Scottish Tourism Emergency Response Group (STERG)

STERG Sector Update Session
Wednesday 21st April 2021

Present:

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<th>Organisation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Association of Scottish Self-Caterers</td>
<td>Fiona Campbell</td>
<td>Scottish Agritourism</td>
<td>Caroline Millar</td>
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<td>Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions</td>
<td>Gordon Morrison</td>
<td>Scottish Golf Tourism Development Group</td>
<td>Stuart French</td>
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<td>Historic Houses</td>
<td>Andrew Hopetoun</td>
<td>Scottish Tourism Alliance</td>
<td>Karen Christie</td>
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<td>Hostelling Scotland</td>
<td>Margo Paterson</td>
<td>Scottish Tourist Guides Association</td>
<td>Kenneth Bramham</td>
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<td>Independent Hostels</td>
<td>Gregor Barclay</td>
<td>VisitScotland</td>
<td>Riddell Graham</td>
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<td>Sail Scotland</td>
<td>Alan Rankin</td>
<td>WildScotland</td>
<td>Victoria Brooks</td>
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Apologies:

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<td>British Amusement Catering Trade Association</td>
<td>John White</td>
<td>Night Time Industries Association</td>
<td>Donald Macleod</td>
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<td>British Holiday &amp; Home Parks Association</td>
<td>Jeanette Wilson</td>
<td>Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group</td>
<td>Rory Kennedy</td>
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<td>Discover Scotland’s Gardens</td>
<td>Dougal Philip</td>
<td>UKHospitality [Scotland]</td>
<td>Willie Macleod</td>
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Key Notes & Actions

1. Outstanding Issues From Previous Meeting
All issues raised on the last STERG Sector call (7th April) were formally raised with STERG. An update on the remaining outstanding issues was provided.

- **STGA Request for Special Dispensation to Complete Tour Guide Training**
  - No relaxation beyond 2m will be approved at this time.

- **Social Distancing Restrictions in Visitor Attractions / Activity Providers**
  - No relaxation is expected at this time.

- **ASVA Meeting with clinicians to discuss social distancing**
  - Meeting took place on Monday 19th

- **Agritourism Businesses to Offer Camping Facilities for up to 2 Months Without Planning Permission.**
  - Reply received from the Chief planners office indicating that Local Authorities have been advised to take a relaxed view on this issue given the visitor management pressures which are likely to be experienced this season. In addition Malcolm Roughead wrote to all Local Authority CEO’s last week requesting that a lenient approach is taken on this issue.
  - It was noted that it would have been helpful if a blanket statement could have been made (as England have done), confirming that 2 months is acceptable. It was highlighted that inconsistencies can arise across Local Authorities if it is left to their discretion.

  **Action: C.Millar to advise R.Graham if any issues arise with this approach.**

- **Hostel Restrictions - Use of Communal Areas / Mixed Households / School Groups**
  - Discussions are ongoing with clinicians
  - An update will be requested at STERG tomorrow

- **Tourism & Hospitality Guidance**
  - Published Friday 16th April
  - Confusion over social distancing in the hospitality sector should now be resolved. The FM made a clear
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statement on Tuesday that guidance around social distancing had not changed and the STA have posted clarification on their website and in their Update.

- Other items noted since the last meeting:
  - F.Campbell had raised ongoing financial support for large self-catering businesses
  - G.Morrison had raised, theme parks openings / soft play / Test & Protect
  - K.Bramham had raised inconsistencies across local authorities for tour guides applying to the discretionary fund. It was noted that this has been raised with SGov and COSLA. No reply has been received yet.
  - All of these points will be highlighted at the STERG meeting tomorrow.

2. Issues Raised

- V.Brooks highlighted that ongoing support for the sector is vital as business viability is seriously compromised due to social distancing. For example:
  - Day boat trips with fixed seating can only operate at c. 25%-30% capacity
  - Day boat trips with moveable seats can only operate at 50%-60% capacity
  - Activity providers and tour operators who use vehicles are having to use two instead of one and similarly two guides instead of one.

It is estimated that 55%-60% of the sector will be open from 26th April.

Wild Scotland have recently conducted a survey, the findings will be available in the coming days.

- G.Barclay questioned the comment made by Prof. Jason Leitch during the Q&A session after the FM’s statement yesterday which suggested that people from England should be following the rules in their own country i.e. in England tourism accommodation (with the exception of self-catering) will open from 17th May and therefore English residents should not travel to Scotland to stay in tourism accommodation until then.

It was suggested that this is unlikely to be SGov guidance and should treated sceptically.

- A.Hopetoun raised concern about the draft capacity guidance for weddings & events. The guidance indicates that the capacity is currently 50, rising to 200, however when you take into account the constraints that have to be applied within a venue, the actual number of guests that can be accommodated may be quite different, e.g. a ballroom of 300 capacity may only be able to accommodate c. 50 guests standing and c. 80 guests seated at tables.

Action: R.Graham to connect A.Hopetoun with SWIA Co-Chair, Duncan McConchie to follow up.

