

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EQIA)

PROJECT TITLE: PRODUCT INFORMATION ON VISITSCOTLAND.COM

Name of Project (Event/Policy/Activity)	Product information on VisitScotland.com
Date	December 2025 for publication
Project Lead	Head of Digital Delivery
Sponsor (if relevant)	Director of Marketing & Digital
Department & Directorate	Digital Team
Version History Information Retain all previous <u>approved</u> versions of the EQIA	March 2025 draft for review December 2025 for publication

Who does the project affect? Who is the project/activity for?

Type of user	Delete as appropriate	Additional information about the users
Stakeholders	YES	Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs), Members of Parliament (MPs), local authority representatives
Partners/industry/business customers/sponsors	YES	Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), tourism and event businesses, travel intermediaries
Members of the public/visitors	YES	Visitors who use visitscotland.com website to research, plan and book their trip
Employees	YES	VisitScotland staff who work with the website and tourism and event businesses
Other (please specify)	NO	None

Provide an outline of the project

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There have been tourism business web listings on visitscotland.com for over 20 years. During this time there have been many factors that have influenced the organisation's approach to web listings, such as the changing nature of the tourism industry, the compliance and governance environment that VisitScotland operates in, and the evolving digital landscape.

Throughout this time VisitScotland has engaged widely with tourism businesses, and other stakeholders, across all areas of Scotland.

Currently the data source that supplies the information for tourism business web listings and the product search site functionality comes from a bespoke destination management system (DMS) supplied by Simpleview. Tourism businesses update their information in the DMS via an individual login. Changes made in this system update the business's information on VisitScotland.com, but nowhere else.

The current approach to web listings no longer meets our obligation to comply with the AA level of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG2.2). There would be a disproportionate burden on VisitScotland to update listings within the current approach to meet accessibility requirements.

INSIGHTS

Advances in digital technology and subsequent shifts in traveller behaviours have diminished the overall value to VisitScotland in offering and maintaining a web listings platform. Insights gathered over the past three years highlight the following key challenges:

- **Low user engagement:** from January 2021 to March 2024, only 4.6% of users interacted with Product Search functionality on visitscotland.com.
- **Minimal industry participation:** industry engagement with the DMS has dropped markedly, with only 15.9% of web listings updated within the past 12 months.
- **Online travel agencies and individual business websites:** 91.5% of businesses currently listed in the DMS already maintain their own digital presence elsewhere using their own website or other online travel agencies.
- **Evolution of organic search¹:**
 - Search engines have already evolved to understand the intent behind search queries, enabling them to deliver more relevant search results for users. This has resulted in most individual business websites outranking VisitScotland web listings when a user searches for a specific business, negating the need for businesses to maintain and update a web listing on VisitScotland.com.
 - In addition, when a user searches for a business or place near their location, they will find local results across Google in places like Maps and Search. To improve organic visibility, the most effective action a business can take is to maintain a Google Business Profile.²
- **Environmental impact:** web listings accounted for 41% of VisitScotland.com's total carbon usage (mostly via organic search as noted above) in 2023. With user engagement declining and most businesses maintaining their web presence elsewhere, much of this carbon usage can be classified as 'wasted'.

Research undertaken by VisitBritain in 2022 found that travellers tend to use National Tourism Organisation (NTO) websites (like visitscotland.com) for inspiration rather than booking.³ This is further supported by a 2023 study carried out by Expedia, which suggests that social media, NTO websites and search engines play the largest role at the inspiration and research stages of the customer journey.⁴ In

¹ An overview of Google algorithm updates can be found at <https://www.searchenginejournal.com/google-algorithm-history/>.

² [Google Business Profile Help](#)

³ [VisitBritain – MIDAS \(2022\)](#)

⁴ [Expedia – Path to Purchase Study \(2023\)](#)

addition, VisitScotland's latest visitor survey data (2023)⁵ found that only 3% of visitors across markets used visitscotland.com to book accommodation.

Lastly, a qualitative study undertaken by Designit on behalf of VisitScotland in late 2024/early 2025 discovered that hyper-personalisation is transforming every stage of the trip planning process, including booking.⁶ Travellers that took part in the study had their own trusted suite of online travel agencies for booking accommodation and activities. These tools (e.g. Kayak, Booking.com, Get Your Guide, etc) set the expectation for advanced customisation that were not met by equivalent functionality on visitscotland.com.

However, Designit's research also highlighted the importance of seamlessly connecting travellers with tourism businesses earlier in the customer journey to help them build concepts for a trip.

[Visitscotland.com](https://visitscotland.com) could effectively meet this user need by leveraging market leading third-party data to surface up-to-date product information across the website whilst referring more traffic directly to businesses.

THE CHANGE

VisitScotland has been carrying out strategic reviews across many of its activities, to ensure it continues to deliver the best economic impact for Scotland. As part of the review process, VisitScotland has considered the role it plays in serving product information to visitors and how that should be undertaken in the future.

VisitScotland has decided to replace the data source for business information to a service that better reflects the change in consumer behaviour, the evolving digital landscape and the needs of tourism businesses.

