- What's working, what's not working, and what could be done differently/better?
- For locals, for visitors?
- Who are the Competitors and Comparators?
- Visitor Profile – Past, Present and Future?
- Community Led Destination Competency Appraisal
- Community Led Place Branding – USPs, POPs and PODs
- Community Led Visitor Propositions & Scenarios
- Measuring tourism impact and benefits from the community perspective –economic, social and enviromental

Destination Competence – 15 Criteria

1. Tourism Traditions and Timelines
2. Sense of place and Visitor Proposition
3. Features and attractions
4. Accommodation
5. Activities and Experiences
6. Food, Drink and Refreshments
7. Events and Festivals
8. Travel and Connectivity
9. Amenities and Infrastructure
10. Visitor Management, Signage and Interpretation
11. Digital Presence and Marketing
12. Biodiversity and Net Zero
13. Community Assets
14. People and Players
15. Destination Collaboration

Destination Competence Appraisal

Being a successful destination is a function of many factors and how they interplay.

Through conversation and discussions between business and community interests the   community appraise their current offer under 15 criteria and then rate it in terms of

Red – things are really not working or don't exist
Amber – things that need to be improved
Green – things that are functioning well.

This rating is generated by all present and helps facilitate collective thinking and also trigger ideas for improvement

Community Appraisals

LOCHCARRON - COMMENTS	RAG	CRITERIA	RAG	THURSO - COMMENTS
Strong history and tradition. Was very seasonal but now extending. Expectations have changed – higher quality and shorter stays	🟨	**TRADITIONS & TIMELINES**	🟥	Tourism hasn't been a big focus traditionally - blank sheet?
Strong Gaelic roots but not used or conveyed. Limited scope for visitors to better understand the place and heritage	🟥	**SENSE OF PLACE**	🟥	Thurso is well known by name but doesn't project a strong sense of place
A good mix of castle, gardens, sea and coastline, wildlife, pottery, weavers	🟩	**FEATURES & ATTRACTIONS**	🟨	There are several – castles, beach, archaeology, museum, church - but not well packaged for visitors
Reasonable provision – don't cater well for campervans and nos are growing. Losing short term lets (covid, Brexit, STL) - no high end hotel	🟨	**ACCOMMODATION**	🟩	Good range in type and quality plus recent Premiere Inn investment
Mainly DIY - No watersports despite coastal setting – no pontoon access – sailing club members only - Highland Tour Guide is unique	🟥	**ACTIVITIES**	🟨	There are DIY options but only limited providers with equipment and tours
Good cafes – evening very limited choice and need to book – issues on Sun and Mon – all staff related – premises do collaborate on opening times	🟨	**FOOD & DRINK**	🟨	There is a good range of type and quality but not necessarily easy for visitors to find – a lot is in the hotels
Highland Games – big feature (clashes with Inverness) – no craft faiers or open studios Shinty club/games not promoted – oldest in west	🟥	**EVENTS & FESTIVALS**	🟨	There have been different festivals and scope to do more – need a large indoor venue
Rail link (station 3 miles from village centre) – 4 trains per day – bus does connect but not promoted – no taxi	🟨	**TRAVEL**	🟨	Despite having a train connection onward travel and public transport links are very poor – poor provision of information

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Community Appraisals

LOCHCARRON - COMMENTS	RAG	CRITERIA	RAG	THURSO - COMMENTS
Public loos, 3 garages, ATM, food store with local produce – 24 hour petrol pumps – EV chargers – health centre – extensive parking	🟩	**AMENITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE**	🟩	Thurso is a hub of services, shops, amenities and infrastructure
Very limited and what there is in poor condition – main junction isnt marked (used to be) – lochcarron not signposted from, North	🟥	**VISITOR INFO & SIGNAGE**	🟥	Local visitor information is poor – very few leaflets, local signs and maps to help visitors orientate themselves
Website has very good traction and google ranking – food facebook page – do a whats on (rely on input – good 4G for browsing	🟩	**DIGITAL PRESENCE**	🟥	Poorly represented on other sites (eg VS) – a new Dfiscover Thurso website has been developed but no resource to manage it
Things are happening but not promoted or explained. Good EV charge points	🟨	**BIODIVERSITY & NET ZERO**	🟨	Things are happening but not promoted eg Green Tourism, EV charge points – lots of opps – scope to work with the Climate Hub
Own a number of community assets for clubs, village hall and also Kirkton Forest – remote from village and lacks parking – looking at Howard Doris Centre	🟨	**COMMUNITY ASSETS**	🟥	There are a few but primarily small scale and speciifc purpose (eg Scouts, greenhouses and garden) – no large space
Active buty serious burnout issues and no succession – very challenging – good size of village but few step up	🟥	**PEOPLE & PLAYERS**	🟨	TCDT is a strong asset but limited capaicyt just now. Local players are keen to engage and collaborate
Plethora of destination content – VWR is the DMO but complacency post covid and losing members – no local engagement with VS	🟨	**DESTINATION COLLABORATION**	🟩	Feels positive with new Venture North DMO and Lord Thurso as current chair of VS

