

# A DESTINATION'S JOURNEY TO NET ZERO



A stakeholder resource for destinations to support  
Scottish tourism's transition to a net zero economy

**DECEMBER 2022**

# Introduction

Supporting the global commitment to tackle climate change, the Scottish Government has set ambitious, but necessary, targets to reach **net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045**.

Aligned with these ambitions, the national tourism strategy **Scotland Outlook 2030** and the Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (**NSET**) have identified climate action as a priority.

Every individual, business, community, and the public sector will need to act now if Scotland is to meet its net zero targets.

A collaborative approach is essential to enable the development and delivery of a net zero tourism sector. This will require a data-driven, visitor-focused approach, which will address not only the reduction of carbon emissions, but also things like adaptation to unavoidable climate change and regeneration of nature and biodiversity. It should also foster innovation and community wellbeing.

VisitScotland, the Enterprise Agencies and Scottish Government, as part of the Destination Net Zero programme, a key strand of the COVID-19 recovery funding for tourism, have started to explore what specific responses may be needed in tourism. As a result, a Destination Net Zero Action Plan framework has been developed for the public sector partners. This has been supported by Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development (SLAED) tourism group who have since joined the Destination Net Zero steering group.

This framework can also be used to inform destination stakeholders' own climate action plans and identify ways your organisation may want to engage with other partners to progress climate action. It can provide opportunities for strategic alignment and collaboration across tourism and beyond.

## What is this resource for?

This resource is designed to highlight elements of the Destination Net Zero Action Plan which are relevant to destination stakeholders (e.g., DMOs, local authorities, sub-sector groups). It will assist stakeholders to develop their own plan, supporting Scottish tourism's transition to a net zero economy.

“Scotland's tourism sector will make a full contribution to our national ambition to become a net zero society by 2045.

- Scotland Outlook 2030

# Background context

As an initial step, the Destination Net Zero Action Plan has been developed to enable the public sector agencies and other partners to support the transition of Scotland's tourism industry to a net zero economy. The plan focuses on priority activities over the next three – four years and will be reviewed and adjusted accordingly to encompass future actions. Public sector partners are now in the process of considering the proposed immediate actions in terms of prioritisation and resource availability.

The Destination Net Zero Action Plan provides a framework and clear pathway for tangible action in the tourism sector. It supports the public sector agencies, as well as providing an opportunity for strategic alignment and collaboration among all stakeholders, e.g., public sector, destinations, and tourism businesses, which will be the key to success.

The framework can also accelerate a move from commitment to action, ensuring we make progress towards net zero at the pace and scale required.

Every individual, business, community, and the public sector will need to act now if Scotland is to meet its net zero targets.

## The need for net zero action planning in tourism

There are several imperatives – economic, environmental and social, as well as legal requirements - which drive the need for a net zero action plan for tourism. In particular:

- Importance of tourism to both residents and visitors to Scotland (providing year-round revenues and vibrancy for places, creating employment as well as encouraging entrepreneurialism and investment).
- Scotland relies heavily on its natural assets – land, water, biodiversity – which are of vital importance to Scotland's ability to achieve net zero emissions, whilst also being key motivators for visitors.
- The tourism industry is a contributor to climate change, but perhaps more than other industries, also stands to suffer its consequences. Climate change and extreme weather is already impacting on Scotland's natural environment as well as its communities and businesses.
- Climate action planning seeks not only to build resilience to worsening climate impacts. It also builds economic resilience by identifying cost savings through, for example, carbon reduction activities.

Given tourism's cross-cutting nature (meaning its strong links and interdependence with other sectors such as transport, energy, agriculture, biodiversity), a specific response to the challenges is required, identifying where tourism specifically can make a difference, and contribute.

The aim is to engage, inspire and enable sector wide commitment and action, supporting Scotland becoming a leading low carbon responsible tourism destination.

The policy context covering Scotland's journey to net zero is attached ([Annex 1](#)).

# Destination Net Zero actions

---

In this section you will find suggested steps for destination stakeholders (e.g., DMOs, local authorities, sub-sector groups) to support their own, as well as tourism's journey, to net zero.

The outlined actions aim to deliver the objectives under each of the five pathways of the [Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism \(Annex 2\)](#) and the Scottish net zero by 2045 targets, by supporting tourism stakeholders to measure, decarbonise, regenerate, collaborate and invest on their journey to net zero.

**Key action areas** for destination stakeholders to support Scottish tourism's transition to net zero:

---

## Net zero advice and tools for tourism

Engage, inspire, and enable businesses to measure their carbon emissions to support development of their climate action plans, with a focus on leveraging existing advice and support provided by partner agencies.

A [Destination Net Zero Climate Action Hub](#) is being developed on VisitScotland.org, with content regularly reviewed and updated. It will provide a central point of guidance for tourism and events businesses on net zero and climate action planning, and signpost to specialist advice, tools and funding opportunities.

