Annual Sustainability Report 2017/18

Tourism is not only a key driver for sustainable economic growth, but also has a special relationship with the Scottish environment and society, due to its unique dependency on quality environments, cultural distinctiveness, social interaction, security and wellbeing. Therefore, we at VisitScotland believe the success of Scotland’s tourism industry rests not only on its economic competitiveness but also on protecting and enhancing the Scottish environment, society and culture, which are vital to the brand, the industry and sustaining Scotland’s economic growth.

In line with the Scottish Government’s plans, VisitScotland aspires to make Scotland Europe’s most sustainable destination and aims to be recognised as a leader in sustainable tourism development. VisitScotland will contribute to a more sustainable future for Scotland through taking direct action on issues under our control and influence the opinion and action of third parties such as strategic partners, businesses and visitors to help drive sustainability within the tourism sector in Scotland.

VisitScotland’s Sustainable Tourism Policy provides a clear rationale and plan for delivering our aspirations for sustainable tourism.

This annual sustainability report outlines the key activities VisitScotland has undertaken in 2017/18 in support of our sustainability policy, as well as the Scottish Government’s sustainability ambitions for Scotland and relevant legislation.

Climate Change Reporting

As part of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, requires all public bodies to exercise their functions in a way that best contributes to the Act’s carbon emission reduction targets, delivery of climate change adaptation program and overall sustainable practices. As part of the Act, the Scottish Government has set ambitious climate change targets: to reduce Scotland’s CO₂ emissions by 80% by 2050, with an interim reduction of 42% by 2020, against a 2008/09 baseline.

As of the 31 March 2018, VisitScotland has achieved a 64% reduction in CO₂ emissions, which already exceeds the 2020 target. This also exceeds the new, more ambitious target, of a 50% reduction by 2020 proposed as part of the new Climate Bill, which is currently with Scottish government for consultation. VisitScotland annually reports on its compliance with its climate change duties through the SSN Public Sector Climate Change reporting tool.
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**Sustainability Policy Objectives**

- **Promote the integration of sustainability in the tourism sector**

  ‘We will integrate sustainability principles into all our activities and influence improvements in the tourism sector across Scotland.’

  - The majority of the VisitScotland’s local offices and iCentres have achieve Green Tourism certification, as part of which consideration is given to overall sustainability activities, including resource efficiency, transport, natural and cultural heritage, and community engagement. This directly supports the implementation of our sustainability objectives across the estate. As of March 2018, 70% of the properties were certified under Green Tourism, with 40% holding a Gold award and 60% a Silver award.

  - VisitScotland has incorporated sustainability actions into its Quality Assurance program since 2015 to encourage and support Quality Assured tourism businesses to undertake sustainability actions, covering a wide range of activity also reflected in our policy objectives, such as resource efficiency, transport, natural and cultural heritage, and community engagement. We encourage continuous improvement and maximizing business benefits through increasing minimum requirements every year. In 2017/18 just over 3000 businesses received sustainability advice through their Quality grading. The minimum sustainability requirements for 2018 and 2019 have been increased.

  - Internally We are reviewing the format and content of our Annual Sustainability report to ensure we maximise the opportunity to communicate the wide range of Sustainability actions VisitScotland undertakes internally and influences externally in line with the organisations Sustainability policy.

  - We are developing an internal sustainability comms plan to deliver more consistent staff communication on the sustainability policy and activities undertaken and how staff can support the activity.

- **Minimise resource use and waste production**

  ‘We will take action to encourage reduced resource use and waste production, both from our internal operations and those of tourism businesses operating in Scotland.’

  - Our resource use and waste related CO₂ emissions are continuing to reduce annually. In 2017/18 we saw a 14% reduction from the previous year. This is due to behavioural changes and improvements we have made through a programme of increasing efficiency, driving down resource use (e.g. energy use in buildings, business travel, and water use), waste reduction, as well as changes within the VisitScotland estate (20 sites closed between Oct 17-March 18).

