Stericado Tourism Emergency Response Group (STERG)

STERG Sector Update Session
Wednesday 24th March 2021

Present:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Representative</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Representative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Association of Scottish Self-Caterers</td>
<td>Fiona Campbell</td>
<td>Scottish Agritourism</td>
<td>Caroline Millar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions</td>
<td>Gordon Morrison</td>
<td>Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group</td>
<td>Rory Kennedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Amusement Catering Trade Association</td>
<td>John White</td>
<td>Scottish Tourism Alliance</td>
<td>Karen Christie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic Houses</td>
<td>Andrew Hopetoun</td>
<td>Scottish Tourist Guides Association</td>
<td>Kenneth Bramham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostelling Scotland</td>
<td>Margo Paterson</td>
<td>UKHospitality (Scotland)</td>
<td>Willie Macleod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Hostels</td>
<td>Gregor Barclay</td>
<td>VisitScotland</td>
<td>Riddell Graham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night Time Industries Association</td>
<td>Donald Macleod</td>
<td>WildScotland</td>
<td>Victoria Brooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sail Scotland</td>
<td>Alan Rankin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apologies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Representative</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Representative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Holiday &amp; Home Parks Association</td>
<td>Jeanette Wilson</td>
<td>Scottish Golf Tourism Development Group</td>
<td>Stuart French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discover Scotland’s Gardens</td>
<td>Dougal Philip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Notes & Actions

1. Updates Since the Last Meeting

R. Graham advised that there was limited news to report on the issues raised at the last meeting, however the group was assured that all issues had been raised with STERG and with the Scottish Government Tourism Team. Updates were provided on the following issues:

- State Aid (or Subsidy Control)
  Issues raised by W. Macleod and A. Rankin are now thought to be resolved.

  W. Macleod highlighted however that a London colleague is still seeking clarity on the position at a UK level, as there are still businesses claiming a delay or denial of grants because of State Aid issues. The UK Subsidy Control team have advised that it is not the role of the subsidy Control team to provide advice to public applicants or beneficiaries of aid and therefore could not engage in discussion with UKH. Help is requested to get assurances that a definitive statement about state aid (or subsidy control) has been issued in Scotland to all grant giving bodies related to COVID.

  Action: W. Macleod to forward all information to R. Graham. R. Graham to follow up with contacts in this area.

- Business support funding for Agritourism
  A new Agritourism fund is progressing with VisitScotland

- Self Catering Issues
  F. Campbell advised that a list of issues impacting the self-catering sector had been submitted to Fergus Ewing in advance of a recent meeting and assurances had been given that a response to each of the issues raised would be given today (24th). It was noted that the issues ranged from financial support to the rule of 1 household to reopening times.

  To Note: Following the STERG update call a response to the issues raised by F. Campbell were received. These can be viewed here [https://www.assc.co.uk/answers-to-key-questions/](https://www.assc.co.uk/answers-to-key-questions/)
Scottish Tourism Emergency Response Group (STERG)

Also announced today was the news that small accommodation operators on Council Tax are now eligible for Restart Grants [https://www.assc.co.uk/restart-grants-for-small-accommodation-providers/](https://www.assc.co.uk/restart-grants-for-small-accommodation-providers/)

- Marine Sector Test & Sail
  A.Rankin advised that following a meeting with Fergus Ewing to discuss and clarify protocols for testing in order to activate the charter and cruise holiday market, a green light was given to discuss further with medical advisors. It is unclear when this meeting will take place but it’s a major development in getting the sector open.

- Impact of the easing of lockdown travel restrictions on Island businesses
  Businesses across all of the Scottish islands are seeking clarity on how the easing of travel restrictions after lockdown will impact them. Recent announcements have specified the mainland but not the islands. It was noted that this point has been raised and we are currently waiting on a response.

