

# **SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 THINK PIECE – BLOG – OUR TOURISM INDUSTRY**

## **Introduction**

The Scottish Government is keen to bring together views and ideas from a wide range of sectors and to explore the priorities Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) should address.

In the twenty-seventh in a series of Think Pieces, Riddell Graham, Director of Industry and Destination Development, VisitScotland, sets out his thoughts on Scotland2050 and specifically on our tourism industry. The opinions expressed are that of the author and we hope that they will stimulate debate and discussion.

## **The issues and opportunities:**

Scottish Tourism is an economic success story. A recognised contributor to the Government's growth sectors, it generates around 5% of GDP and one in twelve of Scotland's workforce, are employed in tourism.

Tourism in Scotland is distributed throughout the country with benefits of the sector seen in cities, towns, rural locations and islands. Tourism is fundamental to the fabric of the nation. It creates income, provides job opportunities to thousands, commands investment in our transport infrastructure, supports and stimulates local communities and assists in maintaining and upholding crucial national assets.

Tourism is at the heart of place development. A vibrant visitor friendly destination is good for those who live and work in those destinations creating the conditions for increased employment and investment in facilities to the benefit of all.

Tourism is not, however, without its challenges. The need to develop sustainable solutions that support inclusive economic growth, jobs, communities, heritage and the environment are central to the future of tourism within Scotland.

Sustainable tourism requires anticipating where demand drives future investment so that its footprint is mitigated by preventative actions sooner rather than later. An example of this relates to the provision of hotel accommodation where more work is needed to ensure we are matching the right kind of supply with predicted changes in demand rather than pursuing policies of simply adding more beds irrespective of quality or demand. A similar situation could well apply without proper infrastructure plans in place to meet the exponential growth in cruise tourism. Data and access to information will continue to be central to a productive and viable industry with fast, reliable digital infrastructure necessary for businesses to remain competitive in a global marketplace.

The consequences of climate change will put pressure on the natural landscape and viability of our built heritage, both of which are central to the Scottish tourism offering.

Adoption of a zero-waste policy, provision of more e-vehicle charging points and an increase in opportunities to be more active will benefit local communities and their citizens as much as meet visitor demands and expectations.

An aging demographic, resident or visitor, will require transport, accommodation, retail, food and drink providers to embrace accessibility issues and adapt their facilities in the future, again to the benefit of all.

### **Planning solutions:**

If we accept that tourism is good for local economies then we need to embrace the fact that tourism is everyone's business. To that end local communities must be part of the solution, influencing the amenities and provision of services.

The planning system must foster greater collaboration between and shared ownership by stakeholders (destination groups, communities, tourism businesses) and developers to understand how everyone contributes to local tourism strategies. Planning systems should encourage developers and operators to identify local employment and business opportunities as part of their application approval. We believe a planning solution that contributes to a supportive framework for economic growth and protects and enhances the natural and built environment would result in the more efficient use of land.

National Planning Framework 4 will be critical to the continued success of regional tourism development and must seek to deliver a consistent approach to infrastructure development at the local level. The implementation of strategic national physical and digital infrastructure would facilitate the development of sustainable tourism growth. Through the implementation of carbon neutral transport networks, visitors and residents can be distributed sustainably throughout Scotland.

Climate change will in the future require intervention against extreme weather events, changes in landscape and biodiversity which will challenge households, businesses and communities.

### **Summary:**

Through national investment in environmentally friendly transport solutions, digital networks and climate change resilience measures Scotland can maintain its global position as a tourism destination which provides a world class visitor experience but which serves those communities by creating employment, which generates investment leading to a positive sense of place, a vibrant environment and a local, regional and national sustainable economy.

### **Author Biography**

Following graduation with a BSc in Ecological Science, Riddell Graham worked for Borders Regional Council within the Planning and Economic development department. He started working in tourism in 1978 ending up as Chief Executive of Scottish Borders Tourist Board. He has been a Director with VisitScotland since 2005.