VISITSCOTLAND ANNUAL INTERNAL SUSTAINABILITY REPORT
2023-2024

Visit Scotland | Alba

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INTRODUCTION

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Tourism is a force for good. It creates jobs, sustains communities, enriches lives and contributes significantly to the economy.

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges facing the tourism and events industry. Our strategic approach is to grow the value of the visitor economy for Scotland whilst minimising any negative social or environmental impact. All activity is delivered through a responsible tourism lens.

In line with the Scottish Government's ambition and Scotland: Outlook 2030 Tourism Strategy, we play a lead role in the development of responsible tourism practices, with the aim of making Scotland one of the most economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable destinations in the world.

This includes taking direct action on issues under our control and engaging, influencing and supporting strategic partners, businesses, destination communities and visitors, to enable and encourage the adoption of responsible tourism practices **(see our Sustainable Tourism Policy).**

We are a proud signatory of the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism and Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency. We are committed to reducing carbon emissions in our own operations, in line with our sustainability policy and the Scottish Government's climate change targets.

This report outlines the internal measures we are taking to help make Scotland more sustainable. As an organisation, we are leading by example, reducing our carbon emissions year-on-year. In 2023/24, CO2 emissions had been reduced by 77% compared to the base year of 2008/09.

We continue to develop as a climate conscious organisation, recognising where we need to make improvements and learn lessons from others. Achievements this year include a new initiative to track the carbon footprint of in-house multimedia productions, a 15% reduction in waste compared to 2022/23, and Climate Awareness Training for 120 staff.
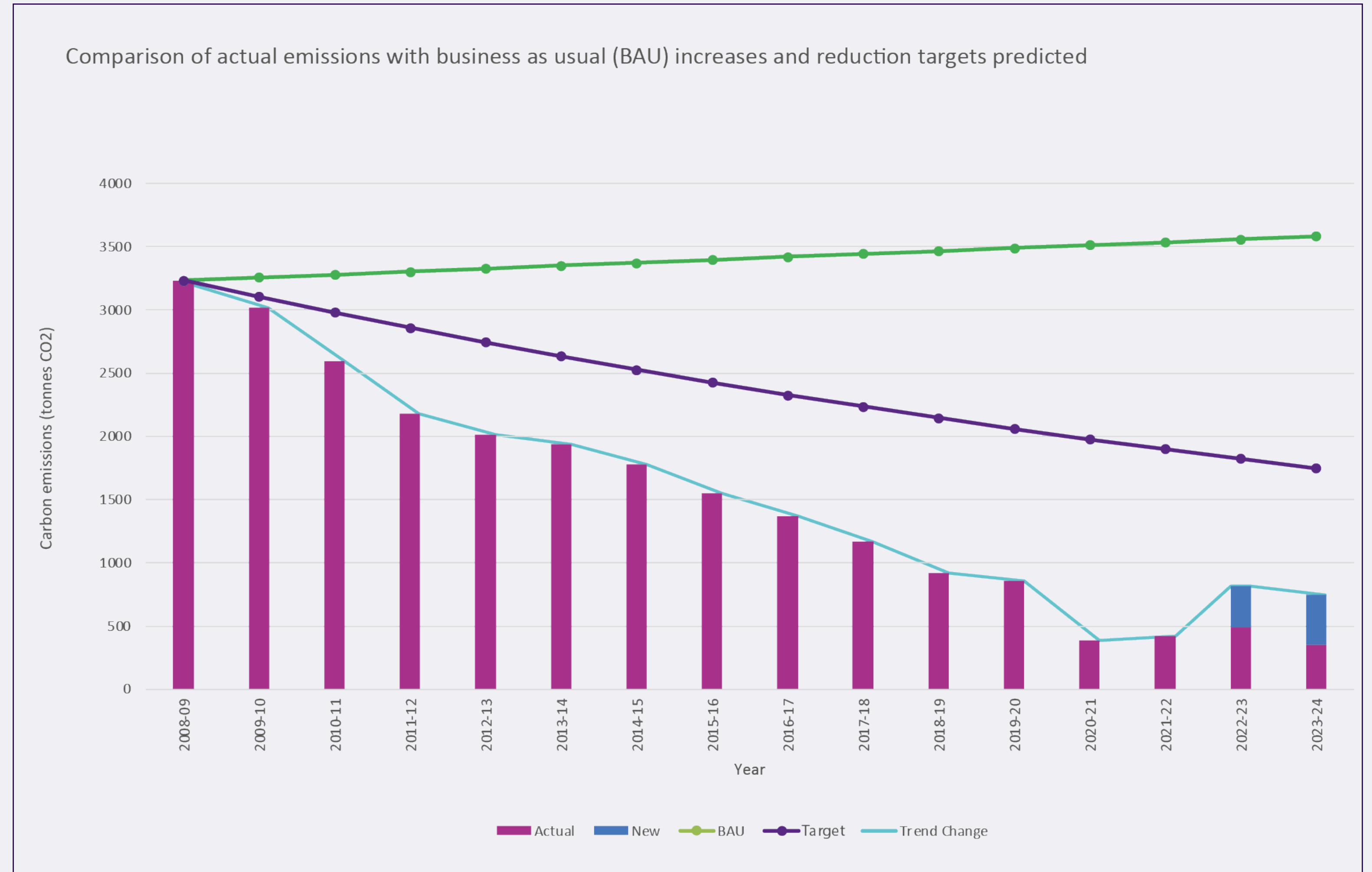
CLIMATE CHANGE

