

# Environmental Impact Assessment

## Visitor Levy in Gwynedd

### 1. Introduction and Context

Cyngor Gwynedd is considering the introduction of a Visitor Levy on overnight stays in eligible visitor accommodation within the county's boundaries, in accordance with the Visitor Accommodation (Register and Levy) Etc. (Wales) Act 2025. The levy is intended to support a sustainable visitor economy, providing a dedicated source of income to invest in communities overwhelmed by tourism, local infrastructure and the natural and built environment.

This assessment focuses specifically on the potential environmental impact of introducing the levy, taking into account both positive and negative impacts, as well as mitigation and consolidation measures.

### 2. Objectives of the Assessment

The main objectives of the Environmental Impact Assessment are:

- To identify the potential impacts of the Visitor Levy on the natural and built environment in Gwynedd.
- To assess the extent to which the levy could contribute to managing visitor pressure and improve the sustainability of destinations.
- To recommend measures to mitigate any negative impact and maximise potential environmental benefits.

### 3. Description of the Visitor Levy

It is proposed that the levy will be charged per person, per night, on overnight stays in registered accommodation. A standard rate and a lower rate are set out for certain types of accommodation such as campsites and hostels, with some exceptions, including young people under the age of 18 in lower rate accommodation.

The income raised is expected to be retained almost entirely locally, and invested for the benefit of communities, businesses, visitors and the environment.

### 4. Environmental Baseline

Gwynedd is home to a wide range of environmentally sensitive assets, including:

- Areas of outstanding natural beauty and landscapes of national importance.
- Fragile ecosystems subject to seasonal pressures due to high numbers of visitors.
- Historic towns and villages where over-tourism can affect the quality of the living environment and built heritage.

The Council's documents already recognise that these pressures need to be managed in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of Gwynedd's visitor economy.

997 Gwynedd residents responded to the Gwynedd Residents' Questionnaire: Views on Tourism in 2025, noting the following responses relevant to the Environment:

- 42.9% believe that tourism has a positive influence on the environment and nature
- 28.9% believe that tourism has a neutral influence on the environment and nature
- 26.1% believe that tourism has a negative influence on the environment and nature
- 31.4% believe that tourism has a negative influence on the cleanliness of public spaces
- 31.6% believe tourism has a negative influence on litter
- If a Levy were to be established in Gwynedd, priority would be given to Environmental Schemes from the choice of potential investment areas (Environmental/Community/Culture and Language/Infrastructure/Destination Management).

## **5. Potential Environmental Impacts**

### **5.1 Positive Impacts**

The introduction of a Visitor Levy could generate a number of environmental benefits, including:

- Better management of popular destinations, by investing in infrastructure such as paths, waste facilities and sanitation facilities.
- Investing in landscape conservation, biodiversity and natural heritage, mitigating damage resulting from over-tourism.
- Encouraging more sustainable tourism, by shifting the focus from growth in numbers to the value and quality of the visitor experience.
- Improving the public transport links offer to locals and visitors.

The proposed use of the income to improve the local environment has been highlighted in the Council's presentations and papers on the levy.

## 5.2 Potential Negative Impacts

There may be some negative impacts or indirect risks, including:

- Changes in visitor patterns, which could shift pressure towards less-prepared areas if visitors are looking for cheaper options.
- A risk that a slight reduction in the number of visitors could lead to indirect economic consequences, with potential implications for continued investment in environmental management if income is not clearly ring-fenced.

In addition to the impacts noted above, there is a risk that the introduction of a Visitor Levy on overnight stays could reinforce some inappropriate tourism behaviours, if not implemented alongside appropriate control and enforcement measures. Specifically:

- A potential increase in unauthorised wild camping, particularly in environmentally sensitive areas, which can lead to:
  - Damage to natural habitats and biodiversity.
  - An increase in waste, human excrement and water pollution.
  - Additional pressure on footpaths, common land and protected sites.
- Illegal parking of motor homes and camper vans overnight, especially on narrow lanes, in coastal areas and near popular destinations, with the following consequences:
  - A negative visual impact on the landscape and natural heritage.
  - Blocking access for local residents, emergency services and agricultural activity.
  - Additional pressure on local facilities not designed for overnight stays.
- A risk that some visitors, in attempting to avoid the costs of registered accommodation, may move towards unregulated types of stays, undermining the aims of the levy in terms of:
  - Creating a more sustainable visitor economy.
  - Ensuring that visitors contribute fairly to the costs of managing and maintaining the environment.
- These problems have already been recognised as part of the wider discussion about tourism management and visitor pressure on Gwynedd's communities, and without appropriate intervention they could increase as a result of unintentional behavioural changes.

## **6. Mitigation and Enhancement Measures**

In order to reduce negative impacts and reinforce environmental benefits, it is recommended:

- To earmark a certain proportion of the levy income for environmental projects and destination management.
- To regularly monitor the impacts of the levy on visitor flow and environmental pressures, adapting policies if necessary.
- To work in partnership with local communities, environmental organisations and the tourism sector to ensure investments target the areas of greatest need.
- To use the levy income on designated motor home parking schemes, improved enforcement and management, and sustainable camping infrastructure where appropriate.

The intention to establish local governance and partnership arrangements has already been identified in the policy work related to the levy.

## **7. Conclusion**

The assessment shows that the Visitor Levy in Gwynedd has the potential to have a significant positive impact on the environment, provided that the income collected is strategically and transparently invested in destination management and the protection of natural assets.

With appropriate mitigation measures, it can be ensured that the levy contributes to a sustainable visitor economy that protects the environment for the benefit of present and future generations.

It is intended to adapt this assessment to reflect any specific issues raised during the formal consultation period.