



Tourism,
Culture and
Creativity

Tourism, Culture and Creativity

LDP3 EVIDENCE REPORT

Topic Paper • December 2025



1. Introduction

1.1. This Topic Paper sets out and analyses evidence pertaining to Tourism, Culture and Creativity in East Ayrshire for the purposes of:

- Contributing towards the preparation of the Council's Evidence Report, as part of a wider suite of Topic Papers;
- Highlighting the key historic environment considerations for the production of Local Development Plan 3;
- Informing future site selection within LDP3; and
- Informing LDP3 policy requirements and specifications for tourism, culture and creativity.

2. Legislative and Policy Context:

National

2.1. National Planning Framework 4

2.1.1. The Tourism, Culture and Creativity topic paper corresponds with National Planning Framework 4 policies **30** and **31**.

NPF4 Policy 30: Tourism

Policy Intent:

To encourage, promote and facilitate sustainable tourism development which benefits local people, is consistent with our net zero and nature commitments, and inspires people to visit Scotland.

Policy Outcomes:

- Communities and places enjoy economic, social and cultural benefits from tourism, supporting resilience and stimulating job creation.

Local Development Plans:

LDPs should support the recovery, growth and long-term resilience of the tourism sector. The spatial strategy should identify suitable locations which reflect opportunities for tourism development by

taking full account of the needs of communities, visitors, the industry and the environment. Relevant national and local sector driven tourism strategies should also be taken into account.

The spatial strategy should also identify areas of pressure where existing tourism provision is having adverse impacts on the environment or the quality of life and health and wellbeing of local communities, and where further development is not appropriate.

NPF4 Policy 31: Culture and Creativity

Policy Intent:

To encourage, promote and facilitate development which reflects our diverse culture and creativity, and to support our culture and creative industries.

Policy Outcomes:

- Locally distinctive places reflect the diversity of communities and support regeneration and town centre vibrancy.
- Cultural and creative industries are expanded, providing jobs and investment.
- Communities have access to cultural and creative activities.

Local Development Plans:

LDPs should recognise and support opportunities for jobs and investment in the creative sector, culture, heritage and the arts.

2.2. Scotland Outlook 2030: Responsible Tourism for a Sustainable Future

2.2.1. Scotland's national tourism strategy for 2030 has four key priorities:

- 'Our passionate people' – supporting fair work practices, diversity and career development in the tourism sector.
- 'Our thriving places' – encouraging sustainable and responsible tourism development, with local communities as stakeholders.
- 'Our diverse businesses' – supporting tourism businesses in Scotland to become more entrepreneurial, resilient and sustainable.

- ‘Our memorable experiences’ – protecting and enhancing Scotland’s tourism assets and working to make them more accessible to all visitors through user-friendly transport options.

2.2.2. Scottish Government economists, in collaboration with VisitScotland and the Tourism and Hospitality Industry Leadership Group, have published a Scotland Outlook 2030 tracker (most recently updated in March 2025) to assess how Scotland’s tourism industry is performing against a list of indicators for each of the above priority areas.

2.2.3. The indicators which saw improved performance were:

- ‘Our passionate people’
 - Fair work: opportunity to progress (percentage of tourism businesses in Scotland providing training)
 - Diverse workforce: disability (percentage of tourism employees aged 16-64 in Scotland who have a disability)
- ‘Our diverse businesses’
 - Business survival (3-year survival rate of new tourism businesses in Scotland)
 - Environmental sustainability (Percentage of tourism businesses taking action to reduce carbon emissions)
- ‘Responsible tourism’
 - Employment contribution (tourism employment in Scotland as a proportion of total Scottish employment)
 - Employment growth (tourism employment in Scotland)

2.2.4. The indicators with worsening performance were:

- ‘Our memorable experiences’
 - Regional spread (ratio of total number of visits in Scotland’s most visited region to least visited region)
- ‘Our passionate people’
 - Skills shortage (percentage of tourism businesses in Scotland reporting skills shortage vacancies)
- ‘Our thriving places’
 - Tourism management (percentage of Scottish island residents agreeing there is adequate provision for the number of tourists)

2.3. Ayrshire and our Islands Visitor Economy Strategy

2.3.1. The Ayrshire and our Islands Visitor Economy Strategy sets out a strategic approach for Community Wealth Building through tourism to 2030 at the regional (Ayrshire-wide) level. A regional approach is deemed appropriate as research has shown that visitors do not limit their exploration to the confines of a particular local authority boundary and it is therefore beneficial to take a holistic view of Ayrshire's tourist offering.

2.3.2. The four regional strategic priorities are aligned with Scotland's national tourism strategy and are to:

1. Connect our high quality, memorable experiences.
2. Connect our diverse businesses to grow and build community prosperity.
3. Regenerate the region through the talent and creativity of our people.
4. Harness our natural and place-based assets to enhance our environment for the benefit of visitors and our communities.

2.3.3. The strategy identifies the core trends shaping visitor demand in Ayrshire as:

1. Localism and getting to know a destination's unique identity
2. Adaptable adventures in the great outdoors
3. Food and drink with a local flavour
4. Enjoying new-found flexibility
5. Bargain hunters and thrill seekers
6. Lighter footprints with conscious consumerism

2.3.4. These trends were formed under the influence of the social and economic pressures of the past few years, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the rising cost of living, demographic changes, technological advances and climate change. All of these factors have changed consumer habits, including travel and tourism, as people re-prioritise what they spend money and time on, with many choosing to focus on sustainable, unique, affordable experiences that can be shared (in person and online). There has been an increase in short breaks and weekends away, which provide flexibility in price and time commitment, with 'staycations' within the UK particularly popular during the initial lifting of COVID-19 travel restrictions.

3. Legislative and Policy Context: Local

3.1. Local Development Plan 2

- 3.1.1. Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2) includes six policies that deal directly with tourism-related development:
- 3.1.2. **TOUR1: Tourism Development** details the circumstances under which the Council will support, in principle, the development of new tourism facilities, particularly where these would enhance the tourism offer of existing visitor assets.
- 3.1.3. In Policy **TOUR2: Tourism Accommodation** criteria are provided for proposals for new visitor accommodation in East Ayrshire, including hutting proposals, self-catering accommodation, and short-term lets.
- 3.1.4. **TOUR3: Rural Sporting, Leisure and Recreational Activities** sets out the Council's position with regards to supporting proposals for appropriate leisure uses in rural locations.
- 3.1.5. **TOUR4: The Dark Sky Park** supports the protection of the Galloway Forest Dark Sky Park and its buffer zones from any unsuitable development that would affect its 'dark sky' status and thus its importance to wildlife and as a visitor asset.
- 3.1.6. **TOUR5: Loss of Tourist Facilities** presumes against the loss of existing tourism-related facilities, with the exception of circumstances under which the facility is no longer viable.
- 3.1.7. **TOUR6: Loudoun Castle Estate Garden and Designed Landscape** sets out detailed requirements for the sympathetic development of the estate for tourism, and leisure purposes, and is accompanied by a supporting piece of supplementary guidance.