03

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 requires all public bodies to exercise their functions in a way that best contributes to the Act's carbon emission reduction targets, delivery of climate change adaptation program and overall sustainable practices. **The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019**, which **amends the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009**, the Scottish Government has set ambitions to reduce Scotland's emissions of all greenhouse gases to net zero by 2045 at the latest against a 2008/09 baseline.

In our previous report, we reported on additional boundaries and achieved a 72% reduction in CO2 emissions from our base year of 2008/09, and in 2023/24 this has increased to a 77% reduction. When comparing like for like boundaries for the baseline year tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO2e) and 2023/24 tCO2e, this reduction is 84%.

Our overall emissions for 2023/24 have decreased from the previous year partly due to purchasing renewable energy through REGOs (renewable energy guarantees of origin) and removing this carbon from our reporting for the first time.

The largest increase is through our business travel which is due to more general business travel and additional travel generated by the UCI 2023 World Cycling Championships team. We will report on scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions changes year on year in this and future reports.

We annually report on our compliance with our climate change duties through the Sustainable Scotland Network reporting tool. This annual report includes our ambition to be net zero in direct emissions by 2030. We have developed a carbon calculator tool to identify Scope 3 emissions and work is progressing to analyse this information for future reduction targets.

Comparison of actual emissions with business as usual (BAU) increases and reduction targets predicted

Carbon emissions (tonnes CO2) — Year

Legend: Actual | New | BAU | Target | Trend Change

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In addition to our direct economic impact, we assess our activity against four outcomes: spread, spend, sustainability and satisfaction.

We reduced our CO2 emissions by

77%

since 2008/09

9% decrease in carbon emissions in 2023/24 against 2022/23 figures. This is reflective of an increase in business travel, gas usage and we had more hotel stays associated with the UCI 2023 Cycling World Championships. We have removed our Scope 2 electricity emissions as we purchase renewable energy through REGOs.

The impact of our business travel decreased by

55%

since 2008/09

34% increase in carbon emissions in 2023/24 against 2022/23 figures. This is reflective of increased travel to events and additional travel from the 2023 UCI Cycling World Championships Team.

Improve quality of jobs for all

Hybrid working model allows us to
spread job roles across Scotland

**OVER
120
STAFF**

successfully completed Climate
Awareness Training

**Support adaption
to climate change**

We maintained Green Tourism Gold Awards for all sites,
increasing the scoring in the majority of assessments

Energy carbon emissions

Recycling and reduced waste

-26%
reduction in electricity usage

65%
recycling rate

17%
waste to landfill

+17%
increase in gas usage

18%
waste to combustion

We purchase renewable electricity and although we will report on our usage, we will not include this emission in our energy reporting.

