



'SELF-CATERING: LOCAL, RELIABLE, SUSTAINABLE'



THE ASSC'S MANIFESTO FOR SCOTLAND'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS 2022



FOREWORD

Scotland is tentatively emerging from a pandemic that has ruined lives and livelihoods across the country. After what has been a challenging time for all Scottish tourism businesses, and self-catering in particular – a situation compounded by additional short-term let regulations – our industry wants to look forward to a brighter future and to ensure a strong and sustainable recovery.

But we can't do this alone. Tourism is everyone's business – and we need to utilise the talents and expertise of our sector, the warm hospitality of our people, and have a supportive environment from all levels of government, to help realise the potential of tourism to benefit everyone in Scotland.

The experience of the past two years with Covid-19 has highlighted the relationship between small businesses and local government more than ever before – and this needs to be strengthened and enhanced. Councils possess a range of powers that could impact self-catering businesses and the decisions they take will influence our economies and the local jobs that depend on it.

That's why the ASSC have launched their first ever local government manifesto for the elections on 5th May. We hope you enthusiastically engage with the campaign in the days that remain, and while who you vote for is your decision, we have presented our key policy priorities with the health, vibrancy and sustainability of our industry in mind.

Whatever happens in terms of the results, we will aspire to work constructively and collaboratively with our local government partners for the benefit of our members, local communities and our industry's recovery. That's our pledge to you.

FIONA CAMPBELL

CEO, Association Of Scotland's Self-Caterers





CONTEXT: THE VALUE OF SELF-CATERING TO LOCAL ECONOMIES

Tourism is a force for good in Scotland. It makes a major contribution to our country's GDP, impacts on jobs, spreads wealth across the whole of Scotland; and is a sustainable, innovative and indigenous industry that offers huge potential. Nationally and locally, it benefits our communities.

The ASSC are rightly proud that self-catering has been a mainstay of the Scottish tourism industry for generations and is integral to its success and future vitality. Professional self-caterers are part of local communities across Scotland and have been for many, many years. Their value is demonstrated by the considerable economic contribution: self-catering provides a **£867m** per annum boost to the Scottish economy, benefiting local communities the length and breadth of Scotland, supporting **23,979** FTE jobs.

To be such an essential part of Scotland's tourism mix is even more remarkable for our sector when most self-caterers operate small or micro businesses. However, like other sectors, self-catering has been hit by the pandemic but faces additional challenges through disproportionate regulation – from short-term let licensing to planning control areas – which have exacerbated the threat to jobs and livelihoods of small business owners. And that's before we even contemplate further regulation – the possibility of councils adding further conditions to their licensing regimes, or introducing so-called transient visitor levies.



ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF SELF-CATERING IN LOCAL AREAS





OUR LOCAL POLICY PRIORITIES

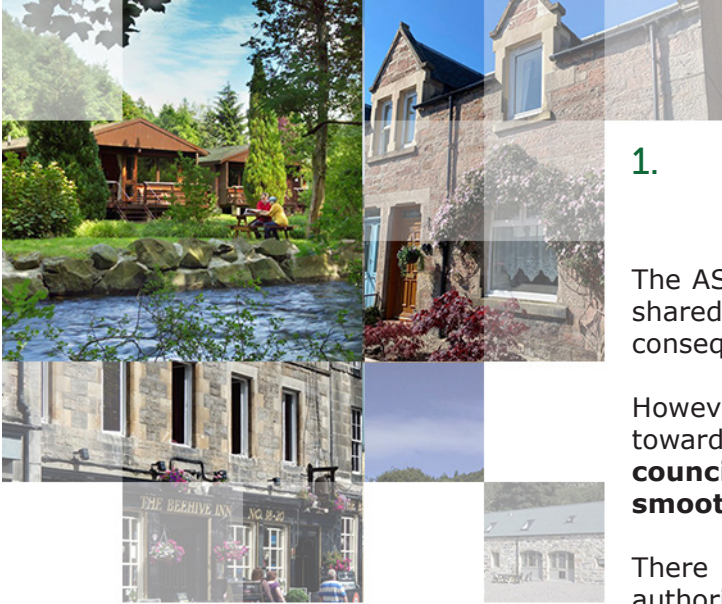
Self-catering can lead the way in providing holiday accommodation that balances the creation of memory-making vacations for our guests while also being a key part of our cities, towns, and villages. The ASSC are immensely proud of our businesses, of those we employ, and our record of not only being a fundamental part of our wonderful tourism offering but also of the communities that we live and work in. Given the importance of self-catering to the Scottish tourism industry, which has experienced such a challenging time due to the impact of Covid-19, an appropriate regulatory balance is a necessity, as is a supportive environment to help businesses recover and flourish.

