

Hostelling Together

Protecting the future of affordable and sustainable tourism for all

January 2021





Who are Hostelling Together?

We are a group of hostel providers and represent the UK's national associations as well as independent SMEs. We have come together because of the extraordinary circumstances that hostels find themselves in.

YHA (England & Wales)
yha.org.uk

Independent Hostels UK
independenthostels.co.uk

Hostelling Scotland
hostellingscotland.org.uk

Scottish Independent Hostels
hostel-scotland.co.uk

**Hostelling International
Northern Ireland**
hini.org.uk

For further information please contact Hostelling Together Secretariat Anita Kerwin-Nye.

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Case for Support

Hostelling is uniquely hit by COVID-19. We are grateful for support – particularly furlough, business support, SEISS and government grants for charities. We will continue to use available support but many hostels have not been able to claim since spring 2020; and remain unable to claim over the winter.

However, the very nature of hostelling – and its place at the core of affordable and sustainable tourism – is at risk.

Hostelling sits at the centre of the sharing economy. It is a core part of the green movement and will play an important part in the nation's recovery; connecting people to each other, to their communities and to nature.

The core of this ask is for £6.57m to provide additional support to independent SME and charity-run hostels to move through the winter period. This recognises the additional challenges of running a hospitality venue that is based upon the very principle of sharing.

Hostelling Together, in Figures¹

28,903

beds

3 million

people reached per year

a combined turnover of

£81m

three

major charities

over 400

microbusinesses
and SMEs

¹ As a collective, we represent 657 hostels. We recognise that others - such as commercial providers - may fit into the hostel category, yet these figures relate only to the members of Hostelling Together.

What is Hostelling?

Hostelling is a movement recognised across the world as:

- core to the sharing economy
- at the centre of sustainable tourism
- an enabler of affordable holidays and travel

A hostel (also known as a bunkhouse, backpackers, camping barn or field/outdoor centre) provides affordable, welcoming accommodation for families, solo travellers, couples and groups. Guests can usually choose from a mix of shared dormitory rooms and private rooms. Likewise, toilets and showers may be shared or private.

Hostels are different from all other accommodation providers because they have an emphasis on communal living, shared facilities and the low cost of an overnight stay. Facilities such as shared kitchens, dining rooms, and lounges give guests the opportunity to meet others staying in the hostel. Drying rooms for outdoor gear, gardens and storage for bikes are also shared.

The ability to book a bed in a shared dormitory or a family room, and the provision of self-catering facilities, makes the cost of a healthy outdoor holiday accessible to people with a wide range of incomes.



The Impact of COVID-19 on Hostelling

Hostelling has been hit by COVID-19, as the rest of the hospitality sector has.

However, losses run disproportionately higher than the rest of the sector (upwards of 80% revenue 2019/20) and the path out to a new normal trading (2020/21 and into 22/23) is likely to be longer and more challenging.

As with the wider sector this is a combination of:

- being closed by government guidance
- having to reduce available stock because of government restrictions
- reduced trading when open; even when open, hostels are likely to run at a loss

Why is Hostelling Additionally Affected?

While the rest of hospitality has been able to open, government guidance specifies that the shared kitchen and dormitories, vital to hostels, have to remain closed. While holiday cottages and hotels have been able to open as holiday cottages and hotels, hostels have had to reopen as something that they are not designed to be.

Hostelling is based on sharing. The reduction of stock availability caused by government bans on shared kitchens, dorms and other shared spaces has meant our capacity to trade is dramatically less than the hotel and cottage hire providers of the accommodation sector.

While furlough, business grants and grants available to charities have – when combined with hostels own actions on redundancies, cost reductions and repurposing/developing new services – mitigated this, there is still a substantial risk to the hostelling movement.

There is a challenge over winter as hostels are particularly reliant on multi-household group trade at this time of year and currently have no trade at all. When combined with a reduced income from summer 2020 this makes the financial effects of COVID-19 devastating. A third of SME hostels are unlikely to survive until spring.

What is the Risk for Hostelling?

A third of SME and microbusiness hostels do not expect to be here by the 2021 season unless there is additional support.

All Hostelling Together members are having to reconsider what our services are in a context of ongoing COVID-19 restrictions. This includes selling or repurposing hostels and the rooms within them – losing many of the shared spaces that connect communities and make hostelling both affordable and green.

This will have a direct impact on affordable accommodation – particularly for families and young people.

Given that hostels are, in the main, in rural areas including National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty this will have a direct impact on the stated intent to connect people to nature and to open access to countryside spaces. There will be a particular impact on those from poorer backgrounds who already access these areas the least. Often the hostel is the only budget accommodation in these areas meaning this loss has impact on income brought into the wider local community.



What we are asking for:



We are grateful for current support. We are asking for an additional £6.57m* to reflect the specific risks to hostelling and its evidenced contribution to sustainable tourism and affordable travel. This is c.£10,000 per hostel and would allow hostels to survive through winter and to continue to make investments in adjusting their service offer to meet ongoing restrictions.

Going forward:



For the Hostelling Together coalition to meet with government Tourism Ministers in each of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to talk through the specific concerns of hostelling and how we can work together on next steps.



To work with governments on a road map (shared across the four nations) that allows hostelling to reopen with shared kitchens, shared dorms, shared spaces and shared bathrooms that balances health and economic requirements.



Options for funding for additional adaptations that maintain the principles of hostelling in a world where COVID-19 and other infectious diseases will be with us for years ahead.



Promotion of hostelling as a route to sustainable tourism and affordable travel as part of both tourism agenda and wider recovery plan.

*This figure reflects an ask above existing support. It is based on analysis of coalition members' positions. While we represent much of the hostelling community – particularly the micro businesses, small and charitable providers – we recognise that others may need support and this figure would need to be increased to reflect this.