4. Key definitions

Term	Definition
Community	A body of people. A community can be based on location (for example people who live or work in or use an area) common identity (for example a shared ethnicity, language, age) or common interest (for example the business community, amenity, sports, social or heritage groups).
Community facilities	Buildings or services used by the community, including community halls, recreation centres and libraries.
Community wealth building	A people-centred approach to local economic development, which redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people.
Cultural significance	Cultural significance means aesthetic, historic, scientific or social value for past, present or future generations. Cultural significance can be embodied in a place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects.
Placemaking	Placemaking is the process of creating good quality places that promotes people's health, happiness and wellbeing. It concerns the environment in which we live; the people that inhabit these spaces; and the quality of life that comes from the interaction of people and their surroundings. Placemaking is a collaborative approach involving the design and development of places over time, with people and communities central to the process
Short term let	The use of a dwellinghouse (a residential house or flat) for rental by persons other than the owner for short periods and for financial or other remuneration. Typically includes properties advertised as being available for holiday let, although can apply to other situations.
Sustainable tourism	Sustainable tourism is defined by the United Nation World Tourism Organisation as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities."
Sustainable travel	Sustainable travel includes travel by the top three modes in the sustainable travel hierarchy. It is recognised that in some locations, particularly in rural areas, where the top three modes have been judged as unfeasible for day to day travel, low emissions vehicles and shared transport options will play an important role.

5. Body of Evidence

5.1. Tourism, Culture and Creativity in East Ayrshire

5.1.1. With its varied landscape and rich local history, East Ayrshire has much to offer as a visitor destination. Many of these visitor assets – such as historic castles, parks and gardens,

museums, galleries and performance venues – also play an essential role in the creative and social lives of people who live in East Ayrshire, and reinforce a sense of place and community.

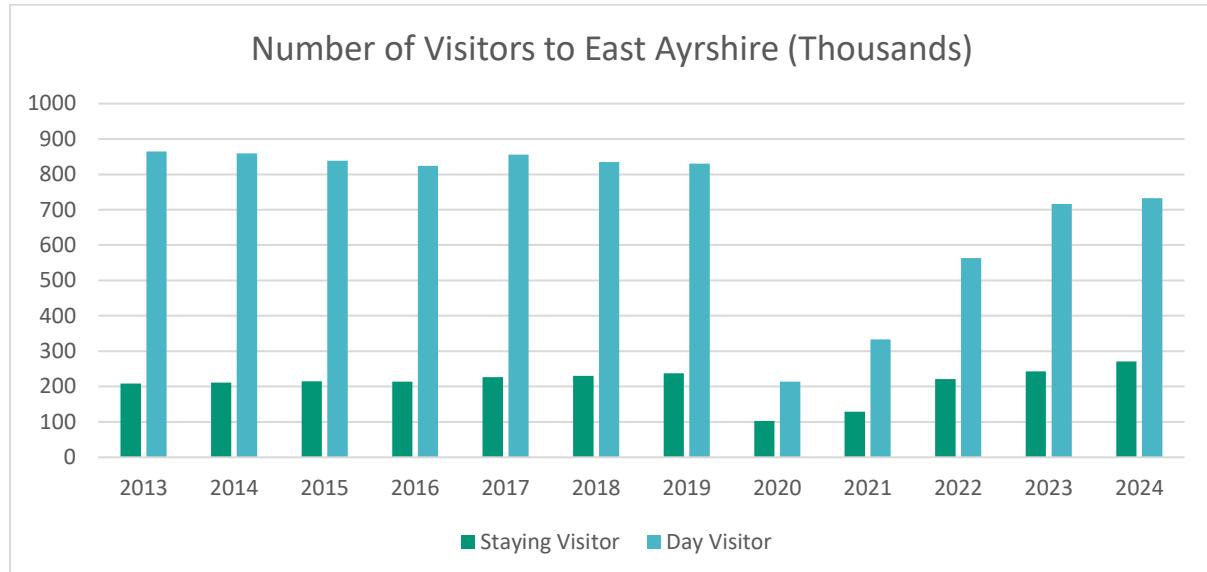
5.1.2. Alongside the social value of tourism and culture, the visitor economy and associated sectors are highly valuable to the local economy, and can also help to drive regeneration.



Photo: Robert Burns Mural on the corner of Strand Street, Kilmarnock, designed by artist Michael Corr

5.2. Visitor Numbers

5.2.1. There were just over 1 million visitors to East Ayrshire in 2024, of which there were 732,436 day visitors and 270,835 staying visitors.¹



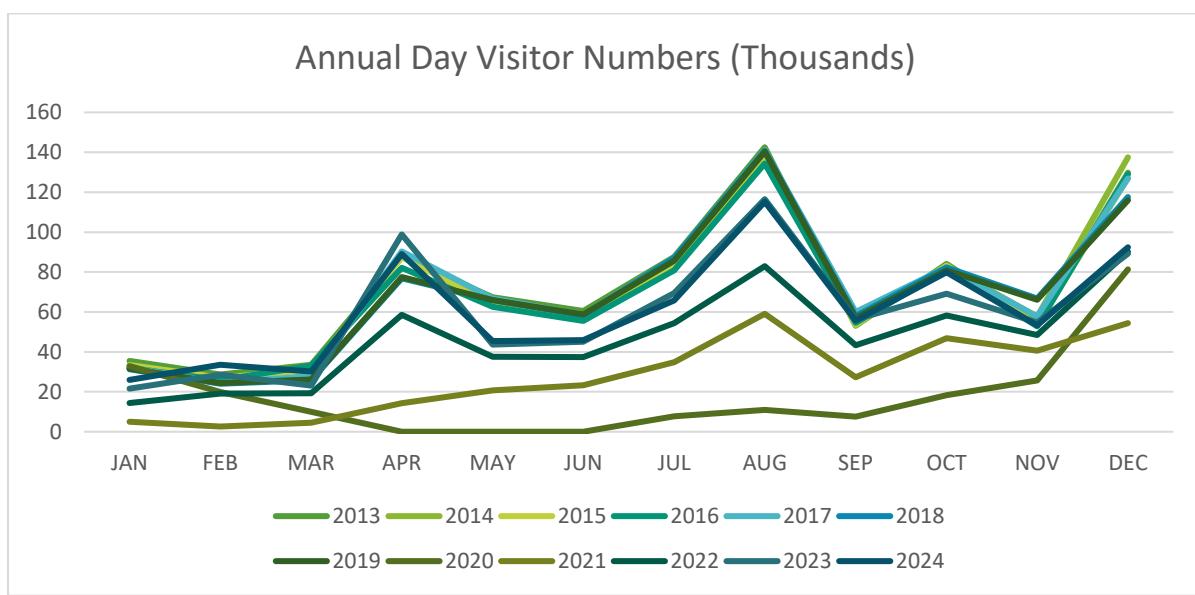
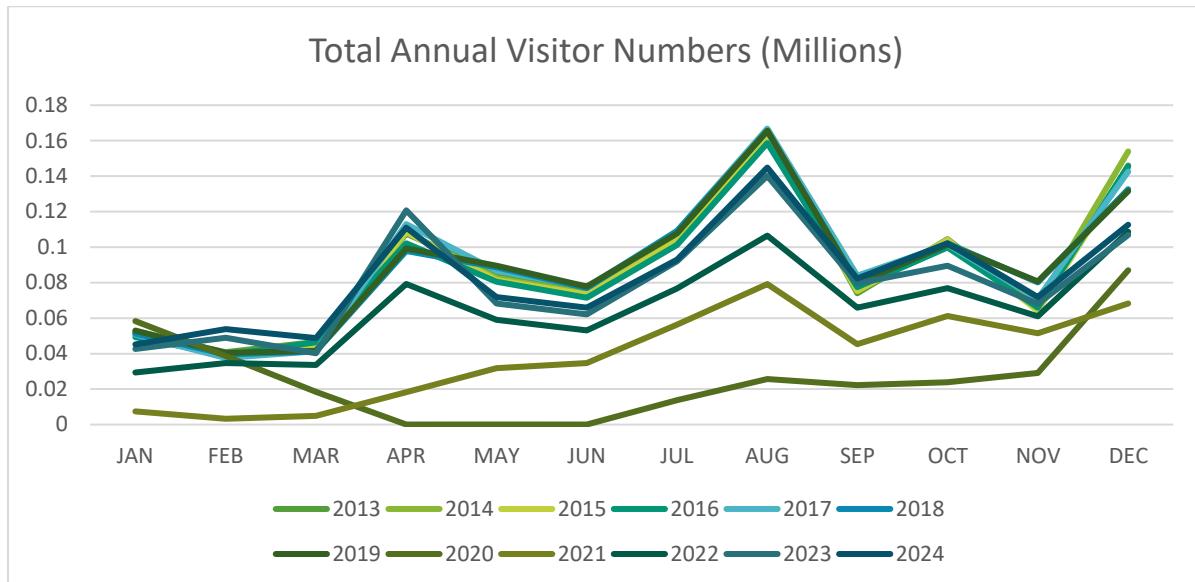
5.2.2. The most popular accommodation type for staying visitors is 'SFR' (Staying with Friends/Relatives), followed by serviced accommodation, although the number of people staying in non-serviced accommodation has increased in recent years.