The objective of the change is to:

- Provide up-to-date information on tourism businesses and events across VisitScotland's websites to help potential visitors quickly form concepts for a trip to Scotland.
- Enhance coverage of tourism businesses and events across Scotland.
- Improve user experience and ensure functionality on VisitScotland websites meets the AA level of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines ([WCAG 2.2](#)).
- Make it easier for tourism businesses and events to maintain visibility across VisitScotland websites, including business owners with lower levels of digital literacy.
- Reduce environmental impact of VisitScotland websites by streamlining functionality and reducing duplication across the digital landscape.

In future, the data for tourism business information will be obtained from third parties data streams, including Google, rather than bespoke VisitScotland in-house systems. Many tourism businesses already have a Google Business Profile, which they update regularly, alongside their own website. VisitScotland's Business Enquiry and Support Programme will provide support for businesses that don't currently have a Google Business Profile to ensure they maintain visibility on VisitScotland websites. The

⁵ [VisitScotland Visitor Survey \(2023\)](#)

⁶ [VisitScotland & Designit – Trip Planning Research Report \(January 2025\)](#)

VisitScotland Business Support Hub can be accessed online at <https://support.visitscotland.org>, via email at business.support@visitscotland.com, or by phone on 01463 244111.

VisitScotland.com users can currently book accommodation through the availability search engine on the website. As the majority of potential visitors use national tourism websites for inspiration and research, this functionality will no longer be available and website users will be signposted directly to business websites or other travel intermediaries to facilitate bookings instead.

Google data in combination with VisitScotland regions data will be utilised in map functionality and destination content. There will no longer be individual town and village pages on VisitScotland.com as this information is well catered for elsewhere in the digital landscape.

THE PLAN

VisitScotland will phase this activity. The first phase will focus on VisitScotland.com and will look to scale the activity up to deliver on its other websites in future phases.

For the small percentage of businesses that do not have an existing Google Business Profile, VisitScotland's Business Support Programme will provide guidance on how businesses can maintain their visibility across VisitScotland websites. This guidance will be the same for all locations, including all island communities.

Following the changes, web listings would be compliant with the AA level of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG2.2).

Will the project deny access to those within the Protected Characteristics, or affect their opportunity to benefit from the project?

Characteristic	Potential impact on Protected Characteristics
Age	Digital literacy levels can vary among business owners and visitors, regardless of age. Those with lower levels of digital literacy may initially feel uncertain about the changes, however, the new approach could make it easier for them to keep their listings updated, particularly if they are already familiar with Google Business Profiles. Similarly, visitors with lower digital literacy may benefit from the new approach, as Google Business Profiles are widely recognised and may feel more familiar.
Disability	The changes will improve VisitScotland's compliance with the AA level of Web Content Accessibility (WCAG2.2) and enhance the user experience. Current web listings do not meet this standard and there would be a disproportionate burden on VisitScotland to bring the web listings into compliance if this change is not made.
Sex	Changing the approach to online listings would have no different effect on people of different sexes. The changed approach would impact all sexes in the same way.

Race	Changing the approach to online listings would have no different effect on people of different races. The changed approach would impact all races in the same way.
Religion and belief	Changing the approach to online listings would have no different effect on people of different religions or beliefs. The changed approach would impact all religions or beliefs in the same way.
Sexual orientation	Changing the approach to online listings would have no different effect on people of different sexual orientations. The changed approach would impact all sexual orientations in the same way.
Gender reassignment	Changing the approach to online listings would have no different effect on people of different genders and undergoing gender reassignment. The changed approach would impact all genders and those going through gender reassignment in the same way.
Pregnancy and maternity	Changing the approach to online listings would have no different effect on women of who are pregnant or on maternity leave. The changed approach would impact pregnant women and women on maternity leave in the same way as those who are not.
Marriage and civil partnership	Changing the approach to online listings would have no different effect on people of different marital or civil partnership status. The changed approach would impact all different marital and civil partnership status in the same way.

If yes, outline the actions you will undertake to change or mitigate the impact.

Characteristic	Potential impact on Protected Characteristics
Age	For business owners who have lower levels of digital literacy, VisitScotland can provide tailored support to help them set up a Google Business Profile if they do not already have one. Additional bespoke assistance can be offered where a business raises this need with the Business Support team.
Disability	As the changes improve the accessibility of the website, it is understood that no action is required. However, other bespoke support can be provided if the business raises the matter with the business support team.
Sex	No action required.
Race	No action required.
Religion and belief	No action required.
Sexual orientation	No action required.
Gender reassignment	No action required.
Pregnancy and maternity	No action required.
Marriage and civil partnership	No action required.

Results from your action undertaken.

VisitScotland has engaged with a range of industry stakeholders during the development process. These have included representatives from the Association of Scotland’s Self-Caterers, Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions, Scottish Agritourism and other bodies representing the sector.

During this engagement, no feedback has suggested that this decision would differently or negatively affect anyone with Protected Characteristics.

Approval process

Completed by and date Project owner/responsible staff member	Senior Product Owner Senior Programme Manager Governance Manager
Consultation with and date	Legal Department (November 2025)
Authorised by and date Head of Department	Head of Digital Delivery (December 2025)
Authorised by and date Equality Manager	Inclusion, Wellbeing and HR Policy Manager (December 2025)
Authorised by and date VisitScotland Director	Chief Technology Officer (9 December 2025)