SCOPES OF EMISSIONS

We have historically reported on our scope 1 and 2 emissions (which are emissions we have direct control over) alongside our scope 3 emissions. Until 2022/23, our scope 3 (indirect) emisssions only covered business travel, waste and water. Now we include home working, commuting, hotel stays and electricity transmission and distribution.

As we add more boundaries we will further understand our fuller carbon emissions and how we can reduce them towards being net zero by 2045 for all scopes.

Scope 1

Scope 1 emissions reflect our gas consumption. This shows as an increase of 17% on the previous year due to more usage in the five properties.

Scope 2

Scope 2 is our electricity usage showing a decrease of 26% from the previous year. Contributing to this decrease is the move of our IT comms room to a data centre and the move of our head office in Edinburgh to shared premises with Edinburgh Council. For the first year we will not include reporting on Scope 2 Electricity usage as we purchase REGOs (renewable energy guarantees of origin).

Scope 3

All other activity is covered by our Scope 3 emissions. We are working to improve our reporting on Scope 3 emissions to reflect more areas of our organisation. In this reporting year we have added 387 tCO2e to our original boundary emissions by including home working, commuting, hotel stays and electricity transmission and distribution.

Reduction in Carbon Emissions from baseline year of 2008/09 in tC02e

2008/9
3235

2023/24
742

-77%
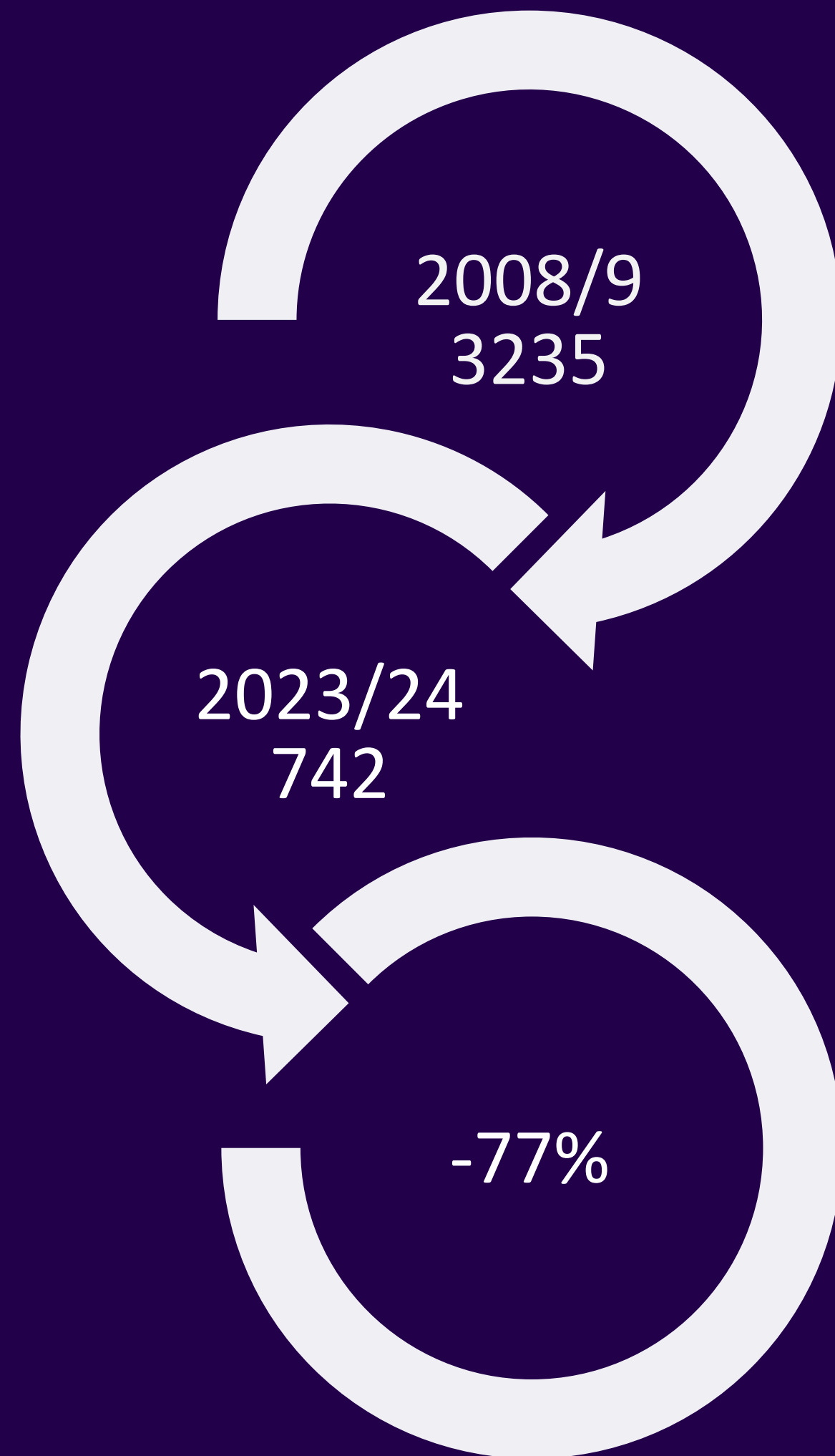
Breakdown of emissions in 2023/24 in tCO2e (Tonnes of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent)

