

ISLAND COMMUNITIES SCREENING ASSESSMENT

CLOSURE OF VISITSCOTLAND ICENTRES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

VisitScotland is required to have regard to island communities when carrying out its functions under the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018. This includes when it is considering policy, strategy or service decisions.

VisitScotland is obliged to undertake an Island Communities Impact Assessment where, in VisitScotland's opinion, a policy, strategy or service is likely to have an effect on an island community which is significantly different from its effect in other communities (including other island communities), in the area in which VisitScotland exercises its functions.

VisitScotland delivers an information provision service through a network of 25 information centres (iCentres) across the Scottish mainland, some Scottish islands, and some locations on key transport routes to Scottish islands:

Aberdeen, Aberfoyle, Aviemore, Ballater, Balloch, Bowmore (Isle of Islay), Brodick (Isle of Arran), Craignure (Isle of Mull), Dumfries, Edinburgh, Fort William, Glasgow, Inverness, Jedburgh, Kirkwall (Orkney), Lerwick (Shetland), Oban, Perth, Pitlochry, Portree (Isle of Skye), Rothesay (Isle of Bute), St Andrews, Stirling, Stornoway (Outer Hebrides), Ullapool.

The following is an Islands Impact Screening Assessment for the strategy change to information provision, which will result in the closure of all 25 iCentres.

In VisitScotland's opinion, this decision will not differently impact any island community, therefore, an Island Communities Impact Assessment is not required. This document provides a summary of the information considered to support the strategy change and the decision not to undertake a full Island Communities Impact Assessment.

OBJECTIVE

VisitScotland has been carrying out strategic reviews across its activities, to ensure it continues to deliver best economic impact for Scotland. The tourism landscape is changing, with a continually evolving digital environment. As part of the review process, a detailed assessment has considered the role VisitScotland plays in information provision to visitors, changing consumer behaviour and where VisitScotland can most directly influence visitor spend.

VisitScotland will close all of its information centres over the course of the next two years with first closures commencing from autumn 2024. It is anticipated that the closure programme will be complete by end of March 2026.

VisitScotland will focus on pre-arrival information and advice to drive the visitor economy, growing its value, which will promote regional spread, including islands as key markets. In contemplating this change, VisitScotland has considered connectivity for island communities and concluded that islands would be no more disadvantaged than rural mainland areas because of this change. In addition to this, the roll out of the Scottish Government R100 programme looks to address connectivity issues across Scotland.

On-arrival information and booking services may already be provided by other organisations and may be provided by other additional organisations in the future, this will be different in each location.

IDENTIFICATION OF ISLANDS

Due to the location of some iCentres (on islands and on key transport routes to islands), VisitScotland has identified the importance of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 legislation in making this decision.

However, at a strategic level, management is confident that this strategic change does not significantly differently impact island communities.

The good practice outlined in the Act will ensure that VisitScotland engages with key stakeholders throughout the life span of the delivery of the project as the centres are closed and following closure. Additional information in sections below.

DATA

See appendix.

STAKEHOLDERS

Key stakeholders:

- VisitScotland staff.
- MSPs, MPs and councillors.
- Local authority officials.
- Local tourism businesses.
- Industry/sector tourism groups.
- Local/regional tourism groups.
- Commercial partners.
- Property landlords and associated service providers.

VisitScotland intends to close the 25 centres over time in discussion with stakeholders. This will include:

- Appropriate timing of handover of premises and liaison with local stakeholders.
- Seasonal visitor fluctuations/key dates in local calendars.
- Implementation of digital delivery models.
- Aligning closure to fixed term staff contract end dates.
- Aligning with lease ends and break points.

VisitScotland staff considerations

No VisitScotland employees will be made compulsorily redundant under the closure programme, while current Scottish Government severance guidance remains in place.

A formal engagement will take place with staff. This will be managed by VisitScotland's HR team and will explore all available options for each employee.

Staff will have the opportunity to apply for voluntary redundancy or undertake a different role within VisitScotland, with redeployment and reskilling available to support this.

Location will not be a factor in determining consideration for voluntary redundancy.

