



MEETING SCOTLAND'S NET ZERO ASPIRATIONS

a white paper

The Institute of Hospitality Round Tables are designed to bring Institute members and the wider hospitality community together to discuss regional challenges and produce a white paper on a specific topic that presents a problem and provides a solution.

The Continuing Professional Development Round Tables are held nationally, outside London, allowing our members to participate in critical discussions.

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NETTING SOLUTIONS TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Achieving net zero emissions for all greenhouses gasses by 2045 – just 22 years' time – will be an enormous task for Scotland. This paper looks at the obstacles and options

Guests and employees – particularly Gens Y and Z – are increasingly worried about climate change, and often choose to work for an organisation that has robust ESG standards. But lack of feet on the ground in hospitality is as big a problem in Scotland as elsewhere and this, remote locations and lack of governments support are just some of the factors impacting the country's efforts to reduce CO2 emissions.

Recycling is a good starting point: in a city centre this is not difficult, but it is a different picture at Mingary Castle restaurant and rooms in Ardnamurchan, a west coast peninsula with limited land access. "We don't have bin lorries and our recycling is collected on Mondays by a pick-up pulling a trailer; remote locations don't get government help with recycling," says founder and co-owner Jessica Thompson MIH.

One element of support was a planned deposit return scheme (DRS), which meant charging consumers a small deposit for drinks in bottles and cans, which they could redeem on return to a collection point. This system is used worldwide to encourage recycling but its launch in Scotland has been delayed until 2025.

The working party that looked into it comprised suppliers, producers and people in hospitality, including managing director of Maryculter House Peter Walker FIH. "The group raised lots of difficulties, including government's lack of recognition of the challenges that people would encounter and that have, indeed, come to fruition," he says.



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"The idea seemed right but the mechanics required to get there were complex and complicated, and would have negatively impacted our competitiveness with England, Ireland and Wales; that's why it crumbled," says Peter Walker.

Technology is one of the many facets of sustainability that would ease the rocky path to net zero and would also help palliate the stark talent shortage. It would create efficiencies and leave employees free to deliver a higher level of service. And low recruitment and retention has been exacerbated by the stresses and strains placed on employees to compensate for that, leading to higher levels of sick leave – up to an average of 7.5 days in the UK to date in 2023, against 5.7 days in 2022.

Consumers are already used to remote check-in, mobile keys and tablet menus, and provided these are presented as an option – as opposed to the only option – this would help close the gap, although for smaller organisations, technology can be prohibitively expensive.

Luxury items in 5-star properties are another area for debate. Washing acres of fluffy towels and dressing gowns, and guests' running the deep, hot bath they might not have at home, are not environmentally friendly. However, customers are paying for an indulgent stay, so dealing with this should be done voluntarily rather than through legislation; people do not like being told what to do.

And looking at the bigger picture, "Worldwide, Scotland is seen as a natural, safe place to be, and we need to protect that and talk about it. If we don't and farming isn't sustainable, then people will vote with their feet," says chief executive at Hospitality Industry Trust (HIT) Scotland David Cochrane MBE.

In England, government provides support but expects hospitality to be proactive in addressing the issue. With organisations that range from SMEs to FTSE 100 companies, representing a wide range of expertise, this should allow the sector to lead the way.





COMMON APPROACH

Educating customers is essential to success and that is achieved by good communication, collaboration and a common approach. And small gestures add up to a notable impact, so encouraging guests to re-use towels, for example, not only reduces the environmental impact of washing and drying, but also cuts down linen collection and delivery, saving operational outlay and the planet. But more can be done. "There is a long way to go," says front office manager for the RAF Club and chair of IoH Youth Council Katariina Reissaar MIH. "I'm from Estonia and have seen how big the change has been over the years. Everything is separated – bio waste, packing and household waste; you don't see a lot of that here.

"I worked in a hotel in Birmingham, where there was no recycling at all, which is shocking. In London there is some recycling and we process food waste, but there needs to be more across all sectors. We should combine with industries and countries that are more advanced, so that we can inform each other," she says.

There is a huge amount of food waste and that comes with cost. Large plates may look more elegant but restaurants could serve smaller helpings on smaller plates; people eat more than they need. What is left on plates is a salient lesson in how that could be done: read the message. With shorter menus and smaller helpings, restaurants could charge less and benefit from increased turnover because customers might buy more.

And catering managers have an unenviable task because restaurants provide – and guests expect – many options on a menu every day.

Taking action on food waste is easier for large organisations than it is for a 20-seat high street outlet. Mingary Castle tests menus regularly; it scrapes only a small amount of food from plates and this feeds pigs on the restaurant's farm.

"We put in a water pump which takes 80% of water out of food waste and this is linked to caterer Baxter Storey. We should challenge caterers and that needs a champion," says assistant inspector for Education Scotland Willie McCurrach OBE FIH.



WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

Scotland's hospitality sector produces more than 262,000 tonnes of mixed waste each year and when food waste breaks down in landfill it releases methane, which is a lot more harmful to the environment than carbon dioxide. In addition, food and drink production accounts for some 20% of Scotland's carbon footprint. Doing nothing is not an option.

Meanwhile, college students are doing theoretical and empirical research to counter this problem and industry protagonists are missing a trick if they are not working with universities and catering colleges to put food waste to good use. This also needs an advocate – one person to drive collaboration and action. Sustainability is fast rising up the corporate agenda and where it was once a nice to have, it is now a priority. Foodservice clients have put pressure on them to buy local and know where food is grown, and about energy and waste management.

"Foodservice is way ahead of hotels and restaurants," says former divisional managing director for Sodexo and Compass, and director and founder of GBX Consultants Graham Box FIH. "Clients want to know what we are doing and how, and we have to be able to demonstrate that."

National Museums of Scotland set up a huge procurement framework with values for every item bought, allowing it to calculate cost per cover. It was labour and time intensive but reaped immeasurable rewards. Again, this is feasible for a large institution but not for SMEs, which are already overwhelmed with the bureaucracy and mechanics of attaining net zero by 2045. One action that would alleviate food waste is education at all levels – students, employees, suppliers and clients.



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There used to be incentives in Scotland to recycle but they have been withdrawn and there are conflicts of interest, not least of which is the inadequate service provided the council. This has driven operators to engage private contractors for waste collection, effectively paying for the service twice.

In the south east, the picture is similar: "On collection day, we see empty bins in the refuse area; why are we paying for nothing to be collected? And when we put our suppliers out to tender, do we look at sustainability practices?" However, paradoxically, that might preclude too many suppliers, which would aggravate existing problems. Ultimately, properties have to keep the lights on.

Peter Walker looked into getting a local dairy to supply milk in traditional glass bottles. However, the cost was uneconomical: "We would have had to increase the price of hot beverages significantly to do that. It was a way of removing plastic cartons from the business but it's cheaper to keep using plastic," he says. "Where is the incentive to be more environmentally friendly when everything comes down to cost? No one is going to come back to the hotel because the milk is from a glass bottle. We would lose business and the redeeming impact on the environment would be relatively small," says Walker.

The harsh fact is that some businesses will not survive the combined effects of the current economic climate and the pressure to reach net zero, so it is critical that all elements of the industry support each other – and the Institute of Hospitality has the wherewithal to facilitate that. That could start domestically, extend regionally and ultimately involve international collaboration.

This could be a powerful action but there is still a major caveat: "We need government to listen to us; without that support, it is not going to happen," says innovation lead at Manchester Metropolitan University John Willis MIH.

There is enormous will and expertise in Scottish hospitality to meet the 2045 net zero goal but the government ignores the need to support that at its peril.



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