



## Community Tourism

## The Role of Social Enterprise





# Foreword

This paper is part of a series of Senscot Briefings which aim to showcase the approach that social enterprise is taking to address a range of complex social issues across Scotland. This Briefing will explore how bringing local people and businesses together with third sector partners can help increase both visitor numbers and the quality of visitor experience - to the benefit of the local community.

## What is a social enterprise?

A social enterprise (SE) is a trading business – selling goods and services – whose primary objective is to achieve social and/or environmental goals. Senscot recognises SEs in Scotland based on the criteria set out in the Voluntary SE Code of Practice.

## Who are we?

Senscot is a third sector intermediary established in 1999. Along with others, we have helped to develop a support infrastructure for SEs over the last 15 years. A key part of our work is to support Social Enterprise Networks (SENs) – geographic and thematic - across Scotland. See [www.senscot.net](http://www.senscot.net) to find out more.

## The context of this briefing

In 2012, an industry-led national tourism strategy, Tourism Scotland 2020 (TS2020), was published. The strategy, headed by the Scottish Tourism Alliance, stated a vision that “Scotland will be a destination of first choice for a high quality, value for money and memorable customer experience, delivered by skilled and passionate people”.

The strategy had two main focuses: identifying markets which offered the highest growth potential, and cultivating a greater level of collaboration between Scotland’s key tourist destinations. It is hoped that the strategy will see Scotland increase its total visitor spend from £4.5bn to over £5.5bn by 2020. However, a mid-term review indicated that, while the strategy’s framework remains fit for purpose, the target of a £1bn increase in visitor spend was still some way off.

Community-led tourism initiatives have an important role to play in achieving this goal, as recognised by the Scottish Government in a strategic letter of guidance to Visit Scotland, encouraging it to “engage regularly with Scotland’s communities to help them make the most of their own local tourism resources”.

Tourism-focussed social enterprises can empower communities to grow their individual tourism markets by putting local people and community assets at the heart of a collaborative approach to growing visitor numbers. Forging a network of local initiatives will be key if Scotland is to achieve the stated aims of TS2020.



# Community Tourism

Community tourism puts local people at the centre of the decision-making process to produce a tourist offering which benefits the whole community, not just a few businesses. It looks to build a strategy which allows small, local businesses to capture the footfall of visitors who are attracted to larger, popular local assets.

Encouraging the local community to take ownership of tourism in their area can help preserve historic and cultural heritage, improve management of land and assets for community use, encourage the development of new business opportunities, and improve the quality of services.

Communities are more likely to lead on tourism in rural areas, often those which are economically marginalised. Similar to social enterprise, communities are stepping in where they see a need that is not being met by the private or public sector.

Ensuring that the economic benefits of tourism are spread across a community increases the buy-in from local businesses, giving a concerted focus to any local tourism initiative. Connecting with community groups, the local tourism forum, development trusts, social enterprises and other tourism-related businesses in the planning of local tourism initiatives reinforces this ethos of community benefit.

*"Living in a small town, we work together to promote what other local businesses are doing. This means when tourists or other customers come in and ask what's going on in the town, we're able to help them with where to go, what to eat, or if other local businesses have promotions or events going on. It's good for local businesses to be able to signpost locally and help each other out."*

*Claire MacDonald, Coast Candle Co., Dornoch*

A successful plan will also look to develop meaningful partnerships between the public, private and third sectors, as well as business to business. Can schools and local businesses build links to develop a better, shared knowledge of local heritage and community assets among young people in the area? Can local businesses work together to signpost each other's products and services to tourists? Cumulatively, these small steps in partnership building can contribute to a vastly enhanced visitor experience, increasing the community's tourist offer.

Some of the challenges included in driving projects forward are local politics, lack of resource, lack of knowledge, and poor infrastructure. Where national and local bodies have stepped in to help tackle these challenges there is greater success.

*"We devised a programme of interactions with the community, the school and local businesses. WorldHost training and visitor experience training was available to young people so that when they worked in restaurants and bars at night they could pass on that information to the tourist. We then further developed it and introduced courses that are now SQA registered: travel and tourism, early education and childcare, which is another need within the community."*

*Yvonne Ross, Director, Dornoch CIC*



# The Contribution of Social Enterprise

The 2017 Social Enterprise Census showed that there are 361 organisations operating within the category of Tourism, Festivals and Heritage.