- A.Rankin advised that a six point plan, which would allow charter and small cruise sector to operate, has been submitted to the Scottish Government for consideration, currently the plan is sitting with the medics and no response has yet been received. In addition a Test & Sail process has been developed which can be implemented should an operator fall foul of any of the standard guidance, it was highlighted that without Test & Sail there will be zero business this season in the charter and small cruise sector and financial support will be required as these businesses will not be able to operate. A response is required urgently.

It was highlighted that the leisure sector is ready to go

R.Graham advised that he is continuing to pursue a response from the SGov on the extension of the VS funds for the Outdoor Sector, Coach Sector, Agritourism and two Event funds
C. Millar highlighted that some members are concerned about the potential of a third wave towards the end of the year and whether there will be any support available.

The Agritourism sector fund is progressing with VS colleagues however the launch is being held up by the election.

Significant visitor management concerns in the Loch Lomond area are being raised by members, for example, uncontrolled dogs and extremely high visitor numbers – this needs addressing.

F. Campbell highlighted that large self-catering properties have been closed since 23rd September and are not likely to reopen until the end of June (at the earliest) when household mixing is relaxed. The £2k large self-catering grant was not enough. Financial support is urgently needed for these businesses.

To calculate the support that will be needed going forward, SGov should confirm how many large self-catering businesses received the grant.

G. Morrison commented that some ASVA members have highlighted that the Tourism & Hospitality Guidance is very much hospitality focused and not tourism focused and it is very difficult to draw out the guidance for visitor attractions. It was noted that ASVA and ALVA have their own guidance and it was also noted that there was Museums, Galleries and Heritage Attractions Guidance published last year but this hasn’t been updated. (it was noted that the Museums, Galleries and Heritage Attractions Guidance has been updated but is waiting on FM approval).

ASVA met with Dr John Harden, Deputy National Clinical Director on Monday 19th. During that meeting ASVA were able to present the case for 1m physical distancing in visitor attractions. Although the mitigating measures that are in place within visitor attractions were recognised as better than many other sectors, the 2m physical distancing will remain as the data is not there yet. It was noted that there are a number of test events taking place in England and Scotland and the data from these test events will determine whether a move to 1m can be made in the future.

The implication for visitor attractions operating with 2m physical distancing is that they are not making any money. 85% of the sector either will not earn enough to see them through the winter, will lose money or will not open. The latest ASVA survey results are due out today and will demonstrate how many businesses will not be opening.

While the sector appreciates the £10m fund, that money is now spent and more support is needed.

A final point was raised about rides at visitor attractions. Rides which are integral to the attraction can open, however a definition of ‘integral’ is required to avoid confusion among operators.

S. French highlighted that there is currently no international business up until the end of July and clients who are booked for August and September are now questioning whether or not they will be able to come, very soon August and September business will be lost and there will be no further opportunities until spring 2022. Three key questions must be addressed:
- For those businesses who are unable to bring in international travellers, what happens when furlough ends at the end of September, will financial assistance be made available until at least April 2022?
- What system will be put in place to allow people who have had their vaccine to travel to Scotland?
- Can the FM consider the negative impact of messaging which suggests sacrificing international travel for the benefit of a good domestic season. Please could statements like these be avoided in the future as it creates a worrying and even more depressing situation for those businesses reliant on international
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3. Additional Comments Raised

- It was commented that the focus has been primarily on the reopening of hospitality and that most of the industries represented around the table today seem to have been left behind. There is a variation from sectors who can just trade through to sectors who are facing 100% closure. How can this message be driven home?

R.Graham assured the group that all of the comments made today would be presented to STERG. It was acknowledged however that purdah does make it difficult to get any direct answers. It was noted however that all views expressed will be captured and passed onto STERG.

4. Phase 1 – 10 Priority Recovery Projects

- All 10 projects are progressing. Some projects are further developed than others.
- The criteria for the new Destination and Sector Marketing Fund is in the final stages of development and a provisional launch date has been set for the 19th May.
- A regular update on all 10 projects will be available in the STERG Action Plan from the end of April.

5. Phase 2 – Five Year Plan Stakeholder Engagement Activity

- Stakeholder consultation is a critical phase of the recovery planning process. 1-2-1 consultations are currently in progress and industry workshops will be held w/c 19th April and w/c 26th April.
- To allow for the Sector organisation to contribute their views and opinions it was proposed that the next STERG update call on 5th May is extended to allow for Toposophy to facilitate a consultation session with the Sector leads. The meeting invite will be amended to reflect this.
- A consultation session with the Tourism Task Force will take place in early May, date TBC.

6. AOB

- The ASSC and the Highland Business Partnership (HBP) teamed up to run an online expert led panel session yesterday (20th) on debt management and refinancing options for business owners. A link to a recording of the session can be found on the ASSC website in the News section.

  https://www.assc.co.uk/debt-management-a-path-to-peace-of-mind/

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Next Meeting

Wednesday 5th May, 8.30am-10.00am.

This meeting will be an extended session facilitated by Toposophy Ltd who are working with STERG to deliver the Scottish Tourism five year recovery plan.