

Pride of Passion

FOR SCOTLAND



'Community Challenges are set up to help communities understand how to make their tourism offering better, they will pay back time, money & effort invested and will be a hugely beneficial experience.'

Dingwall volunteers for the COMMUNITY CHALLENGE

'People don't realize how many visitors Dingwall gets, or what brings them to town. A lot of the businesses have been here a long time and are 'in with the bricks' and there are some well-established events. People kind of take things for granted the way they are but there are things that everybody recognizes could be better, things that the town needs to add to what visitors need, rather than just what local people need.'

Pat MacLeod, Dingwall Museum

How many places hide their light under a bushel and don't really shout about their assets? Dingwall had certainly had a more local outlook than you might imagine for a place that was the Viking capital of Scotland, hosts a major livestock mark and is the nearest town to much-visited Strathpeffer. As the nearest sizeable town for much of the Easter and Wester Ross area, it's also a shopping destination for much of the North.

The classic 3-point plan!

All the town's civic and business groups were represented at the launch meeting for the Community Challenge and many opted into the group formed to take on the 'work' of the Challenge...after first deciding what they wanted to focus on. They identified three priorities they all felt would be helpful to the profile of the town and to its ability to improve the 'Dingwall experience' for visitors:

1. Many town events rely on volunteers for stewarding, first aid and providing visitor information and assistance. Legal, cost and practical considerations led the group to decide a 'bank' of volunteers was needed for these activities, and that proper training should be provided to them.
2. Coordinated marketing research and planning would help prioritise future developments as well as raising the profile of the town and its attractions.
3. Some aspects of the physical environment in Dingwall could be improved with some effort, coordination of priorities and chivvying of the council and certain businesses to toe the line and also join in with the ambition.

The group divided into three parts, each in charge of taking on one of these activities and progressing it.

What was achieved?

The biggest success story so far is the launch of the town's Volunteer Scheme in April 2007 via a stall at the Farmers' Market. Good publicity was gained via press coverage of the launch, too, and the first batch

Case Study

of thirty-odd volunteers recruited and ready to start their training. Local providers are being used to do the training, thereby keeping the business in the community and bringing the likes of the football club into more direct contact with civic groups like the Dingwall Initiative and Dingwall in Bloom via the expertise that the football club can provide.

Specific priorities have been agreed for improving the town centre environment with additional street furniture, a planting programme (involving the whole community) and a lobbying role to encourage local businesses and the council to clean up their facades, premises and attitudes in the spirit of general improvement. The group has proposed specific changes to traffic and pedestrian management and access, too, that they feel will enhance the user-friendliness of the main shopping streets. Part of this is a shopping list of items of street furniture and physical improvements they wish to see the Council take on. Both local councilors have been involved in the process so that should lend credibility to the requests.

What the 'Community Challenge' provided

'The Community Challenge has given us the opportunity to get some of this onto the local agenda. The local paper is now covering the activities and developments and that is great for awareness and creating a feel-good factor and desire to join in.' Aimi Campbell, **The Dingwall Initiative.**

Pride & Passion events such as the Discovery Tour tempted individual businesses into the spirit of the project, taking local business-people on a typical visitor's day out in the district. The idea was to give them first-hand experience of the places they thought they knew about (but hadn't been to!) or didn't even know were there. Businesses of all sorts benefit from this increased knowledge because the more tourism people know about what's out there, the more able and willing they are to tell visitors about it and recommend it. Pride & Passion also paid for a mystery shopping and research trip to Pitlochry and Auchterarder to find out how places recognized as being good at specialist shopping and tourism respectively are actually doing it. They hoped to gain an impression of how Dingwall compared and also to get some ideas on how it could improve and develop.

Customer experience and leadership training was offered to group members and other business leaders. They took the opportunity to apply the information and ideas to the three areas they were working on. More general customer care workshops were delivered by a specialist theatre company.

What did we all learn?

Dingwall's Community Challenge experience showed us:

1. Groups need someone to be the Mr/Ms Motivator, to maintain progress and interest but this can be a tiring and time-consuming role, especially if reliant on face-to-face contact. New technologies are a great way of involving people, communicating progress and streamlining admin.
2. A lot was achieved in the six months the Community Challenge lasted for, but it's not really long enough....so future ones will run for at least a year, maybe eighteen months.
3. Many participants were already involved in civic and business groups and knew each other but they also tried hard to bring in new people and broaden participants beyond the 'usual suspects'.
4. Visiting other places with similar profiles and testing what they have to offer is a great way of borrowing ideas, seeing how your own place could tackle a similar issue or capitalize on an opportunity.
5. A place doesn't have to be 'touristy' to have a large number of visitors – people visit for all sorts of reasons.
6. The competition is not the business down the street – working together will boost everyone's situation. Don't be shy about opening your business up to show what you're doing well, or what you'd value some input on.

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