To achieve this, here is what we ask of local government over the next five years:

- 1. Minimising the Burden of Short-Term Let Licensing:** councils should work closely with small business representatives and industry to try and minimise the burden from licensing as much as possible, then carefully monitor its impacts, and not to impose 'additional conditions' on already hard-pressed businesses.
- 2. Evidence-Based Short-Term Let Control Areas:** now is not the time to further burden self-catering with additional regulations like control areas but if local plans are proposed, they should be underpinned by robust, empirical data.
- 3. No to Local Tourism Levies:** should discretionary powers be devolved from the Scottish Parliament, councils should reject its introduction at local level and instead support tourism businesses and allow ordinary families to have a holiday in Scotland without being hit in the pocket.
- 4. Encouraging Self-Catering as the Sustainable Option:** councils should provide a supportive environment for local businesses to flourish and promote self-catering as an environmentally friendly option.

Now more than ever, as we try and look to a brighter future, Scotland needs to back small business and back our traditional self-catering industry through committing to the ASSC's four key policy recommendations.





1. SHORT-TERM LET LICENSING: Working Together to Minimise the Burden

The ASSC did not want the form of short-term let licensing that is now on the statute book – a view shared by many local councils in Scotland – and we continue to maintain that it will entail unintended consequences.

However, now that the legislation has been passed by the Scottish Government, and as we move towards the implementation stage and licensing schemes going live across the country, **we want local councils to work with us and other relevant tourism and legal stakeholders, to ensure the smoothest possible rollout and to reduce the regulatory burden as much as possible.**

There are two elements to the licensing regime: the mandatory element will require all 32 local authorities to comply but there is also discretion for local councils to go further using so-called 'additional conditions'. Regarding the latter, **we recommend that councils do not make use of these powers which will add further complexity and cost to the system and hamper small businesses in their recovery.**

Ahead of the Scottish Government's review of licensing in Summer 2023, **local authorities should benchmark and monitor the effectiveness of licensing in their area to ensure it meets policy objectives.**





2. SHORT-TERM LET CONTROL AREAS:

Underpin them with a Proper Evidence Base – Or Don't Introduce them at all.

Self-caterers have faced a perfect storm of uncertainty and impending regulation due to the pandemic and then the introduction of a licensing scheme. The prospect of planning control areas therefore comes at the worst possible time for the sector.

Small businesses like self-catering, present in communities for decades, **should not be used as a convenient scapegoat for wider failures in housing policy.** Addressing housing challenges must be viewed holistically, addressing the problems of second homes, empty homes and the lack of homebuilding rather than attacking short-term lets as the default option.

Given the imperative of focusing on economic recovery, and not to further burden both operators and planning teams within local councils, **it is our view that control areas should not be taken forward at this time.**

However, if proposals are commenced, **they must include meaningful consultation with industry and be underpinned by robust, empirical data.** If such an evidence-based approach isn't followed, then they shouldn't be introduced at all – people's livelihoods are at stake.





3. NO TO LOCAL TOURISM LEVIES: The Wrong Tax at the Wrong Time

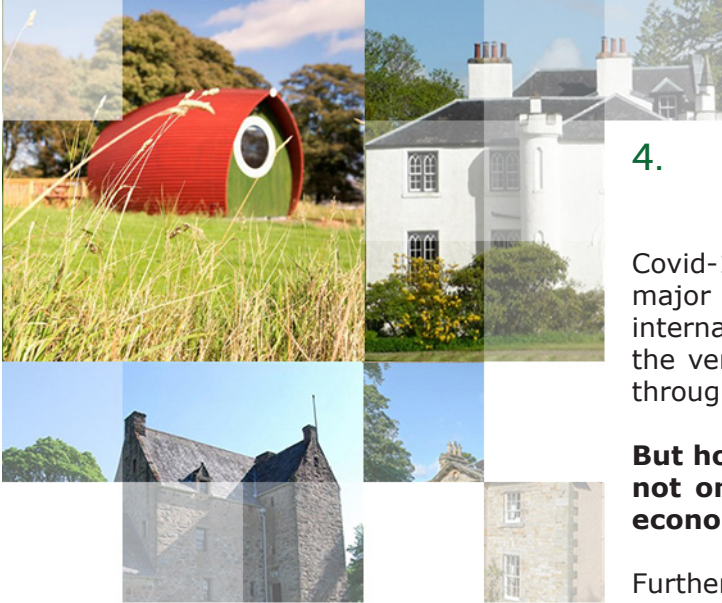
Plans for a Visitor Levy Bill were rightfully postponed due to the impact of the pandemic. However, **the self-catering industry requires clarity on the status of the Bill from national government:** has it been ruled out for the near future to enable businesses to fully and properly recover? If the intention is to proceed, when can industry expect the consultation on a national level to begin and will this involve meaningful engagement with the business community?

