



## Ten North Highlands communities benefit from projects to rebalance tourism



**(Pictured Left to Right, Gairloch, Tongue and Thurso courtesy of NC500)**

A series of workshop-based projects are helping ten local areas across the North Highlands pioneer a community-first visitor-second approach to tourism.

Following the success of the pilot, the organisers are keen to hear from other communities across the North Highlands who want to use this tailored approach to make tourism work better for them.

The Press Pause projects, run by [SCOTO CIC](#) and supported and funded by [NHI](#) with additional grant support from Highland Council's Community Regeneration Fund via Wester Ross Biosphere, are bringing together communities to identify issues and opportunities and support the creation of a plan to take back control of tourism locally.

Genevieve Duhigg, Chair of NHI, said:

“Drawing these groups together has been hugely positive and a way of allowing communities to develop and manage tourism in their areas in a way that works for them. Some of the issues identified were common to many regions: from challenges around staffing and motorhomes, to opportunities for increased accommodation provision and community-controlled marketing and information provision that would allow local people to choose and control how the area was promoted.”

The ten areas, which stretch from Dornie to Thurso, are each running a local workshop for business and community interests which is fully facilitated by SCOTO. This then generates a detailed report setting out the findings and filled with ideas and opportunities for the community to lead and control the development, management and promotion of their

community as a destination. A key feature of each workshop and the report is reference to experience elsewhere as a stimulus for action.

Each community is then being provided with additional funding from NHI to progress quick wins. These range from festivals and guidebooks, to murals, maps and trails.

Examples include Lochcarron staging a Tartan Week celebration at the end of September this year bringing the community together through various events and activities in recognition of this west coast village being the inspiration behind a global tartan brand. The hope is this will become an annual event. In addition, Thurso has repositioned itself as the Hub of the North in recognition of it being the northernmost town on the UK mainland, and has published a new online guidebook.

Other communities are looking at new tear off maps to better orientate and disperse visitors and are looking at resurrecting old and creating new self-guided walks and online content to much better portray their community as a great place to live, work and visit.

Genevieve Duhigg continued:

“These workshops have been terrifically successful in getting different interests around the table, focusing minds on local issues and finding solutions. They have enabled communities to scope out and take forward innovative and effective projects that will allow them to better control the tourism in their own area, creating a community-first; visitor-second approach that supports them to thrive. We’re really pleased to have been able to fund these projects and it’s extremely positive to see communities come together to take them forward.”

Carron Tobin, Executive Director of SCOTO said:

“I’m delighted with the appetite for these Press Pause projects. We piloted this with Thurso and Lochcarron, and the format we’ve developed enables groups to find solutions to the challenges presented by tourism and capitalise on the opportunities in a way that works for the needs of local people. We are finding that Press Pause is stimulating proper discussions about what really matters to individual communities; and then focussing on what needs to be done differently.

“We know that there are other communities across the North Highlands that are interested in getting involved in Press Pause and would urge them to get in touch. We’d be keen, for example, to develop an island-based programme including areas in the Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland and would be keen to hear from communities there.

“With the work progressed with NHI and further afield, the Press Pause process is now recognised as a tried, tested and tailored approach for any Scottish community who wants to make tourism work better for them and bring added value.”

The North Highlands communities involved in Press Pause are:

Lochcarron

Thurso

Brora

Wick

Plockton  
Ullapool  
Shieldaig  
Dornie  
Durness  
Tongue

### About Press Pause

The North Highlands Press Pause initiatives allow communities to pause and collectively reflect on tourism in the local area. This allows for the recognition of shared and chronic issues: from staffing, housing and motorhome impact to the lack of facilities, poor digital content or a fragmented representation of the destination. Groups then explore joint solutions and share best practice and inspiration from elsewhere with the overall objective of making tourism a force for good for everyone.

Press Pause revolves around a half day facilitated workshop which brings community and business interests together to collectively consider tourism. It covers a number of relevant topics, with key focuses on destination competency, sense of place and place branding. This allows for the identification of specific actions that businesses and the local community can progress in the short, medium and longer term.

In total 31 communities across Scotland have benefited from Press Pause workshops to date.

Those looking to find out more about the North Highlands Press Pause community-led tourism projects, should contact [info@north-highlands.co.uk](mailto:info@north-highlands.co.uk).

Find out more about NHI at [www.northhighlandinitiative.co.uk](http://www.northhighlandinitiative.co.uk). Find out more about SCOTO at [www.scoto.co.uk](http://www.scoto.co.uk).

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[Link to images here.](#)

### Notes to Editors:

NHI has provided additional grants to projects in these areas in 2024 as follows:

<u>Project Name</u>	<u>Funding Purpose</u>	<u>Amount Awarded</u>	<u>Date Awarded</u>

Ullapool Golf Club - Replacement Heaters	Replacement heaters to make energy use much more efficient. Current heaters are very wasteful of energy.	£2,000.00	12/03/24
Brora Development Trust-Brora's Healthy School Holidays Project	To provide food relief in the way of meal starter kits to parents and carers of over 200 children and young people in education in Brora during the school summer holidays 2024, as part of a longer-term initiative.	£5,000.00	29/05/24
Pentland Firth Yacht Club (Thurso) - Replacement Windows	Replacement of failing, leaking, non-secure windows	£2,000.00	07/05/24
Thurso Youth Club - Summer Holiday Trips	To contribute towards the costs of two coaches and entry fees to attractions for two summer holiday trips	£1,500.00	25/06/24
Thurso Community Development Trust - Sharing Shed	To provide funding for staff to maintain the sharing shed operation	£1,500.00	09/07/24

### **About North Highland Initiative**

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.

Today its goals remain the same and it works across Caithness, Sutherland, Wester Ross, Easter Ross and the islands of Orkney, Shetland, Lewis and Harris to help grow and champion the potential of the area's natural resources and talent to encourage economic stability and build diverse resilient communities.

NHI focuses on supporting and funding community building, food and farming, education, conservation and tourism. It collaborates with local businesses, organisations, and individuals to foster innovation, create employment, and enhance the quality of life for the people living in this unique and beautiful part of Scotland.

NHI actively supports communities through fundraising and grant making and collaborates with community groups to identify projects that support community infrastructure, services

and well-being. In the last five years NHI has donated over £240K to more than 200 community-led projects and programmes.

Through its retail brand, Mey Selections, NHI works with local farmers and producers, offering high-quality, locally sourced, and sustainable food and drink. This partnership has generated over £1.7 million in additional income for local farmers and opened market opportunities all over the world for producers in the Highlands.

Funds from the sale of the Mey Selections products also directly support local community and environmental projects, the future of local farmers and rural skills education programmes.

### **About SCOTO CIC**

SCOTO CIC (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 vision 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.

SCOTO's ambition is for tourism in Scotland to be recalibrated by 2030 to deliver for Scotland's communities and environment first.

<https://www.scoto.co.uk/>

<https://www.belocal.scot/>