VisitScotland moved to a hybrid working environment following Covid and most roles can now be undertaken from anywhere in Scotland, which offers greater redeployment opportunities for those in island or remote communities.

Other stakeholder considerations (inc officials, tourism groups and tourism businesses)

VisitScotland has engaged with key stakeholders to discuss its decision and will continue to meet with stakeholders as it plans and executes the closure programme.

Engagement with some stakeholders will continue after closure has taken place. This will be different in each individual location and will be determined by the nature of ongoing information provision in each location.

Property considerations

VisitScotland's property arrangements differ by individual iCentre:

- Some sites are owned by VisitScotland.
- Some sites are leased by VisitScotland with a lease term still to run.
- Some sites are leased by VisitScotland with an *in tacit* agreement.

Dependent on location the following are options for the future of the properties:

- Transfer of VisitScotland owned property to local community.
- Sale of owned property if no local community interest is shown.
- Exit from leasehold properties with payment.
- Exit from leasehold at lease end date.
- Sublet of leasehold properties.

Consultation will take place with all landlords as well as local communities to determine plans for each property.

INFORMATION PROVISION IN THE FUTURE

VisitScotland experience shows that regardless of location, visitors expect to obtain information and recommendations from local people, local businesses, and others in the visitor economy. There is an opportunity for community initiatives to play a greater role in information provision in the future.

Dependent on location, the following are options for the future of information provision:

- Existing in-person provision already in place from local operator(s).
- Ongoing information provision by local community, which may include local businesses and/or local tourism groups.
- Ongoing information provision by local authority.
- Potential for community provision.
- Potential for commercial opportunities.

It will become clear, as the project progresses, what the future situation will be for each site, and therefore, the nature of the stakeholder engagement that will take place.

In all cases, VisitScotland will continue to provide digital information for visitors.

Previous iCentre closures have demonstrated the success and importance of community tourism initiatives in delivering services and experiences for the visitor. For example, Loch Ness Hub in Drumnadrochit which combines bike hire, tickets for local attractions and local information; The Gale Centre in Gairloch which is run by The Community Development Trust and provides a community cafe and local information.

CONCLUSION

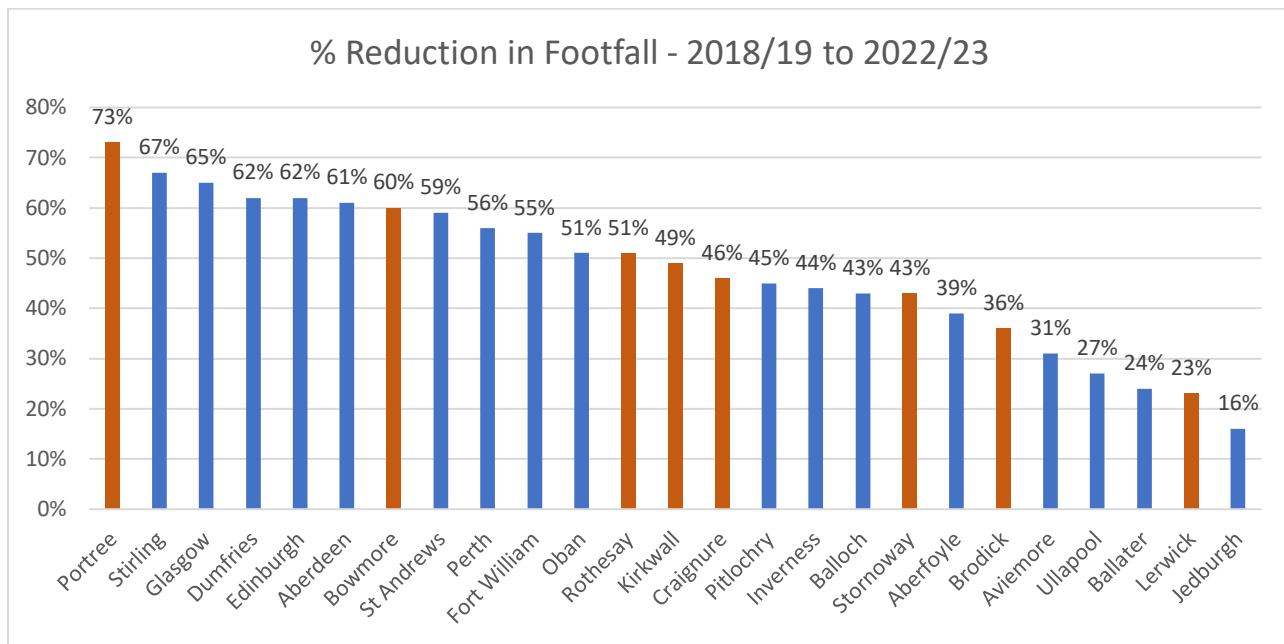
A full impact assessment is not required as, in considering the proposal, VisitScotland have seen no evidence to suggest the effect on an island community is significantly different from its effect on other communities (including other island communities). The impact of the decision to close all iCentres (mainland and islands) is the same for all similar stakeholders across the country, including all island communities.