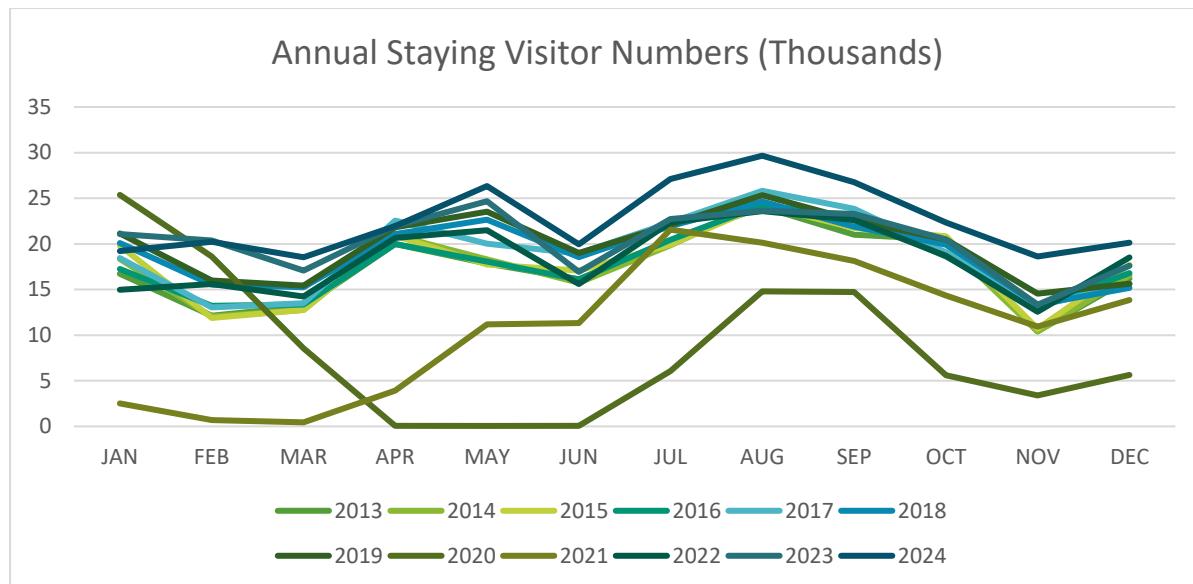
5.2.3. Visitor numbers follow a seasonal pattern, peaking in August, December and April, with a smaller peak in October. As can be seen from comparing the three charts below, this

¹ East Ayrshire STEAM Report 18/06/25

seasonal trend appears to be mainly influenced by day visitors, as the numbers of staying visitors do not peak as sharply. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on visitor numbers can also be clearly seen from March 2020 onwards.²



² East Ayrshire STEAM Report 18/06/25



5.3. Local Employment in Tourism, Culture and Creativity

5.3.1. In 2023, tourism employed 3,000 people in East Ayrshire (5.4% of all employment, based on number of employee jobs).³

5.3.2. There were 1,250 employee jobs in the Arts, Entertainment and Recreation sector in East Ayrshire in 2023 – accounting for 3.1% of all employee jobs, which is higher than the sectoral share for Scotland as a whole in the same year (2.8%). There were also 3,500 employee jobs in Accommodation and Food Service Activities in East Ayrshire in 2023 (8.8% of all employee jobs, which is the same as for Scotland in 2023).⁴

5.3.3. Despite the visitor economy being one of the sectors particularly effected by the closure of businesses and restriction of movement during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21, the numbers of employee jobs show recovery of tourism-related activities in East Ayrshire to near pre-pandemic employment levels. The number of direct, full-time equivalent jobs in the tourist industry in East Ayrshire was higher in 2024 (1,582) than in 2013 (1,580), but not quite as high as the six years pre-pandemic, where it exceeded 1,600.⁵

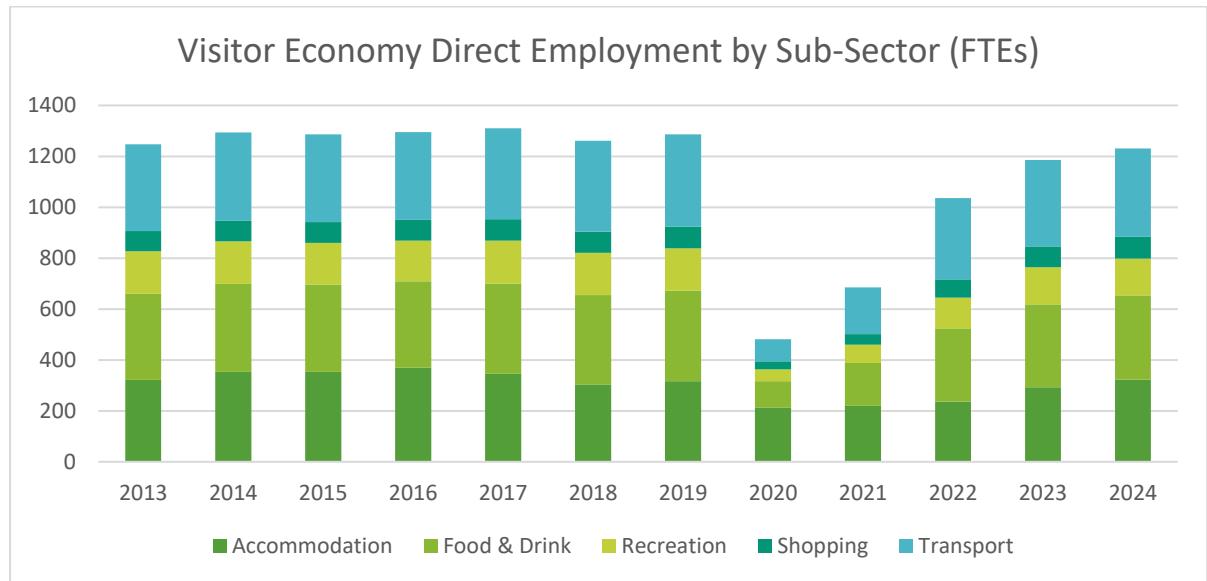
³ Scottish Growth Sector Statistics: December 2024; Visit Scotland