If we explore the phrase 'Tourism is everyone's business', the number of social enterprises linked to the tourism industry increases significantly. Taking into account economic sectors such as arts and creative industries; community centres and halls; food, catering and hospitality; retailing; sport and leisure – the figure rises to over 2500. This is just under half of the total number of social enterprises captured in the 2017 Social Enterprise Census.

## ***"Visitors like to speak to local people."***

These organisations deliver a range of positive social and environmental impacts within their communities while also delivering products and services for visitors. There is still room, however, to grow and improve the sector by helping social enterprises understand their role within the industry, better understand the market, improve quality, and to connect the local population to the needs of the visitor.

Community tourism organisations and social enterprises can contribute to:

- Accessibility and inclusivity
- Training and employability opportunities
- Safeguarding of cultural heritage
- Community asset management
- Tackling loneliness and isolation
- Boosting local economy
- Community cohesion
- Young people staying in the community

While rural communities have historically been more likely to work together to boost tourism numbers, there is a growing interest in replicating this model in urban areas.

Social enterprises in cities across Scotland have shown a heightened interest in connecting with visitors, showing them a side of their city not often included on traditional tourist routes.

Creating the same employment prospects and level of community cohesion that many rural communities are developing is equally important in our towns and cities. Social enterprises in the heart of our urban communities are the perfect partners for developing a long-term commitment to a tourism agenda at a local level.



# Accessible Tourism

The accessibility of venues should be an important consideration for any business. However, there's a reason community-led tourism initiatives should carefully consider their accessibility: the accessible tourism market is huge.

The 2011 Scottish Census indicated that 20% of the population are living with a 'long-term activity-limiting health problem or disability', while data from 2016 puts that figure at 33% among adults in Scotland.

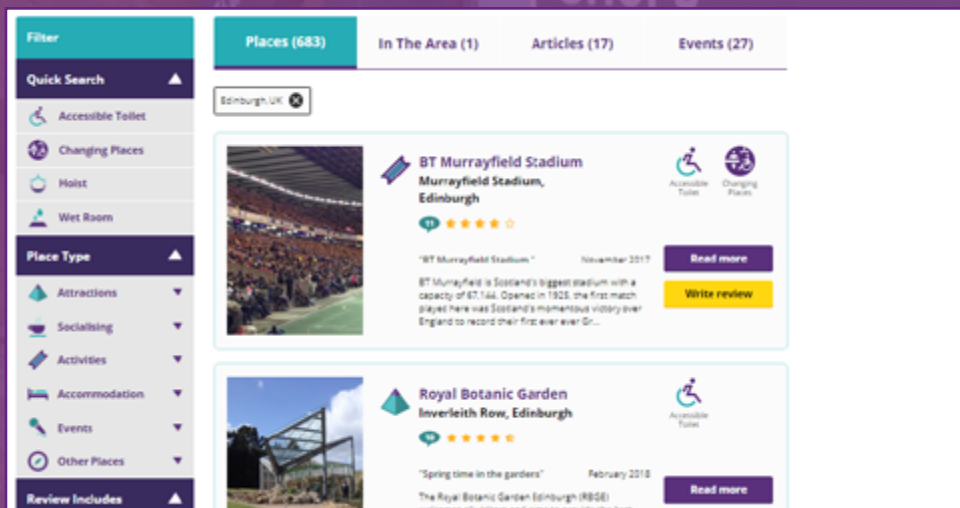
We spoke to Paul Ralph of Euan's Guide, a charity set up to open up towns and cities to disabled people through a disabled access review website, to discuss the meaning of accessibility, how local businesses can become more accessible and the impact this can have on tourism markets.

He opened by pointing out that an organisation simply advertising that it is 'fully' or 'universally' accessible on its website isn't always that helpful.

"It's much better, perhaps, to look at what it is that you've got and break it down into components so that it's more meaningful. By doing that, you're giving people that little bit extra information," he added, suggesting that photos of ramps and accessible toilets on a venue's website, as well as a point of contact, can be extremely valuable.



Paul Ralph, Euan's Guide



The Euan's Guide website reviews the accessibility of thousands of venues

While a venue's facilities are important, Paul stressed that well-trained, helpful staff are what truly makes a venue feel accessible.

"I very often talk about how a visit is in the first 90 seconds. If somebody steps forward warmly and greets me and says, 'Welcome, have you been here before? This is what we have, this is what you can see here, this is where the accessible loo is. If you need any help just shout.' That, for me, is fantastic."



*“When access isn’t good, I don’t remember what went wrong, but I do remember how I felt.”*

Paul goes as far as to say that even if facilities aren’t up to scratch, staff still have the ability to make a venue feel welcoming.

