

Report to Partnership Board Friday 10th November 2023

SCOTTISH ISLANDS PASSPORT UPDATE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Members with an update on the Scottish Islands Passport Project.



Travelogues and physical stamps

'Shaping Our Islands', the second in our series of island travelogues, will launch in the run up to Christmas. These paper travelogues, which were part of the original project scope, allow people to explore the islands based on a variety of themes to compliment the more familiar geographical groupings, with 'Shaping Our Islands' exploring the built heritage and history of 20 further islands and how this has shaped our islands' unique identities and forged the communities that continue to thrive.

This travelogue focuses on exploring historic structures from simple stone houses to luxurious castles and encourages visitors to learn more about how the incredible island communities they visit came about. This links in with our island centred ethos and showing the resilience and hard work of communities that make up the islands is what makes them so interesting to explore.

This travelogue still includes space for collecting brass stamp rubbings at our community hosted stamp points from Unst to South Uist and Papa Westray to Gigha. There is a 'field notes' section for owners to capture their own memories of their travels across the islands as well as full information about how to get around.

Work has started on the next two travelogues in the series. The third full travelogue will be around the theme of sustainable and active travel. Building on messages we've promoted throughout the project, this travelogue will offer more information and incentive for people to use public transport and active travel options both to get to the islands and while exploring. As well as the environmental and health benefits, we will also reflect the benefits to our island transport infrastructure by encouraging more people to travel as foot passengers. Slow tourism is a growing trend which lends itself to this work.

It is critical that the information we provide is accurate and told from the perspective of islanders. Standardised 'mainland' advice on making best use of public transport will not always be appropriate or helpful on smaller islands, extensive work is underway to ensure that the information we provide is practical and appropriate to each island – supporting visitors to engage in active and sustainable travel in an enjoyable way, even for part of their journey, will help support lasting change. This also ties in with our next phase of work within the app.

The fourth will be a revision of the pilot travelogue 'Eat, Drink, Explore' but with double the amount of islands than the original.

We continue to work with Isle20 as our official online retailer for the travelogues whilst also building a network of on-island retailers. Brass rubbing stamps on each island are hosted by community groups or island businesses.

Digital app and Website

Since our last update, continued growth in app activity has been recorded:

- over 17,735 app downloads and nearly 124,752 unique sessions as of the end of September (up from 11k and 69k respectively at the same time in 2022)
- stamps collected for each of the 72 islands covered by the app
- 15,874 stamp unlocks to date with 10,344 people using the manual unlock option showing that the app is providing inspiration for island visits
- On-island unlocks saw a marked increase this summer (988 in August '23 vs 294 in August '22)

Active usage continues at a high level, outperforming comparable apps in the sector.

Developments within the app have been focussed on active and sustainable travel. Island travel experiences have launched in the app along with a travel hub on our website. This links into the big new development of our new set of island travel stamps and their launch this year. Travel stamps have been developed for all of our islands to incentivise visitors to use active and sustainable travel methods for some or all of their island journeys. Users can collect an unlimited amount of travel stamps for each island, thereby encouraging continued use of sustainable travel methods. There are four travel methods available: walk, wheel, cycle and bus. The app uses Artificial Intelligence to verify travel methods from users' photographed travel methods.

These travel stamps will further incentivise visitors by adding to their 'island points' in our points reward scheme. Users can collect up to 360 island points (5 per island) but infinite 'travel points' for the more active and sustainable journeys they take.

In line with our wheel travel category, we are working towards adding improved accessibility information for all of our islands and their experiences. We are working in partnership with travel writers with lived experience of physical disabilities to understand what kind of detail we should be including, and to source this data.

Our website, www.islands.scot, is designed primarily to funnel visitors to the app and provide additional information to compliment the travelogues. This is being updated to date to reflect recent developments and to include additional resources to support active and sustainable travel.

Engagement & working with Partners

Several strands of engagement with island businesses and community groups continue as we install the network of rubbing plates, check and refresh content held for each island, connect with island-based charities who are interested in having their information included in the app, and as we seek island retailers interested in stocking the travelogues. We also continue to see members of the public make good use of the built in feedback loop in the app, allowing them to make suggestions on both content and functionality.

Effective use of social media as a means to engage a wider audience and we are gathering local feedback relating to active and sustainable travel on the islands.

Marketing

Marketing activity over and above our social media posts has been paused while the project has been re-aligned to new funding sources and strategic priorities.

There will be local 'on-island' marketing to promote travelogues, with larger scale advertising being planned more strategically to support our work around active and sustainable travel. The aim would be to do this in partnership with local and regional stakeholders.

Funding & Resource

New funding has been secured through Paths for All and the RURALITES programme, which will allow continuity into 2025.

Although the physical travelogues provide an opportunity to generate unrestricted income, the current cost of goods restricts the ability to create profit. This will be kept under review and we look for ways to minimise costs with each print run.

The cost of living crisis and challenges within the tourism sector affect this project in the same way experienced elsewhere in the sector, however we continue to see positive engagement and will continue to focus on growth, awareness and working with island communities to support community led tourism.

The project continues to be sustained and achieve development milestones with 1 FTE.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note this report.

Risk Register

RTS Delivery

Impact – Positive

Policy

Impact – Positive

Financial

Impact – Positive

Equality

Impact – Positive

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