⁴ Nomis

⁵ East Ayrshire STEAM Report 18/06/25

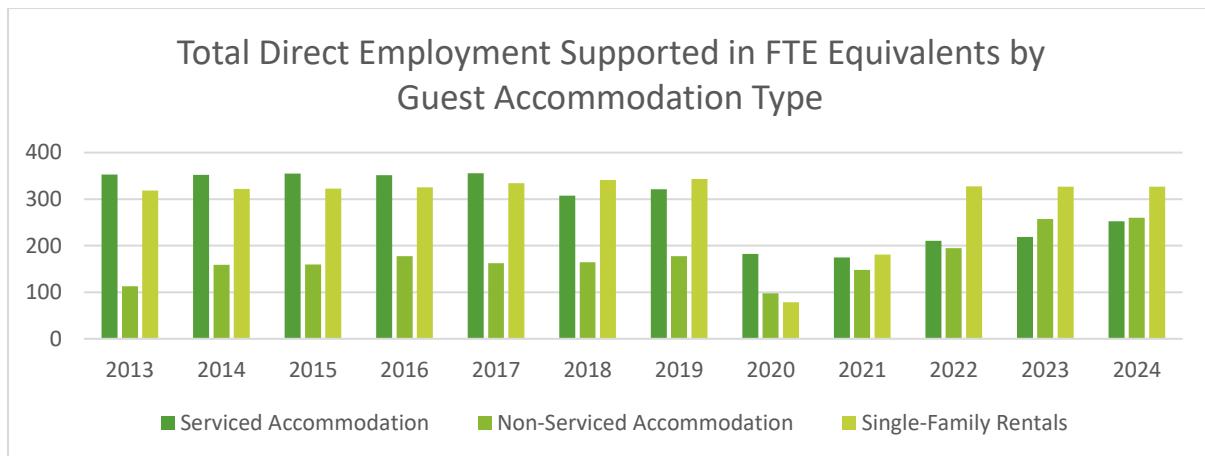


5.3.4. In 2024, the employment sub-sectors with the largest number of full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs supported by the visitor economy in East Ayrshire were Transport (346 FTEs), Food and Drink (330 FTEs) and Accommodation (322 FTEs).⁶



5.3.5. Within the tourism accommodation sub-sector, there has been a notable fall in the number of full-time equivalent jobs associated with serviced accommodation and a rise in jobs in non-serviced accommodation.

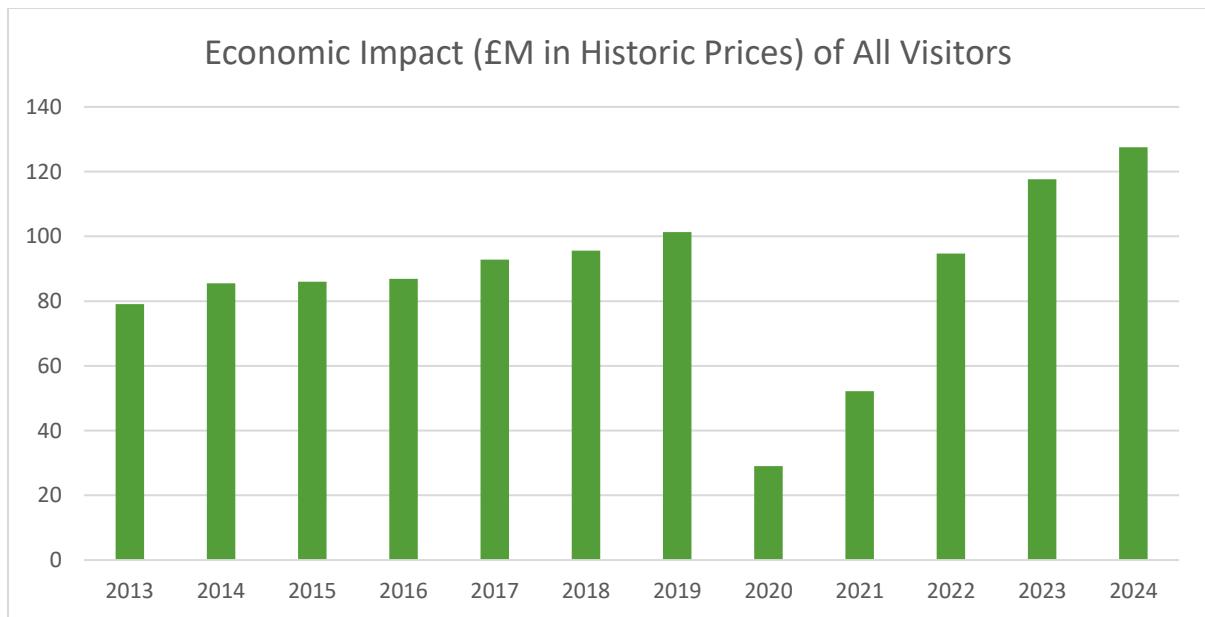
⁶ East Ayrshire STEAM Report 18/06/25



5.4. Tourism Businesses and Contribution to the Local Economy

5.4.1. In 2024, there were 290 tourism businesses operating in East Ayrshire (8.6% of all businesses). The Sustainable Tourism sector in the local authority area had a collective turnover of £65.4 million, producing approximately £30.8 million GVA (in 2023)⁷.

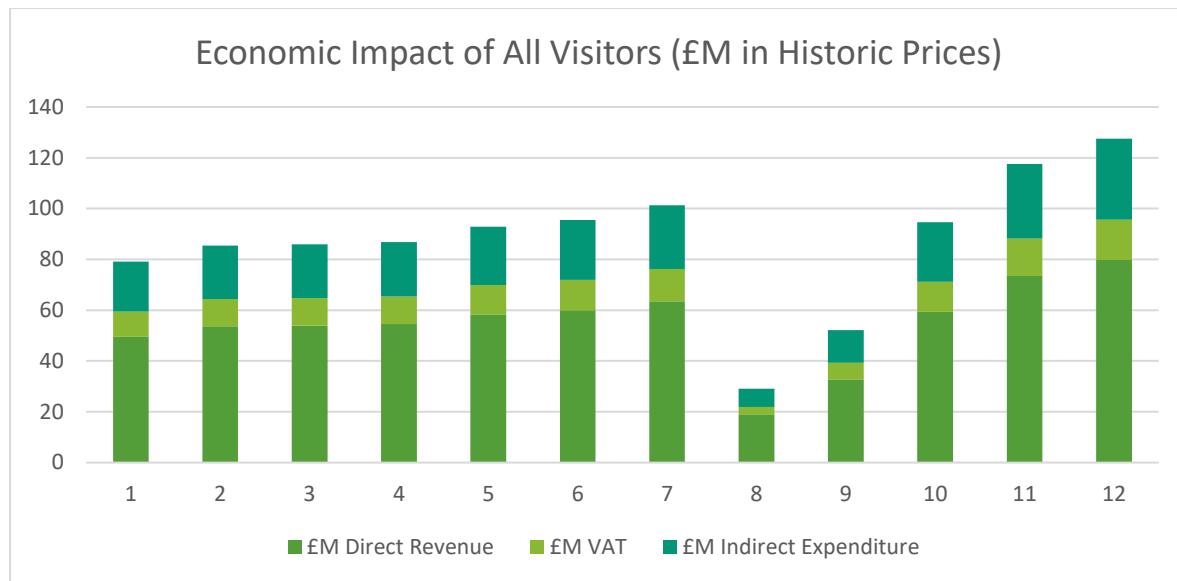
5.4.2. The combined economic impact of staying and day visitors to East Ayrshire was £127 million (in historic prices) in 2024.⁸