Sense of Place and Place Branding

- Place branding is the idea that **a place, a town, a city, or a region can be branded –** given an identity with a value proposition for a target market and have branding techniques and marketing strategies applied to drive a marketing campaign. Much in the same way a product, service or business can.

- In essence, place branding is "**a strategy for projecting images and managing perceptions – and expectations - about places**". **Authenticity.**

- Place branding seeks to form **a meaningful relationship between person (locals and visitors) and place.**

Your place brand

What sets you apart

What the visitor is seeking

Your competitors place brand

What sets them apart

National – Regional – Local Hierarchy

- SCOTLAND – VISIT SCOTLAND

- WESTER ROSS -
VISIT WESTER ROSS

- LOCHCARRON – LADBA

- individual businesses,
organisations and enterprises

- SCOTLAND – VISIT SCOTLAND

- CAITHNESS & SUTHERLAND –
VENTURE NORTH

- THURSO – DISCOVER THURSO

- individual businesses,
organisations and enterprises

Community Led Place Branding

VisitScotland and regional DMOs typically have strong 'see and do' content but lack consistent **high quality place-based content**– and are keen for this to be provided.

This is a golden opportunity for individual communities to consider what makes their place **special** and **differentiates it from other places** nearby. It also presents a golden opportunity to develop existing and new products that reinforce this **place brand** and provide **visitor propositions** for existing and **new audiences** that appeal to the local community.

Of note, this is a golden opportunity for communities to focus on positioning and presenting themselves in a manner that works for **both locals and visitors** and invokes **pride** - an opportunity to welcome visitors as **temporary locals** and gain rich insights into the past, present and future of the community.

By scoping out and developing a **community led place brand**, locals will become much more aware of their past and what made them the community they are today. They will find opportunities to celebrate this through **events, festivals, interpretation** and **new experiences** - with **authenticy** to the fore.

"To see ourselves as others see us"

LOCHCARRON - is a pretty village of white-washed cottages on the shore of Loch Carron in the Wester Ross region of Scotland.

Situated on the shore of Loch Carron, this gem of a town in the western Highlands offers peace and tranquillity. With an abundance of wildlife and scenery, Lochcarron is an ideal location from which to explore further the west coast of Scotland with easy access to the Isle of Skye, Applecross, Torridon and Gairloch.

THURSO - The most northerly town in mainland Scotland, Thurso is a great base for exploring the surrounding countryside.

There's plenty to see and do in and around the delightful town of Thurso. The town is a hive of lovely traditional shops, cafes, bars and restaurants.
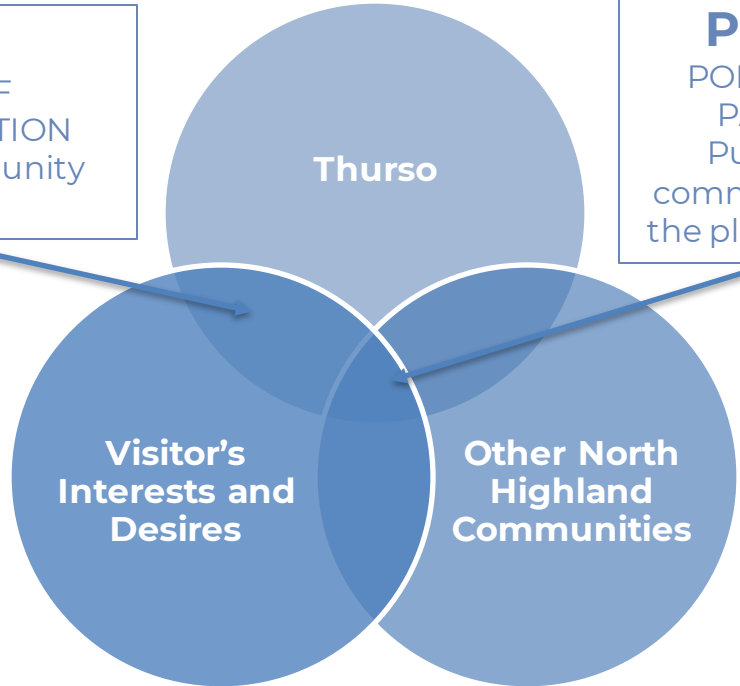
Visit **Scotland** | **Alba** ™

