

Sustaining the Visitor Economy and Environment in the Isles of Scilly

Vicky Smyth, Calum Harvey-Scholes
and Jane Wills

**REPORT SUMMARY
& POLICY BRIEF**



JUNE 2021

Sustaining the Visitor Economy and Environment in the Isles of Scilly

This report summarises the key findings of a short project that took place from January to March 2021. The project examined ways to foster positive synergies between the visitor economy and the natural environment, and to generate additional support for protecting and restoring nature in the Isles of Scilly. The project identified the following ideas as worthy of further development:

- A **Scilly Pledge** to raise awareness and appreciation of Scilly's environment and culture, encouraging responsible behaviours.
- A baseline assessment and monitoring programme to understand the changing '**State of Nature**' in Scilly.
- Raising **charitable donations** from visitors to help maintain Scilly's natural environment including promotion of the Friends of Scilly Wildlife Scheme.

This document summarises the findings of the project as laid out in the full report. The report is one of a pair, the other of which focuses on the visitor economy and environment in Cornwall. All documents can be found [here](#).

The research project

The Isles of Scilly is a designated area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) and the islands' landscape and biodiversity are highly valued. The quality of the natural environment underpins the visitor economy and it requires ongoing protection and enhancement. More than 80% of the local economy depends upon tourism, particularly upon the strong contingent of visitors who holiday in Scilly every year. The Islands' Partnership (IP), a non-profit company consisting of 300 business members who are responsible for marketing the Isles of Scilly as a tourism destination, recognises the challenge of retaining loyal visitors, while also attracting younger generations who might become future 'Scilly loyalists'.

Limitations to infrastructure, including water supply, transport, accommodation, and waste management, represent fundamental restrictions on tourist numbers on Scilly, and plans have been put forward by the IP and partners to develop these services to better support the visitor economy and residents. The IP also appreciates the importance of preserving Scilly's natural and cultural assets, recognising the need to find new ways to maintain the rich environment of the islands alongside the responsible development of the tourism sector.



Sustaining the Visitor Economy and Environment in the Isles of Scilly

A short project from January to March 2021 identified, evaluated, and tested acceptance of locally relevant evidence-based ideas to:

1. Reduce any negative impact of tourism on nature in the Isles of Scilly.
2. Generate understanding, funds, and increased volunteer effort to protect and restore nature in the Isles of Scilly.

These aims were met through three phases of research:

1. Scoping best practice from existing literature and consulting project partners about their understanding of the Isles of Scilly visitor economy.
2. Holding a participatory workshop with a wider group of stakeholders to produce a shortlist of top innovations for further development.
3. Developing the shortlist of new policy ideas and innovations to be further explored through interviews with stakeholders and related surveys.

Partners and additional stakeholders agreed to focus attention on two policy ideas:

- A Visitor Pledge for the Isles of Scilly (hereafter described as the **Scilly Pledge**)
- A baseline assessment and monitoring programme referred to as a **'State of Nature'** report

The potential for raising funds for nature conservation and recovery through charitable donations from visitors was also further investigated as part of this work.

The project team engaged with a range of people including tourism business owners and providers, transport and utility companies, land and ecosystem managers, utilities and infrastructure managers, and residents.



The Scilly Pledge

The concept of the Scilly Pledge is best described as a concise, expressive text with accompanying high-quality video, aimed at tourists to raise awareness of the environment and culture of the Isles of Scilly. The Pledge would require a signature from the visitor as validation of their commitment to abide by the promise set out in the Pledge: to behave mindfully, tread lightly, and consider their actions in relation to the future. The Pledge would be co-created by the community and aim to encourage visitors to behave responsibly to protect and potentially enhance the natural environment.

Overall, the majority of business owners and residents surveyed (74%) were in support of the Scilly Pledge. It was recognised as a novel way of promoting a better connection between people and place, while boosting appreciation of the value of Scilly's unique natural and cultural history among both visitors and residents alike.

Survey respondents and stakeholders were mindful that the Pledge should not jeopardise the bond that regular visitors already have with the islands and it was felt there was no ambition nor need to police visitors. However, there was clear support for increasing awareness of the value of Scilly's ecosystems and cultural heritage on which local people depend.