A wide range of generic net zero support for businesses and guidance on available funding can be found through [Findbusinesssupport.gov](#), which is updated on an ongoing basis.

As a stakeholder you can:

- Ensure any guidance you provide on climate action aligns with the five pathways of the Glasgow Declaration. (See [Annex 2](#)).
- Ensure any guidance on climate action that is provided or promoted focuses not just on decarbonisation, but also on the roles of circularity, adaptation, biodiversity regeneration and community wellbeing.
- Connect businesses with available resources by signposting to the [Destination Net Zero Climate Action Hub](#), as well as any relevant regional and local guidance and funding opportunities, as these become available.
- Connect businesses with clear guidance on the measuring of their carbon footprint, what to measure for the different business types, how to report it, and how to reduce and influence reduction of emissions (e.g., signpost to [Destination Net Zero climate action hub](#)).
- Share best practice of the destination's businesses to provide inspiration for action and innovation.
- Support and promote participation in carbon literacy programmes to build basic capacity of Scottish tourism businesses and stakeholders (e.g., Keep Scotland Beautiful Climate Emergency Training, also available customised for Tourism Sector).

---

## Visitor engagement and communication

Visitors are increasingly looking for businesses and destinations that are taking action to mitigate and reduce their carbon footprint, protecting their natural and cultural heritage, and delivering experiences that have a positive impact in the environment and host communities.

Visitors have an important role to play in Scotland's development as a responsible low carbon tourism destination through the choices they make, from trip planning through to visiting. There is a clear opportunity to inspire, influence, and encourage visitors to make more sustainable choices and responsibly enjoy the memorable experience on offer.

As a stakeholder you can:

- Provide information and resources on public transport, active travel (walking and cycling) and other low carbon transport options in the destination.
- Promote longer trip durations, visitors spending more time in a destination. Encourage off-season travel, highlighting the visitor benefits of experiencing Scotland during quieter periods across the year, and the positive impact for communities.
- Increase visitors' awareness of their carbon footprint, the impact of their choices and highlight ways in which they can reduce the carbon impact of their trips.
- Showcase committed responsible businesses and local destinations, prioritising stories of those delivering tourism products supporting climate, biodiversity, adaptation, regeneration, and wellbeing goals.
- Work with the tourism industry in your destination/ region, including transport, accommodation, food and beverage and experience providers to offer incentives - discounts, loyalty schemes, priority benefits, etc - rewarding visitors for sustainable tourism choice.

---

## Support net zero tourism products and itineraries

In order to accelerate Scotland's transition to a responsible net zero destination and provide the visitor with a wide range of sustainable choices across the country it will be important to support businesses and the tourism supply chain to develop tourism products which align with Scotland's ambition to become net zero by 2045.

In turn, the ever-growing offer of sustainable products and supply chain elements will support the innovation and development of sustainable, low carbon itineraries.

As a stakeholder you can:

- Encourage businesses to reduce their waste through adoption of circular economy principles regarding their waste management and procurement practices.
- Connect businesses with the opportunity to gain sustainability certification, which can provide a framework for the ongoing development of their sustainable product and opportunity to credibly promote their commitment and actions to their customers and suppliers.
- Encourage and support business in developing experiences that support nature regeneration and environmental education.
- Work with industry to support the development and promotion of sustainable, low carbon itineraries in your destination. Itineraries should encompass all supply chain elements including food, accommodation, experience, and transport.
- Support the development and promotion of low carbon and accessible transport infrastructure (e.g., cycling, walking, electric bike and EV charging) at destination level.
- Where grants are offered, consider including sustainability and climate criteria, and provide support for businesses to understand the rationale for the criteria and to meet them.

---

## Responsible tourism data measurement

Data will continue to be of vital importance to measure and monitor progress towards becoming a more responsible, low carbon destination.

As a stakeholder you can:

- Collaborate with public sector partners to adopt, measure, and report on agreed and standardised metrics addressing decarbonisation, biodiversity, adaptation and community wellbeing at destination and business level.

## Increase collaboration between tourism and other sectors

Collaboration and knowledge sharing within the sector, between destinations, and across other sectors is key, to learn from mistakes, share best practices and develop innovative solutions together. There is also an opportunity for tourism to further connect with other relevant sectors to maximise synergies and ensure tourism's role is appreciated.

As a stakeholder you can:

- Increase partnership working between tourism and the transport sectors at regional and destination level, through, for example, engaging in transport working groups and relevant fora to maximise collaboration and increase awareness of the opportunities for tourism to contribute, as well as actions already undertaken.
- Encourage and support optimisation on connectivity (times, distance etc) between boats, trains, coaches etc in your destination to ensure seamless visitor journey experiences and ease of exploration in Scotland using public transport.
- Explore potential for tourism engagement to improve the quality of sustainable transport services to residents, especially in less connected, rural areas.
- Increase connections with other sectors through engaging with relevant groups within the local government and support organisations in your region/destination (e.g., energy, circular economy, adaptation, biodiversity), as well as community groups to maximise synergies and ensure tourism's role is fully accounted for.