Carbon Emmissions for 2023/24 742 tCO2e

tC02e

	tC02e
Hotel stays	70
Commuting	102
Resource usage	112
Home working	216
Business travel	242

INTERNAL SUSTAINABILITY POLICY OBJECTIVES

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Minimise resource use of gas, electricity, waste and water

Take action to encourage reduced resource use and waste production from our internal operations contributing to reduced carbon emissions and climate change impact.

- resource use and waste related CO_2 emissions have reduced by 96% from our base line year of 2008/09

- in 2023/24, compared to the previous reporting year, electricity usage has fallen by 26%, gas usage has increased by 17% and waste has decreased by 15%. Our total waste currently sits at 17% to landfill, 18% to combustion (waste to energy) and 65% recycled. The remaining resource use emissions come from electricity transmission and distribution which shows a 30% reduction in the year and water supply & treatment showing a 16% decrease

Electricity usage	↓	26%
Electricity transmission & distribution	↓	30%
Gas usage	↑	17%
Waste generated	↓	15%
Water supply & treatment	↓	16%

- we continue to purchase REGO (Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin) Certificates demonstrating our commitment to our energy supplier investing in renewable technology. In this reporting year, we have not accounted for 151 tCO2e for renewable energy, however we will still report on energy reductions or increases within each reporting year

- we have gas heating in five of our locations and will remove these over the next two to three years

- energy saving was a key factor in relocating our head office, now shared with other public bodies, and featuring efficient sensored heating, chill beam cooling and rainwater reuse. Wherever possible we take the opportunity to replace lighting with LEDs and when purchasing white goods always ensuring they are of a high energy efficiency

- working with our energy supplier, smart meters or automatic meters readers were installed in 11 of our sites allowing for more accurate data to be collected

- electronic, collaborative ways of working have led to a significant reduction in the amount of print across the organisation and as a result the number and size of print devices has reduced

- our primary data centre moved to an external provider, reducing energy consumption and the need to purchase additional equipment

- electronic information provision in our iCentres has led to a reduction in the need for brochures and printed materials

- the majority of our business systems moved to the Cloud which reduced energy consumption

- we continue with our programme to improve our buildings efficiency, through our planned preventative maintenance measures

- 2023/24 changes within our estate lowered floorspace by 1868 m2 by reducing the size of our head office in Ocean Point from 1 April 2023. We further reduced our floorspace later in the year by relocating our head office to shared office premises from December 2023 and the closure of one of our iCentres. Additional space for the 2023 UCI Cycling World Championship office was leased in 2021/22 which is an additional 137.68m2 over three years. The opportunity was taken in the Inverness local office to reduce space during this period to reflect the usage of staff

- we generated 15% less waste than in the previous year and collaborated with our Green Champions to raise awareness of waste ensuring as little as possible is generated and of that as much as possible is recycled. Although our aim is to continue to decrease our volume of waste, as Local Councils and waste contractors improve their waste percentage to combustion (waste to energy), this will aid in reducing our percentage to landfill