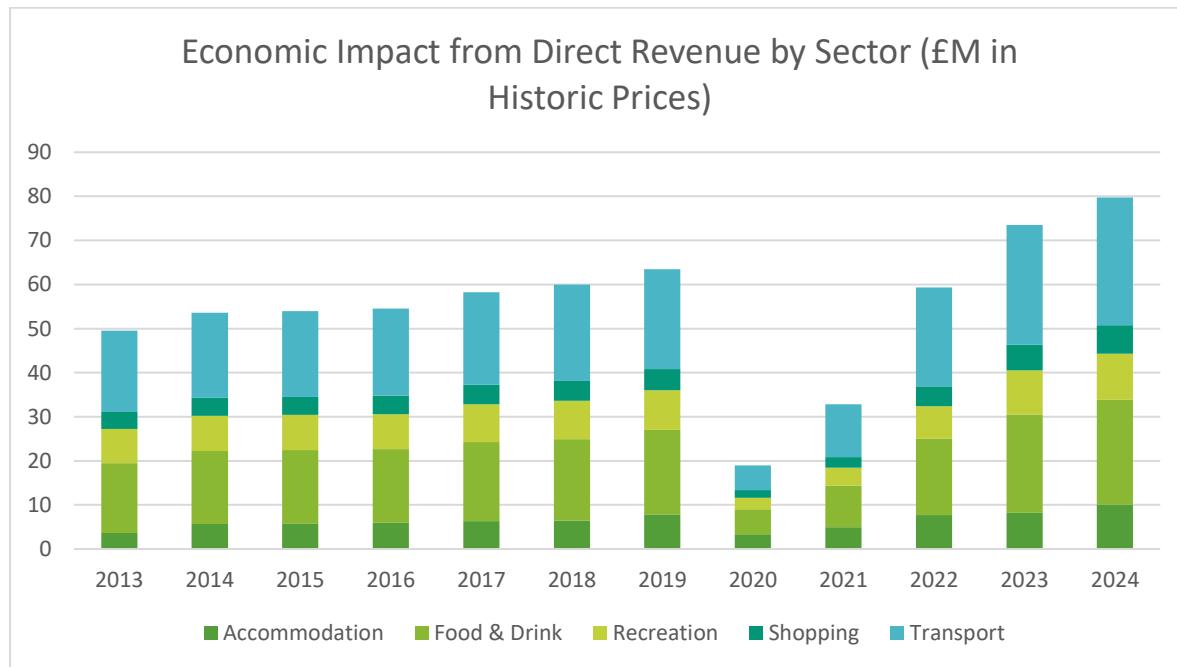
5.4.3. Most of the economic contribution from the visitor economy comes via direct revenue, although indirect expenditure and VAT also contribute to the total.

⁷ Scottish Growth Sector Statistics: December 2025; Visit Scotland

⁸ East Ayrshire STEAM Report 18/06/25



5.4.4. The graph below shows a breakdown of the economic impact of direct revenue from tourism by each sub-sector of visitor spending.⁹

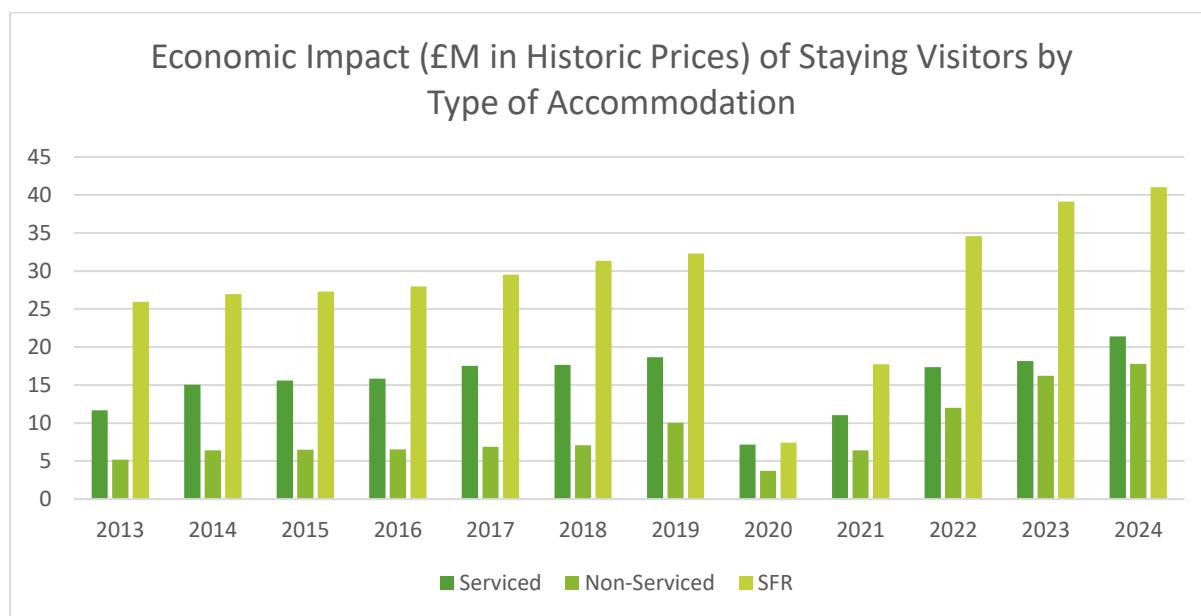


5.4.5. Visitors who used overnight accommodation ('staying' visitors) have had an increasingly larger economic impact than day visitors to the area over time.

⁹ East Ayrshire STEAM Report 18/06/25



5.4.6. ‘SFR’ visitors (people staying with friends/relatives) brought the largest economic impact, followed by serviced accommodation, although the value of non-serviced accommodation has been growing at a faster rate post-pandemic.