USPs, POPs & PODs

PODS
POINTS OF DIFFERENTIATION
Sets our community apart

POPS
POINTS OF PARITY
Puts our community on the playing field

Thurso

Visitor's Interests and Desires

Other North Highland Communities

USPS
UNIQUE SELLING POINTS
What is unique about our community that no other destination can claim

Community Led Appraisals

LOCHCARRON

USPs

- **Longest village in Scotland**
- **Inspired a global Scottish brand**
- **Oldest shinty club on west coast**

POPs

- **Mountains, sealochs, castles, gardens, highland games, weaving, seafood, secret stills and highland clearances**

PODs

- **Within 5 miles of 13 munros**
- **Highest cycling hill climb in UK**
- **Original Loch Carron looms**

THURSO

USPs

- **Most northerly town in Scotland**
- **End of the A9 and the Far North Line**
- **Gateway to Orkney Isles**
- **Home of Robert Dick and his fossil collections**

POPs

- **Coastline, beaches, surf, vikings, harbour, ferry port, distillery, museum, brochs, castle, geology, fossils**

PODs

- **Gateway to Orkney**
- **World class surf beach**
- **Highest concentration of brochs in Scotland**
- **Female Vikings**

Community Led Propositions

LOCHCARRON

Scotland's longest village

Home of globally renowned Lochcarron tartan

Outdoor 'Enthusiast' Mecca (Bealach na Ba cycle hill climb, Munro bagging (13 peaks in 5 miles)

The 'alternative' start and finish of the NC500

THURSO

The Hub of the North - Next Stop Orkney

Where Sex was Invented – 385m years ago!

Scotland's Cold Water Surf Mecca

A Land Ruled by Female Vikings

Scotland's northerly town with a Big Influence

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Measuring what Matters, Matters

"What we measure affects what we do. If we measure the wrong thing, we will do the wrong thing. If we don't measure something, it becomes neglected, as if the problem didn't exist".
Carnegie UK

Tourism in Scotland is traditionally measured by footfall, over night stays and spend. SCOTO and NHI seek to recalibrate tourism and measure what is important to the individual community.

Many communities have developed Community Action Plans and/or are taking part in Place Planning activity.

They have defined local priorities e.g.
- Young people retained/attracted
- Permanent jobs created
- Cultural assets conserved

Findings and Feedback Reports

- **Easy read** slide-based format
- Sets out **context, key findings** and SCOTO **feedback** and **recommendations** so anyone can assimilate (not just participants)
- **Templates** for sharing individual Destination Competency and Place Branding USPs. POPs and PODs to get further local input
- Examples of **best practice** and links to **case studies** provided
- Community led tourism **recommendations** provided for each Destination Competency criteria
- **Optional Place Brand propositions** developed based on USPs, POPs and PODs and for different target markets
- **Product** development and event ideas set out
- **Quick wins** and recommended **next steps**

Benefits for the Communities

- Scope to get off the **hamster wheel** and focus on a **new era** – not 2019
- **Facilitated conversations** on difficult and emotive topics
- Reappraisal of NC500 and other visitors from a community perspective – and focus on **managing expectations**
- Recognition of **shared** and chronic **issues** – staffing, housing, STL impacts, motorhomes and lack of facilities, capacity and succession, poor digital content and representation of the destination on 3rd party sites – and explore **joint solutions**
- Sharing **best practice** and inspiration from elsewhere
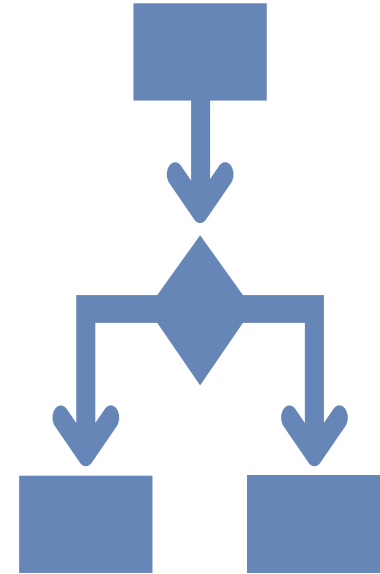
Quick wins and early actions