- furniture was reused when relocating our Edinburgh office, and a recycling supplier took the remaining pieces to match with companies seeking suitable alternatives to buying new

- the waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) was recycled (28%) or reused (72%) keeping 7760.6kg weight out of landfill, saving 227tCO2 to remanufacture the same parts

- whole organisation continues to make full use of Microsoft 365 (M365) collaboration tools to reduce travel for meetings

- water supply and treatment equates to 0.4 of a tonne of CO2e based on our metered sites. Staff are encouraged to report any leaks and to use water wisely to reduce output

More sustainable initiatives

- our Green Champion network achieved Gold Green Tourism Awards at all our sites for the second time, following on from the GreenCheck Assessments. This supported our sustainability objectives across the estate

- over the past year, we have continued our commitment to sustainability with our internal communications activity, highlighting initiatives to our staff. Such as, encouraging participation in litter picks for the Spring Clean in conjunction with Keep Scotland Beautiful. For this, we encouraged staff to share images of their own litter picking experiences on Viva Engage - which is our internal social media platform. Our activity also promoted Recycle Week, Scotland's Climate Week, and the successes of our Green Champions. The publication of our Climate Action Guides, produced for industry were also shared, and staff made aware of the introduction of Low Emission Zones across Scotland

- there were fewer new Shop Local suppliers taken onboard as we looked to streamline and reduce stock holding across the iCentre network. Throughout this period, our retail team prioritised support of the established local suppliers where feasible to do so. The Shop Local initiative supports around 300 local craft and artisans throughout Scotland. A notable new supplier was a South Ayrshire small enterprise set up during COVID, specialising in Scottish-sourced wood to create personalised and site-specific wooden crafts which are stocked in five iCentres

- our iCentre Team have produced a monthly "green" newsletter sharing information on national sustainable days and what food is in season, examples are Earth Day/ hour, walk to school week and no disposable cup day

- sustainability was discussed on several threads on Viva Engage groups. These included "give an hour for Earth" for Earth Hour, "Love Food Hate Waste", how to have a sustainable Christmas, and discussing 52 ways to reduce your plastic supporting Plastic Free July. Other engagement included sharing local favourite places to shop and dine in, supporting Scotland Loves Local Week and Recycle Week saw comms shared on dealing with hard to recycle items

- we partnered and shared information from Home Energy Scotland about saving energy in homes and on the road

- since moving our head office to Waverley Court, staff have supported their café with a Veganuary campaign, trying new and innovative vegan dishes

- our multimedia team has been investigating ways to reduce and track their carbon footprint while capturing and creating photography and video content around Scotland. This led us in the direction of AdGreen, a carbon calculator and sustainability resource aimed at creative production in the advertising and marketing industry. Initially signing up to their sustainability training, learning the facts on climate change and how to make an impact by reducing the carbon footprint of our in-house productions and representing sustainable practices in content. Recently the team tracked their first in-house production using the calculator tool for its image and video shoot in the Outer Hebrides. This gave a detailed overview of the emissions from travel, accommodation, food and drink, materials and pre- and post-production office/home office use. We are now currently reviewing how this sits with other internal tracking with a view to rolling it out to future productions

- following our commitment made in the 2022/23 annual report and accounts to monitor progress of our pension schemes' investment plans, we have engaged with two out of our three pension funds: the British Tourist Board Pension Scheme and the Lothian Pension Fund. We have sought further understanding of how climate change affects the investments each fund holds and what actions can be taken to mitigate its impacts and further the transition to net zero. Both schemes have set out their approach to responsible investment and the steps they are taking in this area. We continue to consider how to best to monitor and report on their progress on the transition from fossil fuels. We recognise that they cannot directly determine the investment decisions of funds given the fiduciary duties their trustees are bound by in relation to members' interests. The third pension scheme available to our staff is the government sponsored National Employee Savings Trust (NEST) which has its own fiduciary arrangements in this area