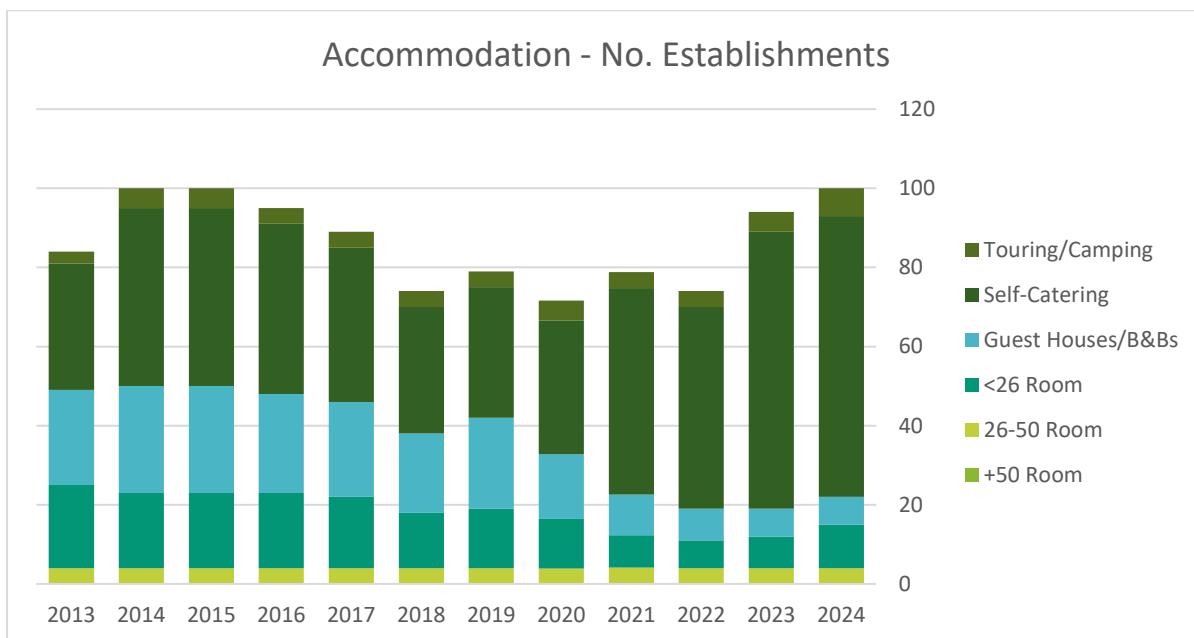


5.5. Visitor Accommodation

5.5.1. Visitor accommodation contributed £10 million in direct revenue to East Ayrshire’s economy in 2024.¹⁰

¹⁰ East Ayrshire STEAM Report 18/06/25

5.5.2. The total number of establishments offering visitor accommodation in East Ayrshire was 100 in 2024, which is the highest since 2015. The vast majority of these establishments were self-catering, with the number of guest houses and small hotels (with 26 or fewer rooms) having generally decreased over time, although the small hotel category did see an increase (from 8 establishments to 11) between 2023 and 2024. There are no large hotels (with 50 or more rooms) located in the local authority area, and only 4 medium-sized hotels (with 26-50 rooms).¹¹



5.5.3. Non-serviced accommodation provided a larger total share of beds for visitors in 2024 (1,218 beds) than serviced accommodation (685 beds). A clear trend can be seen, with non-serviced accommodation overtaking serviced accommodation from 2020 onwards, likely as a result of consumer trends driven by the COVID19 pandemic.

5.5.4. Recent changes to legislation around short-term lets, which requires operators to obtain a license, has also made it easier to identify properties offering this form of accommodation.

¹¹ East Ayrshire STEAM Report 18/06/25



5.5.5. The table below shows the number of tourist beds in East Ayrshire towns and how this number compares to other Scottish towns of a similar population size.¹²

Town	Resident population	Number of tourist beds	How does it compare to similar towns in Scotland per head of population?
Kilmarnock	46,159	216	Less
Cumnock	9,039	46	More
Dalmellington/Burnton	1,411	0	Less
Galston	4,670	0	Less
Stewarton	7,065	0	Less
Auchinleck	3,819	7	More
Catrine	2,236	0	Less
Crosshouse	2,861	7	Less
Darvel	3,871	0	Less
Hurlford/Crookedholm	4,846	0	Less
Kilmaurs	2,833	0	Less
Mauchline	4,099	4	Less
Muirkirk	1,528	0	Less
New Cumnock	2,860	20	More
Newmilns	3,053	0	The Same

5.5.6. It should be noted that the above table is based on traditional tourism accommodation (i.e. predominantly hotels) and does not include rurally-based self-catering accommodation, or seasonal short-term holiday rentals. In recent years, self-catering holiday lodges and small 'glamping' pods have been growing in popularity across rural parts of Scotland, and some

¹² Scotland's Towns Partnership – Understanding Scottish Places

local examples are shown in the table below, with estimates of how many visitors can be accommodated:

Site/Business Name	Address	Number of tourist beds
Arranview Holiday Park	A719 at Grassyards road junction @ Arranview Fishery, Moscow KA4 8PR	4x 4 sleeper pods, 2x 2 sleeper pods, 14x 4 sleeper lodges (76 visitors total)
Barlosh Luxury Glamping Pods	1 Barlosh Court, Cumnock KA18 2QS	3x 2 sleeper pods (6 visitors total)
Craigengillan Glamping Pods	Craigengillan Estate, Dalmellington, Ayrshire KA6 7PZ	1x 2 sleeper pod, 1x 4 sleeper pod, 1x 4 sleeper cottage, 1x 2 sleeper cottage (16 visitors total)
Doon Valley Glamping Pods	Laight Farm, Dalmellington, Ayr KA6 7PX	2x 2 sleeper pods (4 visitors total)
Fulshaw Mill Holidays Ayrshire	2, Fulshaw Mill, Old Glasgow Rd, Stewarton, Kilmarnock KA3 5JP	4x 2 sleeper pods (8 visitors total)
Loudoun Mains Country Cottages	Ayrshire KA16 9LG	3x 2 sleeper lodges, 3x 2 sleeper cottages, 1x 3 sleeper cottage, 3x 4 sleeper cottages, 2x 5 sleeper cottages, 1x 6 sleeper cottage (43 visitors total)
Stag and Thistle Glamping Pods, Ayrshire Rural Retreats	Tigh Na Bruaich, Galston KA4 8PH	3x 2 sleeper pods, 3x 4 sleeper lodges, 2x 12 sleeper lodges (42 visitors total)
Timber Valley Pods	Newmilns KA16 9LJ	7x 2 sleeper pods (14 visitors total)

5.6. Food and Drink

5.6.1. Scotland's Visitor Survey for 2023 found that 21% of visitors to Scotland visited a whisky distillery, 6% visited a brewery and 5% visited a gin distillery as part of their trip. Almost half of visitors (46%) took part in at least one food and drink experience during their trip and experiencing locally produced food and drink was rated as important to all visitors, especially those from the United States (51%).¹³

5.6.2. The food and drink sector plays an important role in both driving and supporting tourism in Scotland; it is a draw for visitors in and of itself but also serves to enhance other leisure and cultural visitor experiences.

¹³ Visit Scotland

5.6.3. Ayrshire has long been associated with quality local food and drink production – as the ancestral home of Johnnie Walker whisky, Ayrshire dairy cattle and the Ayrshire potato. There are several highly-rated restaurants in East Ayrshire’s settlements along with cafés and farm shops using locally-produced ingredients and selling seasonal produce. Small-batch and craft distilling of drink products, such as gin and whisky, has experienced a resurgence over the past decade and has resulted in the growth of small businesses across Scotland, including some local ones (for example, BurnAnne Spirits in Newmilns and Blowin’ Free Gin in Kilmaurs).

5.6.4. According to East Ayrshire’s STEAM report, visitor expenditure on food and drink contributed £23.7 million to the local economy in 2024.

