Responsible Tourism Framework

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND | ÀRAINNEACHD EACHDRAIDHEIL ALBA

Warming Stripes - a visual representation of the change in global temperatures as measured over the past 100+ years. Each stripe represents one year, starting in the late 19th century (left) up until 2020 (right). The 'warmer' the stripe the higher the average recorded temperature was that year.
(Source: **showyourstripes.info**)

Front cover image: Holyrood Park

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The Responsible Tourism Framework for Historic Environment Scotland (HES) defines our understanding of, and role in, responsible tourism. It outlines the principles guiding our organisation's decision-making and around which we can build actions going forward. It sets out how tourism in the historic environment can contribute to better quality of life and meaningful experiences for all.

Our Place in Time (OPiT), Scotland's strategy for the historic environment, has identified the historic environment as key to Scottish tourism, providing visitor attractions that represent Scotland's identity, and a significant contribution to our economy.

We recognise the need to transform our business model to reflect the principles of responsible tourism and make sure we fulfil the vision of OPiT.

Doing so is a priority for us, and our partners and stakeholders, to build a resilient future for the organisation and the heritage tourism sector as a whole. It also contributes to the achievement of our wider climate action ambitions and statutory duties, including the Scottish Government Net Zero target by 2045, and the transition to a wellbeing economy.

Visiting Fort George

The framework supports the national tourism strategy, **Scotland Outlook 2030: Responsible Tourism for a Sustainable Future**, developed by the Scottish Tourism Alliance, with HES represented on the Strategy Steering Group. Addressing climate change and supporting the inclusive economic recovery of the tourism sector are central to the national strategy.

Our commitment is rooted in our **HES Corporate Plan - Heritage for All:**

We will promote responsible tourism – working to make our historic sites outstanding attractions that tell Scotland's story, while respecting the needs of local communities, visitors, the environment, and our cultural heritage itself.

While we have previously referred to sustainable tourism in policy such as our **Climate Action Plan 2020-2020 (CAP)**, our understanding in this fast-changing topic area has grown. As a result, we recognise the need for updated terminology and are now adopting a responsible tourism approach. With our evolving understanding and developments in this area, this document will change accordingly over time.

Appendix A shows how the framework connects to various HES internal policies.

Responsible Tourism is a key part of our CAP, which sets out, across seven themes, how we will place the environmental impact of our activities at the heart of our decision-making and support others to do the same. As well as highlighting our approach to properties in care (PICs), this framework
is relevant to the wider historic environment and our work with partners and other stakeholders.

Innovation

Partnerships

Climate Impacts
and Adapation

Energy and
Carbon Management

Sustainable
Procurement

Sustainable
Travel

Circular
Economy

Biodiversity
and Landscape

Sustainable
Tourism

People

Training

The key areas for our climate change work.

CONTENTS

WHY IS RESPONSIBLE TOURISM IMPORTANT?

Tourism is a major component of our economy, providing employment and contributing to GDP and overall economic growth. There is growing global recognition of the importance of responsible tourism and its benefits, that can be enjoyed by all without detriment to communities and the environment. Collectively, and as individuals, we need to take responsibility for transforming tourism into a force for good by mainstreaming environmental, social and economic sustainability in everything we do. Responsible tourism is guided by and forms part of various national policies and legislation.

The main guiding policies for us are:

The global climate emergency

Tourism contributes significantly to climate change through its associated greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, it is vulnerable to the changes in climate and subdesquent negative impacts. **Climate action in tourism** needs to be accelerated following the declaration of a climate emergency by the Scottish Government and Visit Scotland. HES, identified as a 'Major Player' under the **Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009**, has a duty to act sustainably as an exemplar and contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The shift to a **circular economy**

The tourism industry is interlinked with the production and consumption of products and services, accounting for around 80% of Scotland's carbon footprint Circular business models seek to keep products and materials in use for as long as possible, reducing waste and the negative impacts of resource extraction such as biodiversity loss. It can also help to create a more sustainable and resilient industry which offers competitive economic opportunities and greener jobs.

The transformation to **a wellbeing economy**

The tourism industry is a major contributor to the Scottish economy and its transformation. Scotland's wellbeing economy will be inclusive, promote sustainability, prosperity, and resilience, where businesses can thrive and innovate, supporting communities across the nation to access opportunities and enhance wellbeing.