Language and wording of the Pledge was deemed to be critical for its acceptance by visitors and stakeholders. Survey respondents felt the Pledge should aim to capture why Scilly is special, drawing on illustrative words such as 'beautiful', 'natural', 'wildlife', 'unspoilt', and 'tranquil'.

Cultural heritage, history, and island life are intrinsically linked to the seascape and landscape of Scilly. It was felt that cultural heritage should feature strongly, alongside the natural world, in the Scilly Pledge.

Desired outcomes from the Scilly Pledge were to increase awareness of the islands' environment, prevent pollution and littering, and discourage behaviour which might threaten or damage Scilly's landscape and wildlife. Other goals included raising charitable donations to enhance the environment, reach new markets, match best practice developed in other destinations, and encourage the major landowner, the Duchy of Cornwall, to do more for the islands.

Proposals for communicating the Pledge to visitors included sharing the associated video on all forms of transportation to the islands and creating a physical touch points for the Pledge at transport terminals. Most business owners confirmed their willingness to promote the Pledge by incorporating a link on their websites, which visitors could find before their journey to Scilly.



‘State of Nature’ report

A ‘State of Nature’ report was considered as a means to provide a baseline assessment of environmental conditions and ecosystem health, which could be regularly re-assessed to record any change. This would enable natural ecosystems to be better understood and managed, to identify areas of pressure, and monitor change over time.

There is currently insufficient information about the state of nature on the Isles of Scilly, as well as the potential impact of visitors. Stakeholders agreed that data on the health of different habitats and species is needed to develop a well-founded understanding of the condition of the natural environment. A formal assessment was seen as a necessity to establish a baseline, identify pressures, and prioritise conservation and recovery efforts.

Proposed avenues for data collection could include collaboration with the Environmental Records Centre for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (ERCCIS), universities, and natural scientists based on Scilly, as well as the utilisation and development of citizen science programmes.

Desired outcomes from an assessment of the ‘state of nature’ were to:

1. Guide the local nature conservation and recovery strategy.
2. Establish a baseline against which future interventions to alleviate pressures and recover nature can be evaluated.
3. Provide accessible information and graphics for educational activities to raise public and policy-maker awareness.
4. Showcase successful conservation initiatives which have helped nature to flourish, justifying optimism and contributing to the case for further funding.

New funding mechanisms, such as visitor donations on booking and visitor giving, which could contribute to the regeneration of the natural environment, were met with reservations given the relative expense of visiting Scilly and reluctance to add to that cost. However, 73% of surveyed business respondents who were willing to promote charitable giving were in favour of promoting the Friends of Scilly Wildlife Scheme. This is an annual supporter scheme available for visitors, which helps to pay for the ongoing work of the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust. Members of the Scheme receive regular notifications about new developments and this builds interest and maintains relationships once visitors have gone home.



Recommendations

From the project's discussions with local stakeholders and surveys of business owners and residents, three recommendations are identified as mechanisms to sustain both the visitor economy and the natural environment in the Isles of Scilly.

Recommendation 1

Develop an Isles of Scilly Visitor Pledge to raise awareness and appreciation of the islands' natural environment and cultural heritage, whilst encouraging responsible behaviours among tourists and residents.

Recommendation 2

Develop a baseline assessment and monitoring programme to understand the changing 'state of nature' in the Isles of Scilly.

Recommendation 3

Further explore the scope to raise charitable donations from visitors to help maintain Scilly's natural environment including promotion of the Friends of Scilly Wildlife Scheme.



Acknowledgements

This project was part-funded by the UKRI Strategic Priorities Fund. Thanks to everyone who participated in the workshop, interviews or survey involved in this project. We are grateful to Islands' Partnership and the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust for permission to use the images in this report.



Citation

Smyth, V., Harvey-Scholes, C., Wills, J. (2021) Sustaining the Visitor Economy and Environment in the Isles of Scilly. Environment and Sustainability Institute, University of Exeter, UK.

Contact

Professor Jane Wills: j.wills2@exeter.ac.uk



Photos

Thank you to Agnes Chapman Wills, PT Creative and Barefoot Photographer for supplying imagery.