5.6.5. Future investment into the food and drink sector in East Ayrshire is planned through the Ayrshire Manufacturing Investment Corridor (AMIC) project, which could also enhance the local food and drink tourism offer. AMIC is funded by Ayrshire Growth Deal, and will establish a food and drink centre of excellence in Moorfield, Kilmarnock, with onsite support and incubator units for local food and drink businesses, encouraging creativity and innovation.

5.7. **Visitors and the Historic Environment**

5.7.1. The results of Scotland’s Visitor Survey for 2023 found that 59% of all recorded visitors to Scotland visited a castle or fort on their trip, 49% visited a historic house, palace or stately home, 13% visited a UNESCO site, and 43% visited a cathedral, church, abbey or other place of worship on their trip.¹⁴

5.7.2. East Ayrshire boasts multiple castles, stately homes, and historic buildings – including some notable visitor destinations, such as Dumfries House and Dean Castle Country Park which have both received significant investment in recent years to further enhance the visitor experience. Dumfries House also includes one of the local authority’s Inventory Gardens and Designed Landscapes, recognised as being of national importance, while the landscape around Dean Castle is a Non-Inventory Gardens and Landscapes site of local importance. Dean Castle Country Park is Ayrshire’s most popular free attraction.¹⁵

¹⁴ Visit Scotland

¹⁵ Visitor Attractions Monitor – Moffat Centre, Glasgow Caledonian University

5.7.3. Several of East Ayrshire's castles and historic houses are available for private hire, weddings or other events, including Category A Listed Rowallan Castle and Sorn Castle.

5.7.4. Historic designations across the Local Authority area include:

Designation	Number of Assets
Listed Buildings (All Categories)	728
Listed Buildings (Category A)	45
Listed Buildings (Category B)	326
Listed Buildings (Category C)	357
Conservation Areas	26
Scheduled Monuments	28
Inventory Battlefields	1
Gardens and Designed Landscapes (Inventory)	8
Gardens and Designed Landscapes (Non-Inventory)	30

5.7.5. Further information on East Ayrshire's historic buildings and assets can be found in the Historic Environment Topic Paper.

5.8. Scenic and Landscape Tourism

5.8.1. 42% of respondents to Scotland's Visitor Survey in 2023 visited a country park or garden during their trip to Scotland.¹⁶

5.8.2. Landscape is a significant asset for East Ayrshire, which has strong and distinctive landscape character features. Much of the local authority area contains scenic countryside, jointly shaped by nature and by industrial and by agricultural activities, past and present. There are also many parks and gardens open to the public.

5.8.3. As noted in the table above, there are 38 Inventory and Non-Inventory Gardens and Designed Landscapes across East Ayrshire, and several of these include publicly-accessible gardens, footpaths and forest trails.

5.8.4. 7% of the visitors recorded in Scotland's Visitor Survey for 2023 had visited a working farm or croft in Scotland while on their trip.

5.8.5. East Ayrshire has numerous working farms, some of which have diversified to provide a visitor experience, providing on-site accommodation and/or farm shops and cafés for day

¹⁶ Visit Scotland

visitors, or even creating event spaces to host countryside weddings, such as at Harelaw Farm, near Fenwick.

5.9. Nature Tourism

5.9.1. According to Scotland's Visitor Survey for 2023, 32% of those surveyed visited a nature reserve on their trip.¹⁷

5.9.2. East Ayrshire has several designated natural heritage sites, including:

Designation	Number of Sites
Sites of Special Scientific Interest	16
Local Nature Conservation Sites	128
Local Nature Reserves	1 (Catrine Voes and Woodland)
Special Areas of Conservation	1 (Airds Moss) and 2 (Merrick Kells)
Special Protection Areas	1 (Muirkirk and North Lowther Uplands)
Country Parks	1 (Dean Castle)

5.9.3. Nature enthusiasts can spot many iconic Scottish wildlife species in locations across East Ayrshire.

5.9.4. The Muirkirk Uplands and Airds Moss have special designations as a result of ornithological interest, with hen harrier, merlin, peregrine and red and black grouse spotted in this area.

5.9.5. Catrine Voes is East Ayrshire's first local nature reserve. The river provides an ideal habitat for Atlantic salmon as well as being home to water voles, otters, kingfishers, heron and dipper.

5.9.6. Loch Doon, one of East Ayrshire's Sites of Special Scientific Interest, received its designation due to rare Arctic char in its waters and also has been home to ospreys since 2012 (which can be viewed online through East Ayrshire Leisure's nest livestream).

5.9.7. Further information about natural environment designations in East Ayrshire can be found in the Nature and Biodiversity Topic Paper.

5.9.8. In addition to the nature designations in the table above, a small portion of the Galloway Forest Dark Sky Park is in East Ayrshire. The exceptionally dark night sky within the park

¹⁷ Visit Scotland

offers visitors unique stargazing opportunities, uninterrupted by light pollution, and is a haven for wildlife. In 2012 Galloway and Southern Ayrshire was also designated as a UNESCO Biosphere because of the combination of its unique landscapes and wildlife areas and rich cultural heritage and is the first of its kind in Scotland.

5.9. In early 2025, the Scottish Government, through NatureScot, consulted on their proposal to create a new National Park encompassing the Galloway Forest Park and its surrounding landscape, with the indicative boundary also including a portion of East Ayrshire around Dalmellington and Craigengillan. East Ayrshire Council responded in support of the National Park, however there was significant opposition to the proposal from some of the consultees and the Scottish Government ultimately took the decision that the bid would not proceed. Despite the lack of National Park designation, the special characteristics of the landscape in the south of the East Ayrshire local authority area should be acknowledged, along with its value for nature conservation, tourism and recreation. In addition, in light of the decision to not proceed with the National Park designation, Ministers committed to exploring other options to strengthen arrangements in the region, relating to land use, nature recovery and the visitor economy.

5.10. **Outdoor, Active and Sporting Tourism**

5.10.1. East Ayrshire benefits from an extensive network of walking routes, cycling routes, core paths and rights of way. The local authority also contains a large section of the River Ayr Way – a 40 mile scenic walking route between Glenbuck and Ayr, passing through Muirkirk, Sorn, Catrine and Stair. This route is the site of the River Ayr Way Challenge, a 40 mile ultra marathon taking place each year.

5.10.2. Various other sporting and active events take place across East Ayrshire, such as the annual 'Roon the Toon' 10k race in Kilmarnock, the Cairn Table Hill Race at Muirkirk, and the 'Darvélo' cycling event in Darvel.

5.11. **Cultural Venues and Experiences**

5.11.1. Scotland's Visitor Survey for 2023 found that 50% of all visitors to Scotland visited a museum or art gallery during their trip.

5.11.2. East Ayrshire is home to a range of cultural venues for the use of both local communities and visitors. The Dick Institute (Kilmarnock) contains a museum with permanent

collections, galleries and regularly changing exhibitions. Dean Castle Country Park hosts events such as Illuminight, battle re-enactments at the castle, and also has event spaces for hire. The Palace Theatre and Grand Hall (Kilmarnock) is currently undergoing major renovation and refurbishment works, and upon reopening it will offer an enhanced programme of theatre, music and comedy experiences for all age groups. The regeneration of the Palace Theatre is a landmark project, combining repairs to the historic fabric of the building with an innovative extension to the frontage to create a unique state-of-the-art venue which will bring major performance events to Kilmarnock.