- our Digital Delivery's Carbon Working Group have taken several actions to address its carbon footprint, including creating carbon footprint dashboards for both our corporate site, **VisitScotland. org** and our consumer site, **visitscotland.com**, based on Scottish Enterprise's model. This calculate sites based on Scottish Enterprise's model, which calculate CO2 emissions from page views and provide equivalency metrics for understanding greenhouse gas emissions. The group have also made moves to receive more tech-focused carbon data from our SEO agency. Our developers attended an Image Scaler workshop with AWS to optimize image use and reduce carbon emissions, finding that usage optimization is more effective than focusing solely on upload processes

Events

- VisitScotland Connect is our flagship business to business travel trade event bringing together trade ready Scottish suppliers with international and UK buyers. Sustainability is at the heart of the event: from operational delivery to strategic outcome. Strategically, we invite buyers who can demonstrate programme development potential that aligns with our sustainable National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET)/Outlook 2030 ambitions to ensure the product that is being contracted on the back of this event is responsible.

- operationally, we review sustainable options from choice of venue all the way through to the catering of the event

- in 2024, sustainability measures included:
  - replacement of 100 standard event branded panels to recyclable branded panels
  - reduction of intra-city delegate transport by changing the format for buyer accommodation to be at the conference venue
  - sourcing of Scottish produce for catering wherever possible and informing delegates about Scottish food provenance on menus
  - encouragement of event app usage for delegate meeting diaries and business cards to negate need for paper copies
  - delivery of a familiarisation (fam) trip programme highlighting sustainable product offering, including one rail fam trip

- responsible tourism has been at the heart of the Thistle Awards since the awards programme resumed in 2022. Specific responsible tourism categories were introduced in 2023 to celebrate businesses and events which have embraced responsible tourism. This includes Climate Action Award, Inclusive Tourism Award and Celebrating Thriving Communities Award, and which are now embedded in the awards programme at a regional and national level. Criteria across all categories continues to ask entrants to provide evidence on addressing: a low carbon economy; inclusivity; thriving communities; and natural and cultural heritage

- the Thistle Awards has a responsible tourism page on its website which includes a link to resources and a video providing support to entrants on how best to approach and answer the responsible tourism question in each category

- we have also created a responsible event delivery group this year, with members of the Industry Panel and regional partners, focusing on the actions we can take, as the event delivery partners, between now and 2030 to achieve a more sustainable event delivery model across all Thistle Award events. The group is currently recording the baseline for each of the events and aims to have short, medium and long term actions for each identified and a clear plan of how to achieve them

- to minimise the environmental impact of Scotland's National Events Conference 2024, our events team integrated several measures from the outset. These included a comprehensive Reduce, Reuse, Recycle – Zero to Landfill strategy across all aspects of the event. The conference was held at a centrally located venue with excellent public transport links and the event schedule was designed to encourage the use of public transport. Digital communication was widely used instead of print materials, and there was a digital first and reusable approach to branding. A caterer was selected based on the highest environmental standards. Additionally, an exclusive cycle rack and storage area were provided to promote active travel

- Events Industry team explored the potential for an organisation wide nature focus. This initiative aims to demonstrate leadership within the sector, foster partnerships, and promote the protection and considerate enjoyment of Scotland's natural and cultural heritage, all within the framework of responsible tourism.

- for the PGA Show, Golf Trade Events team developed a stand build that utilises hire furniture and reusable items. Local entertainment was hired to minimise travel and the team are working towards a two/three year model for reusing hanging banner branding

- we decreased the number of rolls of scrim/branded banner roll they purchased this year by 50% in a bid to reduce waste

- we decreased our print run of The List Festival /guide by 80% this year – reducing the number of copies it received from 10,000 to 2,000

- a digital first approach was introduced for communications on Scotland's National Events Strategy 2024 - 2035 by having a dedicated page with PDF versions available in both Gaelic and English. A small limited print run will be carried out for in-person use at conferences but will be produced on sustainable paper stock

- sustainability practices are included for all golf events at contracting stage and the golf hospitality programme has an environmental focus on specific dates providing a platform for key conversation. We also collaborate with our partner GEO to develop understanding and drive change in this field

