

Orkney Islands Council Visitor Management Plan 2027 – 2037 Consultation Explainer

Local folk are being invited to have their say on the Council's draft Visitor Management Plan before it goes in front of Elected Members. The Plan will help us to do our part in managing the impacts of tourism over the next decade.

What is the Visitor Management Plan?

The plan sets out how we (Orkney Islands Council) will manage the impact of tourism on local services, infrastructure and public spaces over the next 10 years. It is about making sure tourism benefits Orkney by protecting the services and places residents rely on, and by improving the experience for visitors.

Why is a plan needed?

Tourism is very important to Orkney's economy and visitor numbers continue to grow. During the busy summer season this can put pressure on roads, ferries, buses, public toilets, parking, waste services, heritage sites and other facilities, and we have to manage these pressures within limited budgets. A clear plan helps us coordinate work across services and take practical, realistic steps to manage tourism pressures.

What is the Council responsible for?

We manage and support a range of services used by both residents and visitors - for example transport, campsites and museums. However, we are not responsible for every aspect of tourism. This plan focuses on the services, infrastructure and public spaces that fall within our remit.

What is not included in the plan?

The plan is not about managing all tourism across Orkney or attracting more visitors. It is also not an infrastructure investment programme. Capital projects are considered separately through the Council's Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan.

What does “regenerative tourism” mean?

It sees tourism actively improving the long-term prosperity and wellbeing of Orkney. Success is measured by whether communities and the environment are thriving, not by visitor numbers. The idea is that great places to live make great places to visit.

What are the main issues identified?

Our research highlighted seasonal pressure on services, transport capacity issues, infrastructure maintenance challenges, overcrowding at some sites, housing concerns, gaps in visitor information, irresponsible behaviour by some visitors and businesses, and limited resources available to manage tourism pressures.

How was the plan developed?

We have used community feedback, discussions with tourism businesses and organisations, reviews of our services, visitor survey results and other local evidence. This information helped to identify problems and develop proposed actions that address them.

What actions are being proposed?

The draft plan includes actions such as improving visitor information, promoting responsible behaviour, collecting better data, assessing roads, transport, parking and public toilets options, developing a cruise management plan, supporting accommodation research, and strengthening coordination across our services.

Will there be new charges or a tourism tax?

The plan explores ways to improve funding for services under pressure by tourism. This does not include introducing a levy on overnight accommodation. Previous work found that the current overnight visitor levy model was not suitable for Orkney, although we continue to discuss alternative approaches with the Scottish Government, such as a point-of-entry levy.

How could residents benefit?

The aim is to protect access to local services, improve public spaces, reduce pressures at busy sites managed by the Council, support community wellbeing and make sure tourism contributes positively to island life.

How could visitors benefit?

Visitors could benefit from clearer information, better managed sites, improved facilities and a higher quality experience across Orkney.

What is the consultation asking?

The consultation asks whether our plan clearly explains our role in supporting tourism, correctly identifies tourism pressures and proposes practical actions to address them. Feedback will help shape the final version of the plan before it is considered by Elected Members.