- 5.11.3. Reflecting the area's industrial, agricultural, religious and literary history, East Ayrshire has several local heritage museums, which include The Baird Institute, Cumnock Heritage Centre, the Burns House Museum in Mauchline, the Doon Valley Railway Museum, Lochgoin Covenanters Museum, and the Stewarton and District Historical Society Museum.
- 5.11.4. East Ayrshire also has a strong historical association with football – Kilmarnock Football Club, founded in 1869, is the oldest club in the Scottish Premiership, and the former Glenbuck Cherrypickers Football Club (commemorated at Glenbuck Heritage Village) is renowned for beginning the careers of around fifty professional footballers, including famous Liverpool manager Bill Shankly.
- 5.11.5. Several of East Ayrshire's libraries and community, leisure and cultural venues are managed by East Ayrshire Leisure Trust (EALT), a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation which has been in existence for around 12 years. Some of the key venues and attractions managed by EALT are: Annanhill Golf Course; Ayrshire Athletics Arena; The Baird Institute; Burns House Museum and Library; Burns Monument Centre; Cumnock Town Hall; Dean Castle and Country Park; The Dick Institute; Leisure Centres (Auchinleck, Barony, Doon Valley, The Galleon, Grange, Loudoun, Stewarton and St Joseph's); The Palace Theatre and Grand Hall; The River Ayr Way; and Rose Reilly Sports Centre.

5.12. **Sustainability and Regeneration**

- 5.12.1. Sustainability is an intrinsic part of both the national and regional tourism strategies, with the focus being on welcoming visitors while also ensuring that there are no negative consequences for nature, communities, and the climate. The location of new tourism development and the modes of travel through which it can be accessed, is a key element of ensuring long-term sustainability.

- 5.12.2. In addition to being sustainable, the tourist sector has the potential to be regenerative and to bring new life and vibrancy to places and spaces.
- 5.12.3. With its proximity to Glasgow, its relevance to national history (including connection to Burns) and mix of towns, villages and countryside, East Ayrshire is well-placed to attract an increasing number of visitors. At the same time, policies which could encourage the visitor economy to grow should also be designed to ensure that local communities benefit from this growth.

5.13. Placemaking and Public Art

- 5.13.1. Public art plays a significant role in placemaking and positively reinforces the local sense of identity in streets and public spaces. Examples of public art in East Ayrshire include a series of gable-end murals, with portraits of prominent local figures Lady Ann Livingston Boyd and Robert Burns on the corners of Titchfield Street and Strand Street in Kilmarnock town centre, the mural depicting Sir Alexander Fleming in Darvel, and the lace-themed murals in Newmilns to represent the town's weaving heritage.

5.14. Creative Spaces for Communities

- 5.14.1. There are many community-led creative spaces and art programmes available in East Ayrshire. Some examples are set out below.
- 5.14.2. CentreStage, based in the former Kilmarnock Academy building on Elmbank Drive, at the edge of Kilmarnock Town Centre is a performing arts venue owned by registered charity CentreStage Communities Ltd. The charity works with other public, private and third sector organisations to provide inclusive arts programmes to members of the local community with the dual purpose of allowing individuals to realise their creative potential and fostering social connection. The activities on offer include acting and theatre classes, choirs, dance troupes and writing groups.
- 5.14.3. Take A Bow – located on Dunbar Drive, Kilmarnock – is a multi-use community facility operated by a SCIO (Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation) which also specialises in performing arts and youth development.

5.14.4. Cumnock's Creative Arts Hub (previously Barrhill Community Centre) provides space for community groups and is home to the local musical theatre society CAMPS (Cumnock Arts Make People Smile).

6. Implications for Proposed Plan

6.1. Local Development Plan 3 will be required to continue to support the sustainable growth of tourism in East Ayrshire, and to align with the objectives of the national and regional visitor economy strategies.

6.2. Some key issues to address in the proposed plan include:

- Ensuring that new development will protect and promote East Ayrshire's existing assets, including cultural and creative venues and key features of the historic and natural environment. In addition to their value to visitors and local communities, the contribution of these assets to placemaking and identity should also be recognised as part of LDP3's place-based approach.
- Supporting the growth of the tourism industry in a sustainable manner, by guiding new tourism development to sustainable locations and including visitor traffic flows in decision-making around transport planning and traffic management.
- Identifying opportunities to harness the regenerative potential of the visitor economy and retain visitor spending in Ayrshire, such as through supporting the growth of small businesses in tourism-related sectors (including food and drink) and encouraging the growth of the accommodation sector. This objective is interlinked with other priority areas for the plan – town centre regeneration, and strategic economic development (for example Ayrshire Growth Deal).
- Enabling and encouraging the creation of public art through planning and providing guidance to assist developers in producing buildings and spaces with high-quality and distinctive design features.

7. Data Sources

7.1. The sources of data used by East Ayrshire Council to analyse the Tourism, Culture and Creativity topic are set out below:

Dataset	Source	Reason for use	Links to Evidence
Nomis Labour Market Profile for East Ayrshire - Office for National Statistics	ONS	Statistical data on the local labour market	Nomis – Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics
Scotland Visitor Survey 2023	Visit Scotland	Survey data on the Visitor Economy in Scotland	Visit Scotland – Scottish Tourism Statistics & Research VisitScotland.org
SLAED Indicators Framework Report 2022-23	SLAED, Improvement Service	Economic Benchmarking Data for East Ayrshire and other SLAs	SLAED Indicators Framework Report 2021-22
Understanding Scottish Places – Scotland's Towns Partnership	STP	Online tool providing profiles on Scotland's towns	https://www.usp.scot/
Ayrshire and our Islands Visitor Economy Strategy	Ayrshire Regional Economic Partnership	Regional tourism strategy	https://www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/Resources/PDF/A/ayrshire-and-our-islands-visitor-economy-strategy.pdf
Scotland Outlook 2030: Responsible Tourism for a Sustainable Future	Scottish Government, Scottish Tourism Alliance	National tourism strategy	https://scottishtourismalliance.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Scotland-Outlook-2030.pdf
Scotland Outlook 2030 Tracker (March 2025)	Scottish Government	Update on progress towards visitor economy goals	https://www.visitscotland.org/binaries/content/assets/dot-org/pdf/research-insights/scotland-outlook-tracker.pdf

Industry Statistics	Scottish Government	Economic statistics for industry sectors in Scotland	https://www.gov.scot/publications/industry-statistics/
East Ayrshire STEAM Report June 2025	STEAM – Global Tourism Solutions	Data Report on the Tourism Industry in East Ayrshire	https://www.globaltourismsolutions.co.uk/steam-model/
Visitor Attractions Monitor – Moffat Centre	Glasgow Caledonian University	Visitor data from Scotland's tourist attractions	https://www.gcu.ac.uk/research/researchcentres/moffatcentre/visitor-attraction-reports/visitor-attraction-monitor

8. Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

8.1. Local Development Plan 3 Early Engagement

8.1.1. Early engagement for Local Development Plan 3 has been designed around the Place Standard tool, with a public survey asking East Ayrshire residents about the aspects of their 'Place' that they feel positively about, or where they feel there may be areas for improvement. Although the survey is ongoing and analysis of the responses has not yet been undertaken, some initial feedback has indicated that people in East Ayrshire value their existing cultural venues, and would like to see more events for communities and visitors alongside regeneration and promotion of towns and villages.