“Even if the ramp is a bit wonky, even if the doors are a bit tight that you can only just squeeze through, you kind of don’t mind because the whole thing is supported by fantastic people. The meet and greet is as powerful as the ramp or the loo.”

To improve visitor experience, Paul suggested communities and tourism-related businesses must engage with local disabled people when considering accessibility, rather than treat it as simply a tick box exercise.

Thinking beyond the realm of physical disabilities is also a must if businesses and venues are to promote true accessibility.

“There’s almost a mythology around accessibility that revolves around wheelchairs. I’ve got bad news for you – wheelchair users only represent 8% of the disabled tourism market.”

“I think we have to also be realistic. It’s not going to be easy to do everything for everyone. It’s about looking at where is your market, who *does* come through your door, who *wants* to come through your door, and exploring that step by step.”

## Key Figures on Accessibility

- Spend value for disabled tourism in Scotland is £1.3bn per annum.
- 13m disabled people in the UK.
- Visit Scotland research shows that disabled people in the tourism sector visit for longer, bring more people with them and spend more money per visit on average.
- There was a 33% increase in the volume of visits to Scotland by those in the accessible market since 2009, despite a 4% decrease in overall visits to Scotland.

Source: Visit Scotland/Euan’s Guide

Due to the sheer size of the disabled tourism market, Paul reiterated the financial benefits that can come with simple adjustments to premises.

“It might be about the accessible toilets, it might be a changing places toilet with a hoist and a changing bench. Including one of those could be a game changer: you suddenly have access to 250,000 families [across the UK] who would never otherwise have visited you.”

With a value of over £1.3bn every year in Scotland, paying attention to the accessible tourism market is a must for community-led initiatives.

“What people may not realise is that disabled people shout just as loudly about the positive experiences as they do about the negative experiences. People want to know about great things to do, great experiences. People talk to each other, a lot – but that’s a real positive.”



# Key Messages

## External Support

National Agencies, such as Visit Scotland and Highland and Islands Enterprise (HIE), can help local communities create a more effective route to a successful tourist offer. Both in-kind and financial support is needed to kick-start projects.

## Extend Existing Tourism Areas

Communities should be looking to explore ways in which to divert tourists to businesses and activities beyond the areas they traditionally visit. By taking an interest in what other services and activities are available in the area, local businesses can sign post tourists to each other, maximising the capture of visitor spending to improve their communities.

## Set Specific Goals

Success looks different to different people in different communities. Decide what your community needs and work together to achieve that goal, whether it be higher visitor numbers, improved local services, a larger variety of local events or better quality employment opportunities.

## Small, Local Businesses Matter

'Big business' in the tourism industry provides the headline figures when it comes to visitor numbers and visitor spend. Equally important, however, is the strength of Scotland's network of local, community-led tourism initiatives. Taken together, they play a crucial role in driving up Scotland's overall tourism revenue.

# Key Organisations & Links



[Scottish Tourism Alliance - Tourism Scotland 2020](#)

[Visit Scotland National Tourism Website](#)

[Visit Scotland Accessible Tourism Toolkit](#)

[Visit Scotland Year of Young People Toolkit](#)

[Visit Scotland Visitor Survey Toolkit](#)

[The Community Ownership Support Service \(COSS\)](#)

[Developing Your Community Tourism Project](#)



# Case Study

## Dornoch CIC

### Mission

Dornoch CIC is a voluntary organisation which aims to:

- Enhance Dornoch town centre, while preserving the historic and cultural heritage;
- Encourage the development of new business employment opportunities;
- Ensure a quality range of services continues to be available;
- Manage community land and associated assets.

### Main activities

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) identified Dornoch as an area of high growth potential in 2013, which led to a team of consultants being commissioned to develop the Dornoch Economic Masterplan.

This extensive piece of research and analysis identified priority projects in the area and assigned local businesses, as well as community and public stakeholders, to champion each one.

Dornoch CIC was assigned the majority of these projects and consequently set up a series of surveys for visitors and local accommodation providers to gauge visitor perception and understand what it was that brought people to the town and surrounding areas.

These surveys confirmed the need for a themed approach to branding Dornoch, which led to the development of a logo and strap line: "Dornoch...you can do it all from here". This was accompanied by a new website, street signage, A9 signage, and a map and a mobile app to help promote local assets more effectively.