- the 2023 UCI Cycling World Championships aimed to be a catalyst for behavioural change across Scotland, embedding sustainability at the core of its planning, operations, and legacy. The event's Sustainability Framework, aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), outlined ten high-level commitments under the pillars of 'People, Place, and Planet'. As a founding signatory of the UCI's Climate Action Charter, and a signatory of the United Nations Sport for Climate Action Framework, the Championships demonstrated a strong commitment to reducing environmental impacts. The event achieved a voluntary environment, social and governance (ESG) score of 53 out of 100, ranking in the top 5% of all events measured using the UCI Sustainability Impact Tracker, and

contributed to 14 out of 17 UN SDGs. The "Power of the Bike" tagline allows driving the Championships' sustainability ambitions in the long-term holding exciting potential to promote cycling beyond 2023 whilst addressing the climate emergency

- setting a precedent for future iterations of the UCI Cycling World Championships, all efforts were made to track emissions to arrive at a carbon footprint measure which can act as a benchmark. Impressive to say we were the first event to use the UCI Sustainability Impact Tracker, the total carbon footprint of the 2023 UCI Cycling World Championships has been calculated as 61.1 ktCO2e and makes an effort to include assumptions on emissions from spectator travel. While the carbon footprint figure comes with caveats, key learnings can be taken away by event organisers across Scotland, the UK and beyond to help improve data collection and methodology. Efforts to promote equality, diversity, and inclusivity (EDI) and accessibility were also central to the Championships, with 97% of attendees feeling the event was inclusive and 93% of spectators with disabilities finding it accessible. Initiatives such as the Good Food Charter, Sustainable Procurement Code, and the appointment of Sustainability Manager and Champions helped drive sustainability and EDI measures. The Championships also inspired significant investments in active travel and cycling programs across Scotland, with over £7 million invested in cycling facilities and programs across all 32 local authority areas. The event's Activation and Legacy partner, Scottish Cycling, delivered the Ride of the Worlds programme encouraging young people to connect with the Championships and empowering them to make cycling a sport for life. The event exceeded targets with 4963 participants taking part in 110 events across Scotland. More information can be found on the **2023 UCI Cycling Worlds sustainability report | VisitScotland.org**

Reduce the impact of transport

Focus on promoting a shift towards more environmentally friendly forms of transport (train, coach/bus, ferry, cycle, foot) aiming to reduce carbon emissions, air pollution, and congestion.

- Bus /Coach < 0.5%
- Taxi < 1%
- Ferry < 0.5%
- Own Car 30%
- Car Rental 6%
- Train 6%
- Air 57%
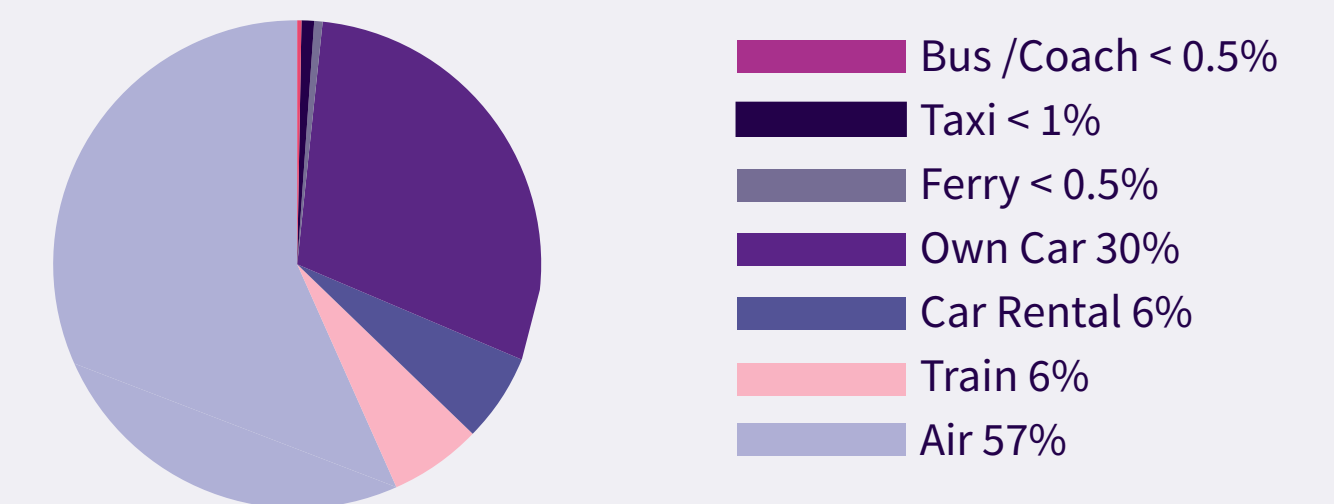
- business travel emissions have reduced by 55% from our baseline year of 2008/09