- Engage with your local authority and/or relevant national (e.g. [Adaptation Scotland](#)) and regional organisations leading on climate change adaptation, to increase awareness of predicted impacts on the destination and opportunities to support adaptation strategies; building resilience in businesses and the destination by mitigating the risks and recognising potential opportunities of unavoidable impacts of climate change.
- Explore options for using any potential tourism taxes and levies that may be raised in your region/destination/local authority to support financing transition/adaptation/regeneration.

## Support biodiversity restoration and carbon sequestration

A key aspect of Scotland's journey to address the climate and ecological emergency is not only decarbonisation, but also the restoration and protection of the natural assets that underpin the industry. Biodiversity conservation projects can address the twin nature and climate crisis together, through supporting projects that both safeguard biodiversity and deliver nature-based solutions.

Tourism revenue has the potential to be a major force for regeneration, and there is an opportunity to connect biodiversity conservation, peatland, and woodland restorations with tourism and visitors.

As a stakeholder you can:

- Work with public and private sector partners to identify opportunities/projects in your destination to support biodiversity conservation activities, as well as carbon sequestration initiatives.
- Encourage tourism and events businesses/stakeholders in your destination to invest in projects supporting biodiversity and carbon sequestration, as part of their climate action planning.
- Take opportunities to make the connection with and raise understanding of visitors on the potential impact on nature/biodiversity of their visits (and what can be done to address this – to ensure its positive messaging).
- Ensure that promoted projects avoid any negative impacts on local people (such as limitation of access, increased land prices).

## Annex 1

### Policy context

The [Climate Change \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#) commits Scotland to net zero emissions by 2045 (five years ahead of the UK Government's target), with an interim target of a 75% reduction by 2030, and 90% by 2040. The Scottish Government is moving towards integrating net zero in all areas of policy that cover issues such as employment, green skills, just transition, active travel, and biodiversity.

These targets are coupled to a strong commitment, reflected in Scotland's climate change legislation, on delivering a just transition, tackling inequalities, promoting fair work, and mitigating the risks to those worst impacted. The 2022/23 Programme for Government suggests key actions in transport, in the economy and in how we use our land and protect our natural environment to help reduce costs and meet our climate change and nature targets.

So far there has been no announcement to develop a Tourism Just Transition Plan – in contrast to the [European Union](#), where tourism was the first sector for which a transition pathway was published (in February 2022), recognising the important role the sector has to play in emissions reduction.

The Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) sets out a vision of a wellbeing economy thriving across economic, social, and environmental dimensions. As a cross-cutting industry, tourism is well positioned to support the strategy's three core ambitions, in particular its aim to demonstrate global leadership in delivering a just transition to a net zero, nature-positive economy, and building natural capital.

The tourism sector is both highly vulnerable to climate change and contributed about 8% of emissions globally in 2008-2013, and 11% in 2019. Tourism has a key role to play in the transition to net zero.

Scottish Government strategic policy documents, plans and updates (for example the Climate Change Plan), are generally based on overarching sectors of the economy, for example transport, waste, energy, land use and natural resources management, and do not refer to tourism specifically. The Tourism and Hospitality industry's own journey to net zero will however be affected by policies and actions in these areas. Scotland Outlook 2030 and this Destination Net Zero plan are therefore important as they look specifically at this sector and its role.

## Annex 2

### The Glasgow Declaration

The [Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism](#) has the objective to raise the climate ambition of tourism stakeholders and secure strong actions to support the global commitment to halve emissions by 2030 and reach net zero as soon as possible before 2050. Transforming tourism through climate action is crucial for the sector's competitiveness, sustainability, and resilience.

The Declaration is aiming to:

- Define a clear and consistent sector-wide message and approach to climate action in the coming decade, aligned with the wider scientific framework and urgency to act now.
- Outline the pathways and specific actions that will accelerate tourism's ability to transform tourism and achieve net zero emissions as soon as possible.
- Encourage signatories across the tourism industry to demonstrate their public support for scaling up the sector's response to the climate emergency.

The signatories of the Glasgow Declaration agree on five shared pathways to ensure climate action is aligned across all of tourism sector:

- **Measure:** by providing a framework to promote the measurement and disclosure of tourism-related emissions.
- **Decarbonise:** by facilitating and supporting decarbonisation by all elements of the tourism value chain.
- **Regenerate:** by restoring and protecting ecosystems and safeguarding biodiversity; by building business and destination resilience through climate change adaptation.
- **Collaborate:** by adopting a cross- and inter-sectoral approach, coordinating plans, aligning strategic approaches, and strengthening governance and capacity for action at all levels.
- **Finance:** by supporting industry to access financial support and investment to accelerate the transition to a net zero economy.