The **just transition** to net zero

The tourism industry needs to change to support a successful ntransition to a net zero society by 2045. Tourism has significant potential and a responsibility to effect profound changes while ensuring that the benefits of a fairer, greener future can be enjoyed by all through a resilient economy delivering fairness and tackling inequality and injustice.

The **Place Principle**

The tourism industry, at its core, can enable communities to shape places where people, location and resources combine and create a sense of identity and purpose. A more joined-up, collaborative and participative approach with communities develop experiences that deliver positive benefits for all and foster understanding and respect.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM PRINCIPLES

Our responsible tourism approach is guided by five interlinking principles, which are adapted from those laid out in the **Cape Town Declaration 2022.**

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

It is important that we manage our natural and historic environment sustainably, considering the volume and type of tourism that a site can support while respecting the integrity of vulnerable ecosystems and protected areas.

Sustainable consumption and production of resources needs to be implemented as the norm, disconnecting tourism's growth from use. Sustainable procurement plays a resource central role as we move towards more circular economy practices.

SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE USE

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

We should actively involve local communities in planning and decision-making and embed a service-design approach that allows us to co-design quality tourism experiences and products which reflect, complement, and enhance the destination. We can safeguard authenticity and the sense of place while meeting communities' needs and enhancing their wellbeing.

As part of the just transition to a wellbeing net zero economy, we should provide fair, quality, and green employment and responsinble tourism, support the local economy by adopting community wealth building approaches, and provide valuable career pathways in responsible tourism practice. In partnerships we can provide relevant training and development in traditional skills, exchanging knowledge and sharing risk.

MAXIMISE LOCAL ECONOMIC BENEFITS

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion needs to be integrated to make tourism an inclusive social experience and ensure that there is access for all, particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, and individuals. We can help deliver climate justice by recognising these social inequalities, and working with marginalised communities to achieve a socially sustainable society.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM AT HES – OUR OBJECTIVES

As Scotland's lead public body for the historic environment and the largest operator of paid-for visitor attractions, we have a responsibility to show leadership in the just transition to a low carbon economy.

Responsible Tourism is about making 'better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit'

(Cape Town Declaration, 2002).

We aim to provide our visitors with the facilities, infrastructure, and information they need to make their visit as sustainable and responsible as possible. We continue delivering increased economic and wellbeing benefits to the local communities which we are part of, maintaining a financially resilient organisation, as well as supporting the wider tourism sector.

Urquhart Castle on the shores of Loch Ness in the Highlands.

Our objective is to turn the opportunities of a transition to net zero, and a responsible frm of tourism, into reality.

We want to:
Build business resilience and decrease our dependency on a carbon and resource intensive operational model, including relying on high emission international markets.

Enable community wealth building through participation, inclusion, and sharing our knowledge, leading to greater economic benefits and wellbeing.

Respond to rapidly growing visitor expectation and demand for ethical, low carbon tourism experiences, alongside changing visitor behaviour, and numbers, due to climate change.

Innovate creative ways to welcome visitors, and to communicate environmental stewardship. both physically and virtually.

Unlock local knowledge and narratives to enable enriching experiences and increase sense of place, cultural awareness, identity, and inclusion.

Enhance wellbeing at the community and individual level, taking a more conscientious approach to the potential and value of place.

PRIORITY AREAS

Guided by national policy and linking back to our responsible tourism principles, the following three priority areas are identified for effective action. Informed by extensive internal, cross-organisational consultation, nine outcomes and a series of aspirations are highlighted. These are not exhaustive, but form the starting point from which to develop the potential of our operational activities. They cover the breadth of our ogranisation, as everyone has a part to play, and you will find some aspirations more relevant to your role than others.

The priority areas and their leading principles are:

OUR RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT:

This priority area covers aspirations to maximise our positive impact on the environment. This includes efforts to decarbonise our tourism operations, integrate circular business models, and sustainable procurement. It also covers our responsiblity to enable and educate visitors to be responsible consumers.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE:

This priority area covers aspirations to co-create experiences with wider communities and visitors. This includes encouraging meaningful interactions and improving access to our heritage for everyone, all with wellbeing at the heart of consideration.

OUR RESPONSIBLITY FOR CAPACITY BUILDING:

This priority area covers aspirations to use our lead position to support others. This includes demonstrating best-practice, providing guidance on decarbonisation, and strengthening skills development and local career pathways in the heritage tourism sector.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

We will accelerate the transition to net zero based circular business practices, capitalising on new opportunities through nature-based solutions, to reduce our dependency on a carbon and resource intensive operational model.