- in 2023/24, our business travel increased against the year prior, reflecting an expected increase when there was increased travel to events and meetings. In addition to our business as usual emissions in 2023/24, the increase in business travel emissions take into account an additional 28 tCO2e generated by the UCI 2023 Cycling World Championships team

- we have reduced our leased car numbers to seven from nine vehicles during the year, with all cars under 130g/km. These are reported in our Scope 3 business travel

- our Green Car Scheme to encourage staff to privately lease a lower CO2 emitting vehicle, further reducing our commuting and business travel emissions, currently has six staff engaged

- the 2023 UCI Cycling World Championships Team based in Glasgow used Brompton folding bikes to travel to local cycling events during the championships

- through continual review of our estate requirements and relocation of our Edinburgh head office, we have enhanced public transport access for staff. This will positively affect future Scope 3 emissions from commuting and business travel

- our staff continue to make full use of Microsoft 365 (M365) collaboration tools to reduce travel for meetings

- reporting of all travel expenses has been enhanced this year and is now more accurate pulling resources from staff expenses and the travel management organisations

Improve the quality of tourism jobs

Support initiatives to improve the quality of jobs within VisitScotland.

- we continue to work in a hybrid working model. The benefits of this are a reduction in commuting, in time spent travelling and in energy of our buildings; it allows improved communication, greater collaboration and the ability to spread job roles across Scotland thereby creating more locally based jobs. In addition, it allows a better work-life balance for our staff

- Carbon Literacy Training continued internally, which has been hugely successful with over 120 staff electing to take this optional training. This year additional dates have been added due to high demand

- volunteering opportunities included the Global Partnerships team volunteering at the University of Dundee Botanic Garden

- during Spring 2024, some of our staff participated in the litter campaigns in partnership with Keep Scotland Beautiful. Teams and individuals from Shetland to Aberdeen, St Andrews and Aberfoyle all took part

Future Sustainable Planning

- we will keep our sustainable management plan under review through regular meetings of our Internal Sustainability Steering Group

- we will continue to drive reduction in all scopes of emissions and will re baseline reporting based on Scope 1,2 & 3 from year 2022/23 to give more up to date and accurate reflection of our Carbon emissions

- we have worked to identify our Scope 3 emissions and using the carbon calculator tool we developed, we are now looking at how to embed Scope 3 carbon emissions in our operational planning going forward. We will identify areas of spend to review where KPIs show carbon generated per £ spent is high. This will involve working with all departments across the organisation and when practices are in place information will be shared through reporting

- through our Scottish Government Public Bodies Climate Change Duties reporting we have confirmed our ambitions to be net zero in Scope 1 direct emissions by 2030

- our Digital Delivery team are planning to conduct competitor research to benchmark our carbon footprint against other content-heavy sites. This will help us explore the carbon impact of releases and CMS updates to improve its processes, consider implementing a 'carbon-friendly page' logo to gauge user response, measure the carbon difference between using YouTube versus embedded videos. The team also intend to create a carbon section on The Hub to promote transparency and explain the impact of new site additions on its carbon measurements

Responsible Tourism Strategy

We recognise our role as a leader in the development of responsible tourism practices across the industry to make Scotland one of the most economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable destinations in the world. This will be achieved through four key objectives under our Responsible Tourism Strategy:

- Supporting Scotland's transition to a low carbon economy.

- Ensuring tourism and events in Scotland are inclusive.

- Ensuring tourism and events contribute to thriving communities.

- Supporting the protection and considerate enjoyment of Scotland's natural and cultural heritage.

We will prepare the industry, destinations, communities, and visitors for what a future centered around responsible tourism must look like. This will be reported in our Annual Report.

THANK YOU

visitscotland.org