  - We support the Scottish Government Targets of 70% recycling/composting for all waste and a maximum 5% sent to Landfill by 2025 (baseline year 2012/13) In 2017/18 our recycling rate was 52%, and there was a slight increase in the amount of waste to landfill due to better recording of information from the estate. The emission factors also changed substantially (from 421 – to 588.9), which shows an increase in the CO₂ emissions for waste.
In January 2018, VisitScotland provided all staff with a ‘Year of Young People’ reusable Keep Cup, which help to will reduce the use of disposable cups, cutting down on waste, and cost for the individual and the organisation.

VisitScotland continues to implement the Carrier Bag Charge (Scotland) Regulations across our iCentre network, which contribute to reducing litter and resource use. In the year to 31 March 2017, the VIC network provided customers with 27,621 chargeable bags. This is about a 7% reduction in carrier bag sales from the previous year and a reduction of around 89% from before the charge was implemented.

Reduce the impact of tourism transport

‘Our efforts will focus on promoting a shift towards more environmentally friendly forms of transport (train, coach/bus, ferry, cycle, foot) both to and within tourism destinations in Scotland.’

We have made a 42% reduction in our travel related CO₂ emissions from the baseline year. Both long and short haul air travel decreased this year and we have continued to show improvement in other areas.

We have 24 vehicles in our leased car fleet and 50% (12 vehicles) are under 100g/km CO₂ emissions and 25% (6 vehicles) are under 110g/km. We will be reviewing the Lease car policy with a view to capping the emissions at 120g/km by 31 December 2018.

In March 2018, VisitScotland staff participated in the Sustrans Journey Challenge, with 108 staff members registered and 87 people logging journeys. VisitScotland managed to score second place in the Scottish Workplace Challenge 2018. We logged 1,478 journeys, saving over £2,000 on work related travel.
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Protect and enhance Scotland’s natural and cultural heritage

‘We will promote Scotland’s natural and cultural heritage to visitors and support the activities of organisations responsible for its protection and enhancement.’

- The Year of History Heritage and Archaeology 2017 sustained and built upon the momentum of the preceding Themed Years to spotlight, celebrate and promote Scotland’s rich and vibrant History, Heritage and Archaeology to engage and attract the people of Scotland and our visitors. Support the activities for its protection and enhancement undertaken by partner organisations.
- Through a wide range of channels, we providing potential visitors and visitors in Scotland with a range of information on Scottish Wildlife and its natural landscapes, as well as promoting the Outdoor Access code.
- In 2017 VisitScotland has started working with Plan Bee to adopt Beehives, using the money collected for the 5p carrier bag charge, which we committed to donate to an environmental good cause. We will be collaborating with Plan Bee to highlight the plight of Bees with our staff as well as externally with communities and visitors. This will directly support the Scottish Government’s Pollinator Strategy.
- There are volunteering opportunities available for VisitScotland staff, staff have undertaken activities such as litter picking, beach clean and clearing invasive species.

Enhance quality of life for Scottish communities

‘We will support Scottish communities through promoting year-round tourism activity including local accommodation, events, attractions and products to visitors. We will also advocate local engagement and empowerment in tourism planning and management and the wider community development process.’

- VisitScotland works with industry and partners like Scotland Food and Drink to increase the sourcing of quality Scottish Food and drink to enhance the visitor experience, as well as support local businesses and communities. VisitScotland’s Taste Our Best accreditation, which showcases businesses that provide and promote a quality Scottish Food and Drink experience, was achieved by 1266 businesses by the end of 2017/18.
- Shop local initiative in iCentres now sources products from over 260 local Scottish suppliers.
- The Year of Young People in 2018 (YoYP 2018) will inspire Scotland through its young people aged 8 to 26, celebrating their achievements, valuing their contributions to communities and creating new opportunities for them to shine locally, nationally and globally.
- On-going activity to ensure seasonal and regional spread is considered in marketing activity and funding allocation (e.g. for events, Growth Fund).
- Regional engagement with councils and DMOs delivered through the Regional Leadership and Development Team.
Make holidays in Scotland available for all

‘We will help to improve the accessibility of tourism opportunities in Scotland, especially for disabled and economically disadvantaged persons.’