- An **open day event** in the community to share the Press Pause findings, gather interest in project ideas and recruit new volunteers
- Develop the **place brand** and proposition and produce a **toolkit** for all community players to use
- **Curate** new place brand relevant **content** to share
- New place branded **welcome signs, banners** and **bunting**
- Local attractions **tear off map** and display version at key locations
- Develop **BeLocal** FaceBook page for local business promotions and visitor queries
- Self guided **local trails** under different themes / **waymarking** existing paths and walks
- **Signage** for services and facilities
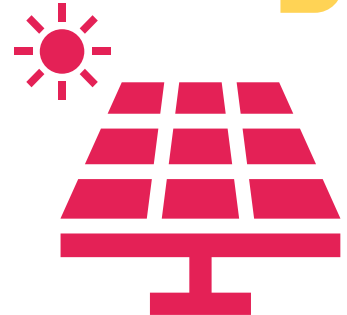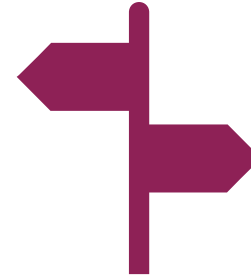
Next Steps for the Pilot Communities

- Provide support to prioritise recommendations into a **Press Pause activity plan** template
- Provide NHI grant support to progress **quick wins**
- Provide inspiration for **doing things differently** with the same resource / how to achieve **best effect**
- Highlight funding opportunities to secure **local resources** and progress **priority actions**
- Highlight **local capacity building** and **succession planning** approaches for community leaders
- **Introduce** community players to **key partners**
- Explore **collaborations with other communities** where similar themes emerge
- Devise and provide **Press Pause toolkits** to support Place Brand roll out

Lessons Learned

- Process needs to be **owned locally**
- **3.5 hour** workshop is needed
- **External facilitation** and expertise is vital
- Awareness of **issues elsewhere** is invaluable
- Feedback after the event has value – allow for **reflection**
- Sense of consultation fatigue so essential to contextualise this as **community led** and for the benefit of the **community first**, others second
- **Differentiate** Press Pause from Place Planning
- Important to have **follow through** support for activity planning and quick wins
- Previous community action plans provide **priority themes** for measurement of **impact**

Strategic Opportunities

- **Content curation sharing frameworks** with strategic partners
- **Toolkits** for community led Place Branding, PR and media, content curation and social media best practice
- **Learning exchanges** within the North Highlands and further afield
- **Data aggregation** with toolkits for measurement, standard templates with infographic reporting
- **Collaborative product development –** eg themed trails, regional themed festivals

Next Steps and Roll Out

- SCOTO & NHI have identified four more communities who want to "Press Pause"
- We'd like to find more
- We'd like to work with other partners
- Can you help?

NHI and SCOTO

North Highland Initiative (**NHI**) is a non-profit organisation established in 2005 as a direct result of His Majesty King Charles III's commitment to support the people and businesses of the north Highlands of Scotland.

Today NHI's goals remain the same with a focus on supporting and funding community building, food and farming, education, conservation and tourism, seeking to foster innovation, create employment and enhance quality of life for the people living in this unique and beautiful part of Scotland.

www.northhighlandinitiative.co.uk

SCOTO (Scotland's Community Tourism Network) was established in 2022 as a forum for individuals and enterprises across Scotland involved with or interested in developing community led tourism.

SCOTO's energy is focused on peer-to-peer support and learning, providing online resources, sharing best practice and supporting the growth and development of community led tourism across Scotland.

SCOTO's ambition is for every community in Scotland to embrace community led tourism as a force for good which enables their community to be an even better place to live, work and visit.

www.scoto.co.uk   www.belocal.scot

SCOTO Press Pause
Recalibrating tourism in Scotland

"A grass roots community wealth building approach enabling Scotland's communities to recalibrate tourism to deliver for the community and environment first, visitors second."

SCOTO

Scottish Community Tourism