Local assets such as the globally-renowned Royal Dornoch Golf Club (RDGC) were critical to HIE's decision to nominate Dornoch as an area of high growth potential, and the subsequent development of the North Coast 500 route has been a tremendous bonus. However, a large part of Dornoch's success is down to its partnership building programmes.

The local high school, Dornoch Academy, works closely with local businesses to offer meaningful development opportunities to students (hygiene certificates, first aid courses, hospitality and tourism qualifications) while also building up their understanding of local attractions and services available.

In return, businesses benefit from better trained, more knowledgeable, highly-motivated staff to improve their visitor experience and signpost each other's products and services.

Developing and promoting events to attract more visitors has been achieved in partnership with the Dornoch Community Association, who run eight summer markets on the Cathedral Green. Local businesses come together to run the Dornoch Whisky Festival and have worked to extend the Hogmanay Street Party into a three-day programme with community events such as the Loony Dook.

In 2018, a joint promotional leaflet was created to showcase events throughout the year including weekly Pipe Band parades, Sutherland Show, Festival Week and the Highland Games.

Dornoch CIC is a member of both the North Coast 500 group and the cruise liner stakeholder group, while it also holds Visit Scotland VIP status. The new visitor centre created in the Carnegie Courthouse is shared with the Highland Council, and Dornoch has also achieved WorldHost destination status.

### Dornoch CIC Fact File

**Established:**  
2007

**Workforce:**  
2 PT staff for visitor centre  
1 PT staff for digital marketing  
1 PT Dornoch ambassador

**Turnover (2016-17)**  
£26,408 (excluding grant funding)

**Legal Structure:**  
Community Interest Company

**Visitor Numbers:**  
26,971 visitors recorded at visitor centre in 2016, up 32% on 2015.

[www.visitdornoch.com](http://www.visitdornoch.com)



[@visitdornoch](https://twitter.com/visitdornoch)



[facebook.com/VisitDornoch](https://facebook.com/VisitDornoch)





## Business Model

HIE's decision to commission a Masterplan Strategy has been key to securing competitive grant funding and enabling projects to be delivered as planned.

HIE also put Dornoch in touch with VisitArran, who encouraged Dornoch CIC to follow their example and ask businesses for a turnover-based levy (set at 0.3% of annual turnover) to generate a joint marketing fund.

With over 80 members of the business group, the levy generated an initial £20k to kick-start the project, which received an additional £20k in match funding from Common Good. Having raised £40k, this in turn was matched with a further £40k from the Visit Scotland Growth Fund.

This enabled the implementation of a digital marketing strategy (social media, search engine optimisation, Google adverts etc), the development of off-season events, and the promotion of Dornoch to a wider audience to achieve its aim of increasing bed nights and extending the season.

Dornoch CIC was also successful in its bid for £200k from the Coastal Communities Fund to implement the street and A9 signage, maps, a mobile app and the development of visitor leaflets. It also enabled capacity building with WorldHost, as well as marketing and social media training for business group members.

The ability to attract such substantial funding awards has been key to growing the area's tourism strategy, leading to increased visitor numbers. New businesses have been established and jobs created as a result.

The business levy continues to provide the joint marketing fund, which ensures a level of sustainability outside of grant funding.

*"Obviously we're trying to get more people through the door, and we do this by a lot of local things in the town – better signage, better main road signage, very good websites, linking up with local shops by having artefacts from our collection displayed in selected shops."*

*Peter Wild, Historylinks Museum*

## Community Benefit

Dornoch CIC's partnership with Dornoch Academy ensures young adults in the area have opportunities for professional development. A number of work placements have been created in partnership with local businesses to allow the youngsters to develop soft skills and enhance their career prospects.

Creating jobs also encourages young people to stay in the rural town, ensuring the community has a mixture of generations rather than have an ageing population.

Volunteering plays a vital role at many Dornoch businesses, such as the Historylinks museum. Volunteers engaging in community activities are less likely to be affected by loneliness and social isolation, while it also offers the chance for people to increase their value in the job market. Dornoch Cathedral runs a Welcome Table for visitors, with a team of 60 volunteers.

Cultivating a busy schedule of events not only benefits visitors, but ensures people living locally have a wide array of activities on their doorstep, helping tackle issues such as social exclusion.

*"For years we've had small amounts of funding, but the HIE Masterplan for Dornoch allowed us to go and get £200,000 from the Coastal Communities fund and solve our signage issue, plus get the signs on the A9 we'd been waiting 10 years for. That's the difference."*

*Joan Bishop, Director, Dornoch CIC*

