

## VisitScotland Information Strategy Update

### Background

In 2005 VisitScotland inherited 120 Tourist Information Centres from the Area Tourist Board network. Traditionally these centres offered free visitor information print, itinerary planning, ticket sales and on-arrival booking services for accommodation. By 2017 visitor numbers to the estate had dropped by 58%; and 66% of visitors now access information online. The strategy represents a radical approach to ensure customer needs continue to be met.

VisitScotland will continue to manage a smaller estate of manned centres in key locations. They will be high-impact regional hubs, supported by digital products and local businesses participating in the VisitScotland Information Partnership programme. There are 110 participants across Argyll & Bute and the number and diversity of outlets are increasing.

The strategy is focused on enhancing information provision in partnership with others to deliver the right information at the right time and through the right channels. The 2016 visitor survey showed that visitors value talking to locals and see this as an important way to access highlights and hidden gems – 46% prefer to get information from local people and 33% from directly from their accommodation provider. Online accommodation bookings are now made by 64% of visitors, and 20% of bookings are made directly with providers. Mobile phones are brought and used by 68% of visitors and 36% bring a tablet on holiday.

### Argyll & Bute

Regional hubs will be created in Bowmore, Craginure, Oban and Rothesay. VisitScotland iCentres affected by the strategy are:

**Campbeltown** This centre will cease operating by the end of March 2019. In the period from 2006/07-2016/17 visitor numbers fell by 58% and accommodation bookings by 78%.

Interest in the property has been expressed by a commercial operator, with support from Argyll & the Isles Tourism Co-operative and Explore Kintyre. Discussions are ongoing.

**Dunoon** This centre ceased trading on 22 December 2017 owing to staff contract conditions. The building is still occupied by VisitScotland and Scottish Natural Heritage staff. In the period from 2006/07-2016/17 visitor numbers fell by 41% and accommodation bookings by 90%.

Discussions are underway with Argyll & Bute Council/Live Argyll on the creation of an enhanced VisitScotland Information Partnership outlet at the new Queen's Hall development.

**Inveraray** This centre will cease operating by the end of March 2019. In the period from 2006/07-2016/17 visitor numbers fell by 72% and accommodation bookings by 79%.

The property is leased from Argyll & Bute Council.

**Tarbert** This centre will cease trading by the end of March 2019. In the period from 2006/07-2016/17 visitor numbers fell by 17% and accommodation bookings by 81%.

Interest in the property has been expressed by Tarbert & Skipness Community Council, Tarbert & Skipness Community Trust; Tarbert Harbour Authority and Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance. I have

offered to meet representatives of these organisations to look at options for the future use for the property.

Under current Scottish Government regulations, the properties must first be offered to other Scottish Government agencies. If there is no interest then the properties will be offered for sale on the open market. VisitScotland is not bound to accept the highest, or indeed any offer. Offers that demonstrate appropriate, sustainable use will be welcome.

David Adams McGilp

Regional Director

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