No evidence has been presented as part of the engagement that indicated any island impacts that require to be taken into account.

VisitScotland will publish this screening assessment.

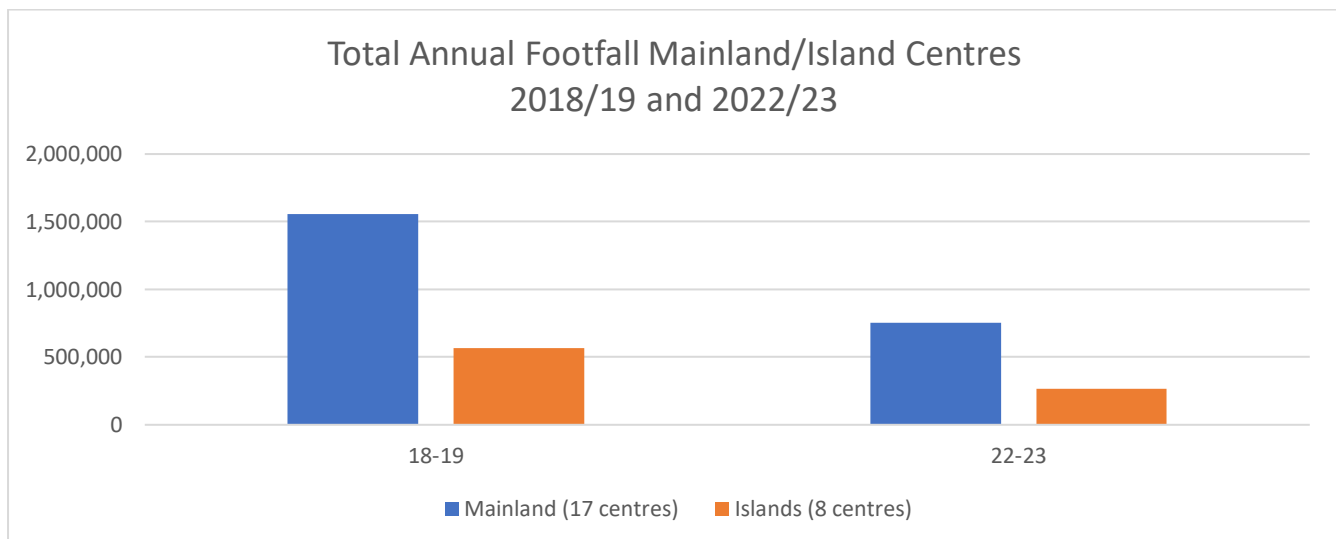
APPENDIX – DATA

Total Footfall Reduction



As illustrated in the chart above, there has been a significant footfall reduction across all iCentres (including all iCentres based on islands) from 2018/19 to 2022/23. No iCentres are showing an increase in this period.

Total Annual Footfall – Mainland/Island Centre Split



	2018-2019	% of total footfall	2022-2023	% of total footfall
Mainland (17 centres)	1,554,989	73.4%	753,884	74.1%
Islands (8 centres)	564,562	26.6%	263,600	25.9%
TOTAL	2,119,551		1,017,484	

The chart and table above show that the decline in footfall in iCentres based on islands is consistent with the rate of decline of iCentres based on the mainland.