- In partnership with VisitEngland, a new accessibility guide website tool was launched in November 2017. The tool helps businesses promote themselves to customers with specific access requirements. A number of speaking opportunities, at tourism events across Scotland, was scheduled for spring 2018 to raise awareness and engagement with the tool. At the end of March 2018, 190 businesses had registered onto the site to complete a guide.

- Our online accessibility training programme content was updated with some modified questions which were proving difficult for some participants. At the end March 2018, we recorded 1,500 registered users.

- We introduced basic assessment of several key accessibility actions within our Quality Assurance visits. These included a business’s accessibility facilities, whether they have undertaken accessible customer care training, and whether they have an access guide. In the 2017 scheme year over 2,000 businesses were reviewed for accessibility actions, this figure represents 88% of the total number of visits. 29% of these businesses were undertaking at least one of three possible actions.

- We introduced a new style of educational event for our industry-facing support staff, which involved several facilitated visits to accommodation and attraction venues with good accessibility features and design. These events were very well received by the staff members.

- The National Events Conference, in November 2017, featured a workshop session on inclusive and accessible events. Our inclusive tourism team led the session and facilitated a panel discussion with key accessible event experts from across the industry. Over 50 businesses were in attendance.

- In 2017 we started the Inclusive Photography Project to increase the number of pictures on our Digital Media Library (DML) that are representative of the diversity of tourists we welcome each year, for our use, as well as for partners and businesses. Since the beginning of the project we have added 87 pictures to the DML featuring models from the disabled, LGBTQIA, Black Asian and Minority Ethnic and senior communities. Our pictures depict many different touristic activities, ranging from museum going to beach walks, to festival going and high end dining.

- Since 2016, VisitScotland has been working in partnership with the Family Holiday association alongside business from across the Scottish tourism industry to help vulnerable and disadvantaged families in Scotland enjoy a short break or day out in their own country, offering #ScotSpirit breaks. In 2017, 90 business took part, with over 1,600 people from 400 families receiving a break, with 97% of them visiting parts of Scotland they had never been to before and 90% saying they could cope better after the experience.
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- **Improve the quality of tourism jobs**

‘We will support initiatives to improve the quality of jobs both across the tourism sector and within VisitScotland.’

Following on from the success of the summer placements within the Career Ready programme - highlighting the development opportunities within the organisation to school leavers - discussions are ongoing as to the continuation of this into next year with suitable mentors within the organisation being sought.

- In 2017-18 we took on seven graduates and five Modern Apprentices and we offered six Career Ready Internships to school-age students (this is a full-time work placement in an iCentre for 1 month).

- Raising the attractiveness of the tourism and hospitality sector to new entrants through work with schools and universities

- VisitScotland has close links with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and was involved in the recent review of the Tourism Skills Investment Plan (SIP). There is ongoing engagement with SDS and other organisations such as Springboard. VisitScotland supports the key priority ‘To ensure staff at all levels understand and are able to respond to visitor expectations’ through programs such as Glasgow welcomes, Digital Tourism Scotland, and the Accessible Tourism on-line training.

- **Support adaptation to climate change in the tourism sector**

‘We will take action not only to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, but also to adapt to the unavoidable consequences of climate change and support tourism businesses and destinations to do the same.’

- Reviewed Adaptation needs across the estate as part of the buildings review with a focus on Energy performance certificates and recommendations to reduce rating.

- We collaborated with Adaptation Scotland to develop industry facing advice and support and Climate Change Adaptation. The guide ‘Is your business Climate Ready?’ was launched in February 2018.