- VisitScotland Funds
  - All funds are now closed.
  - 2-3 funds are in the final assessment stages
  - Offer letters are now going out and the money is flowing.
  - In a number of funds, where there has been an underspend, a top up has been given to all of the eligible businesses, this has been welcomed.
  - It was noted that successful applicants to the Tour Guide fund, which was one of the last funds to close, should begin to receive their offer letters by the end of this week / start of next week at the lasts. The high volume of applicants to this fund has resulted in a slight delay.

- Funding Moving Forward
  The latest information from the Scottish Government would suggest that from now on their focus will be firmly on restart and there will be no new money for new funds. This does not however mean that there will be no money in the next Financial Year or the new Government. The only source of additional funding is the Local Authority Discretionary Fund

2. Tourism Recovery Planning

- Phase 1 priority recovery proposals were submitted to Scottish Government Ministers on 11th March. It was noted that these proposals were based on the Tourism Task Force recommendations and were over and above the urgent need for ongoing business support.

  Six of the proposals have been led by VisitScotland, three by Scottish Enterprise and one by Skills Development Scotland. It was highlighted that the First Minister would be making a funding announcement related to these proposals at the STA conference later in the morning.

  It was noted that money has been secured for a new Destination and Sector Marketing Fund.

  To Note: At the STA conference today (24th) the First Minister confirmed that £25m would be made available to support all 10 priority recovery proposals.

  Action: K.Christie to share the 10 proposals with the group.

- Phase 2 will focus on creating a five year, costed, tourism recovery plan which will be submitted to Scottish Government Ministers by end of May. Consultants Toposophy have been appointed to work with STERG in the development of the Plan. A programme of industry stakeholder activity will take place in mid-April. It was noted that this submission will also be a bid for funding support.
3. Visitor Management Forum

- A second Visitor Management Summit, convened by Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing and facilitated by VisitScotland, was held on 19 March. This provided an update on the activity and plans of the visitor management groups. There are three main workstreams, Education and Marketing, Investment and Infrastructure, and Prevention, Regulation & Reassurance. https://www.visitscotland.org/about-us/what-we-do/working-in-partnership/visitor-management-plan

It was noted that on Monday (22nd), VisitScotland announced a responsible tourism campaign to highlight the importance of exploring Scotland responsibly. https://www.visitscotland.org/news/2021/responsible-visitor-management-campaign

- Following recent feedback from the agricultural sector and the Estates lobby it is clear that there are significant concerns about the countryside reopening and already there are worrying examples of irresponsible behaviour.

C.Millar recognised the good work that the Visitor management group is doing however emphasised the point that the biggest challenge and most worrying challenge is communicating to those people who don’t care - this needs to be noted and addressed.

4. Issues raised

- G.Morrison commented that it was good to hear that the Scottish Government were focusing on restart plans as many questions have been raised on the guidelines for reopening from the visitor attractions sector. Physical distancing in particular is key as it impacts the viability of a business. It was noted however that despite many emails to the Scottish Government there has been no response on this at all. It was noted that this is not helpful as answers need to be provided to members.

- W.Macleod highlighted that UKH are pressing hard for updated guidance to be issued following the FM’s announcement last week. It is understood that it is being worked on now, however it is needed now. In addition, the guidance needs rationalised as it has become out of date. A request for STERG to reinforce this message would be helpful.

- G.Barclay emphasised the need for further clarity on travel restrictions. It is understood that from 26th April mainland Scotland will move to Level 3 and unrestricted travel will be permitted, however it is not clear what the restrictions on travel will be if different parts of the country begin to move into different levels thereafter. An answer to this is requested.

- A.Rankin commented that following recent engagement with rural and island members, about the influx of leisure sailing, a much more pragmatic view to visitors (and visitor spend), has been detected, it is thought that the need for cash in the till is now more important than it was a few weeks ago.

- C.Millar highlighted the urgent need for answers to the many questions that have been raised around reopening.

- R.Graham reassured the group that the notes of this meeting will be shared with STERG and with the Scottish Government Tourism team.

In addition, as soon as any updates become available they will be shared with the group.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Next Meeting
Wednesday 7th April, 9.00am-9.30am.