

# Celtic Fringe Tourist Association Strategy Document

## Introduction

The Celtic Fringe Tourist Association (CFTA) presents this strategy document in order to provide a single point of reference for matters of strategy and policy. It is hoped that it will enable committee members, development workers, association members, strategic partners and funders to proceed on the basis of shared understanding without undue anxiety or misunderstanding. Written in late 2001, the document presents a strategy that will guide our activities for the next three years.

## Background

Celtic Fringe Tourism Association was formed in late 1997 following a series of locally held meetings on the Subject of Rural Tourism. It was felt that there was a need for a local community group who could identify and develop tourism based proposals for the Celtic Fringe area (defined as the portion of Wester Ross coastal area that lies between Lochcarron in the South and Braemore Junction in the north, bounded by the A832), and could work co-operatively with outside organisations such as HOST, RACE, Highland Council and other groups.

## External Influences

### **Economic context**

The Celtic Fringe area is one that has been defined economically by the preponderance of fishing and crofting interests although the area has been renowned as a tourist location since the 1860s. Other historical economic activity includes estates and the military. With the decline of agriculture in general and crofting in particular it is seen that tourism offers the best hope for economic progress in the area. The growth of interest in recreational access to the hills and wild lands has coincided with an extension of scientific and conservation interest in the area as expressed through groups such as the National Trust and SNH. The declaration of a Wester Ross National Scenic Area - as well as designations such as the Beinn Eighe Nature Reserve - has had a profound effect on attitudes towards land use, with the growing acceptance of the relevance of recreation as a key economic activity in the area.

### **Visitor patterns**

In the past few years, in spite of increased efforts at marketing the Highlands by groups such as HOST, visitor numbers have generally declined. This has been put down to factors such as the strength of the pound on international currency markets – resulting both in fewer visitors by foreigners and more foreign holidays being made by UK residents – as well as increased competition from other tourist areas, particularly Ireland. The way to reverse this decline is to concentrate on niche areas within the tourism market and build on our area's unique strengths.

### **Geographical context**

The Celtic Fringe area is one of great natural beauty. The varied landscape includes beaches, dramatic mountains, rivers and islands. There are no urban centres and the most significant towns are Gairloch and Lochcarron. Roads are generally poor, especially between Achnasheen and Gairloch, which contains long sections of single track. However, it is said that the primitive roads also constitute some of the area's attractiveness, especially to bikers.

## Internal Influences

The Celtic Fringe Tourism Association is run on behalf of its members by a volunteer committee. We receive funding by the Highland Council and Ross and Cromarty Enterprise (RACE) as well as other funders on a project-by-project basis. We are self-funding to the extent that our members pay annual membership dues. CFTA has recently taken on a part-time, paid Development Worker to further its aims.

## Our vision and our aim

At Celtic Fringe we believe that we can make more of our area's natural and human resources to increase the number of visitors coming to the area and to extend the stay of those visitors. By encouraging the clustering of

member businesses and assisting in the collection and dissemination of information it is believed that we can significantly enhance both the attractiveness of the area to visitors and the profitability of businesses serving those visitors' needs.

## Strategic objectives

- to enhance the natural and cultural amenities of Wester Ross
- to create a perception in the minds of potential visitors of the attractiveness of the area
- to convey a sense of continuing welcome to visitors already visiting the area in order to prolong their stay and maximise their economic benefit
- to encourage the clustering of local tourism-related businesses to maximise the benefit to visitors and business profitability

## Sectors

### Food and Drink

The high costs of bringing food ingredients in from outside the area has resulted in the tendency to cut corners at the expense of visitor satisfaction. Using local produce – especially seafood – has been identified as one of the primary means of increasing perceptions of quality. We need to do more to promote local produce and to work with other groups to facilitate increased local trade between produce supplier and hospitality provider. Although there is no distillery in the area, businesses can benefit from the promotion of Scotch Whisky.

### Culture and Music

The West Highlands are renowned for the richness of the indigenous culture which includes Gaelic; the remnants of clan culture; fiddle, accordion and bagpipe music; military history; the Church; the cultural admixture resulting from the Clearances and resultant settlements in the New World; fishing and maritime culture. In recent times a large influx of settlers from outwith the region has resulted in an additional richness of cultural diversity with a high proportion of writers, craftspeople, artists and musicians. There is great potential for the hosting of cultural events as a means by which visitors can be induced to visit and prolong their stay in the area.

### Natural Environment

The naturally wild landscape, availability of wide-open spaces and unique pattern of interaction between humans and landscape form a large part of the attractiveness of our area to visitors. We will seek to enhance perceptions of the natural beauty of the Celtic Fringe area and encourage the development of new niche tourism products such as eco-tourism and wilderness activities provision.

### Sport

The potential for the development of sport consists in the natural amenities constituted by the land and sea environment, the existence of built amenities such as golf courses and marinas, and the tradition of sporting events and fixtures. We will promote events such as golf tournaments, hill-running races, shinty etc. and liaise with groups responsible for hosting and organising such events to maximise the advantage for tourism-related interests.

## Strategic Projects

For a descriptive list of current and completed projects at any one time please email the Development Officer, [tommy@celticfringe.org.uk](mailto:tommy@celticfringe.org.uk)

## Principles

### Sustainability

We will endeavour to abide by the principles of sustainable economic development by ensuring that funding is only spent where it will result in long-term economic, social or environmental advantage. Wherever possible we will encourage the use of renewable resources and locally produced goods and services, and we will prefer to be involved with those projects which have minimal impact on the natural environment. Where possible we

will minimise environmental costs by using electronic of communication, remote working techniques and recycled office products.

### **Partnership**

We aim to work in partnership with other groups in the area and seek to reduce duplication of effort by ensuring that we liaise effectively with those groups and only undertake projects where there is a provable, unique benefit to be derived. Wherever it is appropriate we will encourage the affiliation of our group with other groups and work towards encouraging other groups to join Celtic Fringe as affiliate members.

### **Consultation**

We aim at all times to act in accordance with the consent of our members. We will carry out consultation exercises at various times to determine that consent. We also aim to work with the consent of the wider community and will act to consult with them at such times as is deemed necessary.

### **Inclusion**

We believe in principles of inclusion and equality and will not discriminate on the grounds of race, gender, class, religious beliefs or sexuality. We aim to work with diverse groups and businesses within the field of tourism in Wester Ross and will endeavour where possible to act to the advantage of all and the detriment of none.

### **Responsibility**

We aim to conduct ourselves as a responsible corporate citizen with regard to wider social and environmental concerns.

### **We Believe in**

- risk taking
- innovation
- adding value
- delivering community benefit

### **Measurement**

#### **Demonstrate Progress**

We will seek at all times to demonstrate that we are a proactive organisation that take seriously our responsibility to deliver results to our members, funders and partners.

#### **Monitor and Evaluate**

Each project undertaken by CFTA will be monitored on an ongoing basis and subjected to a formal qualitative and quantitative evaluation in terms of costs and benefits.

#### **Quality of Life**

As well as seeking to maximise the economic benefits of tourism to the area we aim to demonstrate the ways in which appropriate tourism can improve quality of life for residents and visitors alike, resulting in viable communities, cultural richness and increased wealth.

#### **Employment**

We will aim to foster a business approach that results in increased levels of employment locally.

#### **Community Confidence**

We aim to act with the confidence of communities within the Celtic Fringe area and will take seriously any criticisms of our methods and approach.