Herbs and plants for sale at Jedburgh Abbey.

01

We will integrate circular economy practices into our operational model.

02

We will protect and maintain the natural capital and biodiversity of our historic environment.

03

We will enable and promote low carbon visitor experiences.

- Establish a supporting policy framework

- Embed resource efficiency and prioritise reused or remanufactured goods over new.

- Empower and invest in initiatives that help us eliminate waste and pollution and keep materials in use, both in the natural and built environments.

- Build strong and fair partnerships with our suppliers and mainstream sustainable procurement.

- Work in partnership with natural heritage organisations to deliver the objectives set out in the HES's Biodiversity Delivery Statement for the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.

- Holistically consider future resources required when planning new products and experiences, to ensure long-term sustainability.

- Promote and implement best practices avoiding or minimising negative impacts of our tourism activities on the environment.

- Increase engagement with communities and visitors on litter prevention and complete actions outlined in the HES Litter Prevention Action Plan.

- Design experiences and increase marketing for domestic, low carbon visitors.

- Embed sustainable and active travel as a core consideration in the development of strategies, such as the HES Monument Investment Plans and Sustainable Management Plans.

- Adopt a shared destination approach with partners to develop low carbon travel routes between heritage attractions.

- Expand our capacity for digital interpretation of our heritage, enhancing our visitor welcome and experience.

- Mainstream the historic connection between us and our environment, the impact of the climate emergency on our sites, and what we are doing about it in our interpretation, communication, and our publications.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE

We will co-create memorable and innovative experiences with communities, enhancing wellbeing and making the historic environment accessible to more diverse groups of people, while fostering respect between visitors and residents.

Edinburgh's Muslim Scouts site visit to Stirling Castle.

01

We will
co-create experiences
enhancing the wellbeing of
communities and visitors.

02

We will improve accessibility,
both physical and cultural, to
heritage tourism experiences
for all.

03

We will increase the seasonal
and geographic spread of
our outstanding experiences
for more communities to
benefit from tourism.

- Lead pro-active dialogues
with communities, travel trade,
Destination Management
Organisations (DMOs), and
tour operators to explore
opportunities within social
carrying capacity thresholds.

- Develop long-term relationships
supporting groups who would
otherwise struggle to engage
actively with heritage and the
historic environment.

- Develop a baseline to understand
and recognise differing levels of
community engagement.

- Evaluate feedback from
communities, visitors, staff,
and other stakeholders,
on our co-creation and
engagement with them.

- Develop colleagues to fully
enable inclusive and meaningful
community engagement around
the development of our PICs.

- Encourage shared ownership
of our heritage by providing
authentic visitor experiences and
volunteering opportunities that
link to community priorities.

- Identify barriers relating to
Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion
through collaborative research
with visitors and partners, to
ensure everything from planning
and booking to experiencing
Scotland's heritage is as
accessible as possible.

- Build capacity to analyse and
interpret all collected data, and
develop experiences based on
our improved understanding of
our visitors gained from this data.

- Design inclusive experiences
which attract, encourage and
enable new audiences from all
backgrounds and abilities to
enjoy our heritage.

- Increase authentic engagement
between staff and visitors to
enhance accessibility.

- Enhance our Membership offer to
influence visitors to spend more
time in one place, visit off-peak,
and spread their visit across the
country, and reduce pressure at
high volume sites.

- Adequately invest in pro-active
visitor management, operations,
staffing, and interpretation, to
ensure quality experiences.

- Develop a visitor offer which is
adaptable to external influences.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

We will lead the heritage tourism sector by using the organisation's strength and capabilities to support and enable other partners to decarbonise and thrive sustainably, and to provide career pathways, training, and green jobs.

Seminar on Energy Efficiency delivered by staff at the Engine Shed, Stirling.

01

We will improve and support the generation of local economic benefits from tourism.

02

We will strengthen the provision of skills development and quality career pathways in the heritage tourism sector.

03

We will support heritage and tourism organisations and businesses in their efforts to achieving net zero.

- Facilitate community wealth building through regional economic planning and investment mechanisms reducing Economic Leakage.

- Increase HES's awareness of regional tourism strategies to identify areas for effective support and collaboration.

- Support and invest in communities to develop local approaches to tourism planning and management.

- Ensure marginalised communities and individuals are involved in decision-making processes, to support and encourage inclusive employment and entrepreneurship.

