



## Edinburgh Tourism Strategy 2030

Cockburn's Consultation response 15 December 2019

---

Overall, we recognise that tourism is an important sector for the Edinburgh, its economy and for its environment. Growth in tourism is a global trend, driven by strong economic and social forces, and Edinburgh has an asset base that makes it attractive to a world-wide market.

People come to Edinburgh, first and foremost, because it is a historic city with an architectural and townscape legacy unique to itself. Also, as a Capital City, it hosts many fine public institutions including national galleries and museums. Tourism must enhance these assets, not erode them.

The Cockburn Association welcomes the opportunity to comment on this draft strategy. We offer the following comments in the hope that this will be the start of constructive dialogue across all sectors and interests, working towards a more collaborative and inclusive agenda.

### **The Cockburn's Ambition for the Tourism Strategy**

There is a need for a much more coherent, managed approach to tourism in the city, with much stronger and focused leadership. Growth should not be an overriding objective for this strategy. Much greater recognition of the impact of tourism is required by all parties, inside the sector and out. There need to be a much stronger recognition that tourism needs to be handled and managed, and is as likely to bring significant problems as well as some opportunities. In an overcrowded and congested city (especially the historic core), we need to recognise that tourism growth, especially at peak times, will not be an unmitigated benefit.

Greater emphasis on improving the productivity of the tourism sector, and building value and the quality of the tourism experience rather than just a crude "the more, the better" numbers game is required in this strategy.

There is also a need to pay much more attention to the needs and perceptions of residents and communities. In the end, the needs of residents and tourist are not necessarily in conflict - a city which is a high quality, accessible, enjoyable place to be will be good for both. What we need to question is events which are out sync with the character of the city, and large-scale projects, largely financed from outside, mainly designed to generate profit rather than meet the real needs of residents or visitors. We need to be much more cautious about the capacity of the city to absorb major new projects/events (or expanded existing projects/events). The Council needs to be more assertive in requiring investors to demonstrate clearly the benefits of projects to the city. In this, the apparent conflict of the City Council in both promoter and regulator needs a much more coherent

framework, and one which residents and local communities in particular can have confidence in. Regrettably, this is lacking at the moment.

The purpose of supporting tourism should be to benefit the people and communities of Edinburgh and surrounding areas through generating employment and development of local businesses, and infrastructure and events that benefit the whole community. It is important that outside investment should not be to the detriment of local communities, or lead to over-development in specific economic sectors/ localities, or the displacement of local residents from existing communities.

### **What we support and think can be improved**

In particular, we welcome the suggestion of a guiding principle based on improving the quality of life for residents and making a wider contribution to the city's economic goals. However, we feel that economic goals is too narrow, and be expanded to including wider sustainability goals. For example, in the Environment Section, a suggested indicator of success should be "resident satisfaction with parks, gardens and green space", not visitor satisfaction.

We agree with the five priorities for action. We would suggest that each one of these might benefit for a dedicated multi-perspective task group as the next phase of the strategy is developed.

We agree that there is a much greater imperative to manage tourism than grow it. Again, the strategy does not fully develop this and in many places, does not align itself to this.

We agree with the sentiment of many of the Ambitions highlighted in the Strategy. However, many of the Principal Recommendations do not align clearly with the ambitions. This becomes more apparent in the Potential Indicators which are sector-focussed in many instances and do not seem to align directly with the Ambition.

### **What is missing**

The lack of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and clear alignment to the SEA process is a significant gap, and a weaknesses of the strategy.

Resilience management - the tourism sector has vulnerabilities. Adverse economic developments and/or climate change could at some point lead to quite a sharp contraction in travel. If the exchange rate was to strengthen post-BREXIT, this could also have quite a sharp impact on tourism and/or result in a reduction in "staycations" with a similar result. This strategy still predicated on a growth model.

An effective mechanism for engaging with residents and local communities is missing, despite the clear ambition to do so. We understand that there has been little if no discussion with resident/community groups in the preparation or dissemination of this draft strategy.

Authenticity is clearly of significant value to visitors. A clear objective of the Strategy should be to reinforce the characteristics of the City that make it a special place.

There is no consideration of the finite carrying capacity of the city and those areas must under pressure from tourism. The Setting the Scene research suggests the need for a dispersal strategy, both city-wide and across Scotland. We feel that an underlying assumption of the strategy is a continued focus on specific areas of the city, notably the Old Town. Overcrowding is a serious issue, and one that it not addressed.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

There are many positive aspects of this Strategy. However, we feel that there is a mismatch between the overarching principals and ambitions stated in the document, and many of the Principal Recommendations and Potential Indicators, which seem are narrow in focus and industry focused.

It is clear that engagement outside of the sector and membership of ETAG has been very limited. Discussion with resident and community groups has been almost non-existent, which is disappointing given the laudable statements in the document. As such, a formal and meaningful engagement with a wider constituency should take place before any approval is made.

The desire to move from driving growth to managing growth is welcome, but is still a growth model. Managing the existing levels of tourism should be the starting point before any quantitative increase is contemplated. The Strategy should provide leadership in this.

A dispersal strategy for activities and events is needed. This is a clear recommendation of the Setting the Scene research, but is largely missing here. Specific recommendations relating to the City's Festivals in this regard is needed.

To help facilitate wider cross-interest and sector discussions, we recommend the creation of a Resident/Community Task Group and a Heritage/Curatorial Task Group to help ETAG and the wider tourism sector develop and mature the ambitions stated in this draft Strategy and advise on more meaningful Recommendation and Potential Indicators. They should also be in place to assist in the preparation of an Action Plan.

Many of the elements in the more detailed sections would sit better in a related Action Plan.

Finally, the Cockburn would wish continue to acknowledge the importance of tourism to the City and to Scotland. It is essential that it is managed, and managed not from the sector's interests but from those who live and work in the City. The foundations for this lie within this draft Edinburgh Tourism Strategy 2030, but it is not there yet.

## **thecockburnassociation**

Trunk's Close, 55 High Street  
EDINBURGH EH1 1SR  
t.0131-557-8686

[www.cockburnassociation.org.uk](http://www.cockburnassociation.org.uk)

The Cockburn Association is a registered Scottish Charity SC011544