While some councils have indicated a willingness to introduce a local levy, they will have to wait for this move to be sanctioned by MSPs. We therefore hope that parliamentarians recognise that this levy would slow the recovery of Scottish tourism from the pandemic and that now is not the time to proceed with legislation.

However, should circumstances change and this is taken forward at Holyrood, **we call on councillors to reject any proposals initiated in their authority**, in order Scotland's competitiveness as an attractive destination for visitors and also to ensure the recovery of small businesses in their local communities.

Finally, **we need to recognise what this 'levy' amounts to: it is not a measure solely applied to international visitors as a quick and easy revenue raiser, but a tax on domestic visitors from Scotland and the rest of the UK** – many of whom will be using the trip to reconnect with family and friends – during a cost-of-living crisis. This underlines the fact that this is the wrong tax at the wrong time.





4. THINKING LOCAL: Encouraging Self-Catering as a Sustainable Option

Covid-19 and the climate emergency may be two entirely different phenomena – but they have had a major impact on the way people go on holiday and what they want to do when they get there. When international travel was restricted, and following domestic Covid-19 restrictions, many rediscovered the very best of what Scotland had to offer through staycations at beautiful self-catering properties throughout Scotland.

But holidaying within Scotland, rather than jumping on a plane to a resort overseas, should not only be encouraged during a global pandemic – but as an environmental, social and economic positive going forward.

Furthermore, self-catering units can help to disperse guests around Scotland and are available in areas that are not often well-served by hotel chains, thereby spreading the economic benefits even wider. **Self-catering properties can, therefore, be viewed as a solution to sustainability, not the problem.**

Following pre-pandemic negative headlines about ‘overtourism’ and criticism during the pandemic about visitors in some parts of Scotland, **councils should champion the positive contribution that tourism accommodation businesses make to their area and encourage self-catering as a truly local and sustainable option.** After all, the recovery of Scottish tourism will benefit small businesses, while responsible and sustainable tourism can help communities to recover too.





Founded in 1978, the ASSC are the leading source of knowledge on short-term letting and holiday homes in Scotland and are the only trade body representing the interests of the traditional self-catering sector. We represent over 1300 Members, operating tens of thousands of self-catering properties throughout Scotland, from city centre apartments to rural cottages, to lodges and chalets, to castles, all of whom generate £867m per year for the Scottish economy. The ASSC commits its members to maintaining the principles of “*quality, integrity, cleanliness, comfort, courtesy and efficiency*” and to offering visitors to Scotland consistently high standards within their self-catering properties.

The ASSC’s four policy priorities for local government:

1. **Minimising the Burden of Short-Term Let Licensing:** councils should work closely with small business representatives and industry to try and minimise the burden from licensing as much as possible, then carefully monitor its impacts, and not to impose ‘additional conditions’ on already hard-pressed businesses.
2. **Evidenced-Based Short-Term Let Control Areas:** now is not the time to further burden self-catering with additional regulations like control areas but if local plans are proposed, they should be underpinned by robust, empirical data.
3. **No to Local Tourism Levies:** should discretionary powers be devolved from the Scottish Parliament, councils should reject its introduction at local level and instead support tourism businesses and allow ordinary families to have a holiday in Scotland without being hit in the pocket.
4. **Encouraging Self-Catering as the Sustainable Option:** councils should provide a supportive environment for local businesses to flourish and promote self-catering as an environmentally friendly option.

Now more than ever, as we try and look to a brighter future, Scotland needs to back small business and back our traditional self-catering industry through committing to the ASSC’s four key policy recommendations.





ASSC

Supporting self-catering in Scotland

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