- Identify skills and knowledge gaps across the heritage tourism sector to develop tailored training resources.

- Strengthen partnerships with institutions training our future staff, to address knowledge and skills gaps, remain up-to-date with research, and embed HES knowledge in their learning programmes.

- Identify our skills and knowledge gaps, and develop training in response.

- Develop a knowledge base and best practice catalogue, including examples of community co-creation, to ensure consistency across the organisation.

- Integrate pro-active workforce planning to ensure provision of training and progression opportunities.

- Expand relationships with community and volunteering groups, and local businesses, support them on climate action, and developing products and activities aligning with a responsible tourism approach.

- Collaborate with DMOs to support and influence destination aims.

- Share tailored guidance and insight on practical action towards net zero.

- Provide funding for a broad range of heritage assets owners, to further their activity towards net zero.

- Positively influence behaviour and inspire others within the heritage tourism sector, towards taking responsibility for net zero activities.

NEXT STEPS

This document sets out our aspirations for implementing responsible tourism principles across Historic Environment Scotland.

Transforming our activities around tourism to incorporate responsible tourism principles will be challenging for some areas of activity, but will also create new and exciting opportunities for us as a lead public body, as well as for the wider heritage tourism sector. It will require partnership working, transparency, and shared accountability for tourism in the historic environment, to ensure we are all empowered to participate in decision-making and acting responsibly. Responsibility for delivery of the aspirations outlined in this document lies with us all.

In a number of cases, a shift in existing internal policy is required, and we recognise that operational and cultural change will need to occur before some of these aspirations can be realised. Further mapping of the framework against existing policy is necessary, to identify areas where quick wins can be made, and where more work and resources are likely to be required for a successful transformation.

How this framework will be applied is likely to be different from site to site, across different communities, and different visitor types. Opportunities will be determined by site-specific factors, such that framework principles will be applied at local level, informed by site knowledge, and based on locally focused research.

The approach taken at individual sites can be aligned with existing prioritisation tools, such as the **OPiT Sustainable Investment Toolkit (SIT)**, developed by the OPiT Built Heritage Investment Group to demonstrate how a project or site contributes to positive outcomes for people across the wellbeing, climate and economic agendas. It will also form a component part of future activity, such as the HES PIC Strategy work.

The framework provides the basis for the next steps that can be taken to advance the efforts of implementing responsible tourism principles across HES.

Mainstreaming internal understanding of responsible tourism

Run facilitated workshops and on-site engagement with colleagues, focused on adopting responsible tourism principles into our operations, empowering managers and site staff to make local decisions and champion on the ground solutions. Initial progress can be made by extending the existing internal HES online course, **Climate Change and Heritage.**

Case studies

Document case studies to demonstrate practical examples of how responsible tourism in the historic environment can contribute to Scotland's economic recovery and net zero transition. Showcasing HES's leadership, these best-practice examples would be plugged into the **VisitScotland Responsible Tourism Case Study platform.**

Measure success

Develop criteria, based on the framework's principles and corresponding indicators, to measure and monitor the benefits and added value of responsible tourism actions and initiatives. This can build on the initial Responsible Tourism Assessment Framework being developed for Doune Castle and rolled out to establish site specific baselines against which future performance can be measured.

Research

It is recognised that our knowledge and expertise in responsible tourism will evolve over time. We need to increase our understanding of our operational impact on communities and local economies, in parallel with new types of engagement with communities, visitors and stakeholders. We also need to gain greater awareness of the impact of climate change on tourism and the wider socio-economic impacts this will have on communities.

Resources

Identify areas for investment and upskilling and training staff to reflect a trajectory based on responsible tourism principles. Establish resource needs for funding transformative approaches and on the ground actions, including costs for coordination and monitoring.

External influence and profile

Strengthen our role as lead public body through existing and new external partnerships, for example using OPiT as a mechanism for wider sector engagement on Responsible Tourism. The new UK World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Working Group, of which HES are a founding member, will serve as a sounding board and knowledge exchange platform.

Our Responsible Tourism work will follow existing and developing Scottish Government best practice guidance on achieving societal and environment outcomes, for example the **Land Rights and Responsibilities Protocol**, the **National Standards for Community Engagement** and the **Service-Design approach.**

A new pedestrian bridge, built to link Doune Castle with its natural environment and improve links with the local village.

GLOSSARY

Accessible: Providing for individuals with varied capabilities the opportunity to reach, participate, or understand.

Active travel: Making journeys by physically active means, such as walking or cycling, resulting in benefits to health, wellbeing, and the environment.

Adaptation: Measures such as physical interventions or changes in business practice implemented in response to, or in anticipation of, changes in climate to increase resilience.

Built environment: Human-made interventions in the environment including structures and facilities.

Capacity building: The process of developing the skills and capability to effectively address and strengthen our response to the causes and impacts of climate change.

Climate change: Future and recent changes in the climate that physically impact on sites, our operations and visitation.

Climate Justice: A human-rights based approach to tackling the climate crisis, recognising that marginalised communities are more vulnerable due to social and economic inequalities.

Community wealth building: Economic development which seeks to develop resilient, inclusive local economies, with more local employment and a larger and more diverse business base.

Cultural heritage: The legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations.

Economic benefit: Any benefit(s) that can be quantified in terms of money generated (or saved), such as net income, revenues, etc.

Economic leakage: Economic leakage in tourism is where revenue generated leaves the local economy or community to benefit others.

Historic environment: Our surroundings as they have been shaped, used and valued by people in the past, and continue to be today. The historic environment includes natural and built features comprising our collective heritage, and it can be valued for both its tangible and intangible aspects.

Just Transition: The process and outcome undertaken to deliver a net zero and climate resilient economy in a way that ensures fairness and tackles inequality and injustice.

Mitigation: In the context of climate change, efforts to decrease the amount of emissions released into the atmosphere and reduce the current concentration of greenhouse gases.

Natural capital: The elements of nature that produce value (directly and indirectly) to people, such as the stock of forests, rivers, land, minerals, and oceans. It includes living aspects (such as fish stocks) as well as non-living aspects (such as minerals and energy resources).

Natural heritage: Natural features and areas that constitute the habitat of threatened species of animals and plants and natural sites of value from the point of view of science, conservation, or natural beauty.

Nature-based solutions: Actions that use nature to address societal challenges, providing benefits for both human well-being and biodiversity.

Net Zero: The balance between the amount of greenhouse gas emissions emitted and the amount removed from the atmosphere. This differs from zero carbon emissions, which requires no carbon to be emitted.

Responsible/sustainable consumption: A concerted effort to purchase and use goods and services that have a low environmental footprint and provide a positive economic impact where possible.

Service Design: Improvement of existing services and innovation of new ones by the application of established design process and skills to focus on services which are useful, usable, efficient, effective, and desirable.

Shared destination approach: Development, commonly in partnership, of routes or itineraries that encourage visiting multiple sites in a responsible way. Examples include the 4 Abbeys Cycle route, and sections of the John Muir Way along the Antonine Wall.

Social carrying capacity: The maximum level of use that can be absorbed by an area without an unacceptable decline in the quality of experience for visitors and without unacceptable adverse impacts on society.

Sustainability: Using resources in an environmentally responsible, socially fair and economically viable manner, in order to meet the needs of current users without compromising the needs of future generations.

Visitors: In reference to our sites, visitors are people who come to our sites, but also can be people coming into undefined geographical areas.

APPENDIX A –

Relevance of the Responsible Tourism key priority
areas to HES internal policies and action areas

	We will accelerate the transition to net zero based circular business solutions, capitalising on new opportunities through nature-based solutions, to reduce our dependency on a carbon and resource intensive operational model.	We will co-create memorable and innovative experiences with communities, enhancing wellbeing and making the historic environment accessible to more diverse groups of people, while fostering respect between visitors and residents.	We will lead the heritage tourism sector by leveraging the organisation's strength and capabilities to support and enable other partners to decarbonise and thrive sustainably, and to provide and sustain quality career pathways, training, and green jobs.
Climate Action Plan 2020-2025	X		
Visitor Strategy 2019-2023	X	X	
Intangible Cultural Heritage Policy Statement		X	
Equalities Outcomes and Mainstreaming		X	X
Communities Connections Programme	X	X	X
Skills Investment Plan 2019-2022		X	X
HES Volunteer Programme		X	X
Procurement Strategy 2022-2026	X		X
Retail Strategy 2022-2027	X		
People Strategy 2020-2025		X	X
HES Our Behaviours		X	X

Geotourist App in use in Holyrood Park,
telling visitors about the park's rich stories,
prehistoric tales and abundant wildlife.

We are the lead public body established to investigate, care for and promote Scotland's historic environment.

We want to make sure Scotland's heritage is cherished, understood, shared and enjoyed with pride by everyone.

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