

Guidance for:

# Àirigh - Highland Motorhome Stopover Sites

## Introduction

With a rise in the number of motorhomes coming to Highland in recent years, there has been an increased interest in the provision of continental style “Aires” in Highland. The rough Gaelic equivalent for Aire is Àirigh – a shieling – so this name has been adopted for a Highland network of such sites. The Highland Council recognises the demand from motorhome owners for small, simple and low-cost opportunities for short stopovers that can complement the full service offer available from Caravan and Camping sites. As this also presents a business opportunity for communities or private landowners, this guide is intended to give a basic introduction to what can be provided with the minimum of legislative constraints. However, it is important to note that no separate legal definition of an “Àirigh” or “Aire” currently exists, so this guidance is based on existing legislation relating to planning and licensing of caravan and campsites and when or where any exemptions exist.

## Temporary Covid-19 related exceptions

Scotland’s Chief Planner wrote to Local Authorities in spring 2021 to confirm the Scottish Government’s ongoing commitment to **a temporary relaxation** of planning controls thereby allowing Local Authorities to exercise their discretion in certain circumstances that could help businesses operate during the pandemic. One specific example was the opportunity for Local Authorities to consider the temporary use of appropriate locations for overnight stops in motorhomes without formal planning permission where this was considered safe and reasonable.

The Highland Council took a constructive approach to the application of this relaxation so as to both support businesses and to address some of the visitor pressures during the 2021 season. This temporary relaxation of planning control has now been extended until September 2022 – in part to recognise ongoing business challenges but also to allow time for operators to seek planning permission as **planning permission will be required to operate after September 2022.**

As not all proposals will necessarily be deemed appropriate, anyone interested in undertaking such a development should contact the planning service for guidance on whether or not it can proceed under the temporary relaxations (unless one of the existing 3 or 5 vehicle exemptions described below applies). To get further, free guidance from planning officers please submit an enquiry to [PlanningTechnical@highland.gov.uk](mailto:PlanningTechnical@highland.gov.uk) and a planning officer will contact you to discuss your proposal.

Anyone who is currently operating an overnight stopover site and who wishes to continue to do so beyond September 2022 is therefore encouraged **to lodge a formal application for planning permission as soon as possible to allow the application to be determined before the end of the relaxation period in September 2022.**

Applications and guidance notes on how to submit a planning application can be found [here](#)

Anyone who operates a Motorhome Stopover Site is also required to have a caravan site licence (unless one of 3 or 5 vehicle exemptions described below applies). Applications and information on site conditions can be obtained by contacting Environmental Health at [envhealth@highland.gov.uk](mailto:envhealth@highland.gov.uk)

## Providing parking for up to 3 vehicles

An existing exemption to the need to obtain planning permission applies, beyond the current temporary relaxation of planning control referred to above, when all of the following apply:

- The property is an agricultural holding/registered croft which is a **minimum of 2 acres**
- A **maximum of three** caravans (or motorhomes) are permitted at any one time
- Caravans / motorhomes are only allowed on site between **1st April and 30th September** (although you can apply to operate a temporary site for a longer period using the **temporary Covid exemptions** above).
- No excavation, or other engineering works, including the siting of temporary structures are to be carried out.
- Additional services such as electricity, fresh water and waste disposal do not have to be supplied but see separate section on this below for further guidance.

## Providing parking for up to 5 vehicles

In other cases, motorhomes can be parked on land without the need to obtain planning permission provided the site is classed as a "**certified location**" by a recognised organisation. These sites are commonly only available to members of the certifying organisation who will also promote your facility to their members.

**Recognised national organisations authorised to certify locations** in Highland are: -

- [Camping and Caravanning Club](#)
- [Caravan and Motorhome Club](#)
- [The Motor Caravanners' Club](#)

To apply to operate a site for 5 vehicles without certification by one of those organisations you would need to contact the planning service about doing so using the temporary Covid exemptions above.

## Planning a larger or permanent development?

More detailed information regarding larger scale developments is available in a separate document available from the Highland Council. The Highland Council encourages and welcomes the opportunity to provide advice before you formally submit a planning application. Please contact the Planning Service through our [pre application advice service](#)

## Additional advice

### Safety

Any safety hazards must be thoroughly assessed before caravans /motorhomes are allowed on site. For example, areas such as deep water, falls from height, derelict buildings or other structures etc. must be considered. In some cases, it may be necessary to fence areas off or otherwise put in place safety measures to minimise the risk to visitors. Consideration must be given to children being on site.

### Water

Providing fresh water is a service that may be expected by many visitors and so is an element to consider even if not legally required for the specific development planned. In particular those with a private water supply should note there is a requirement to have it tested. Further information on water supply requirements can be found on the [Drinking Water Quality Regulator for Scotland website](#) or on the [Highland Council website](#)

### Electricity

Although not essential, electrical hook-ups may be expected by some visitors.

### Waste & recycling

The opportunity to dispose of waste and / or recyclables will be expected by many visitors. Most crofts, farms etc. will have a commercial waste contract in place that could be used to offer this but the Council can provide further advice on [business waste collection](#) where this is not the case.

### Water supply and waste water

If you plan utilising the existing public water and foul drainage network you should also contact [Scottish Water](#) for advice on its suitability. For some small-scale sites, facilities for the disposal of wastewater may not be necessary but for others this will be the biggest challenge and needs to be addressed prior to any other considerations. The more detailed [Campervan and Motorhome Waste Disposal Guidance](#) document provides comprehensive advice on this matter.

An increasing number of standalone waste disposal points have recently been provided, with more being added all the time while some commercial campsites also make their facilities available to

non-residents. The Council & partners have compiled a list of these which can be seen on the [Campervan & Motorhome Professional Association \(CAMPA\) website](#) and so, in some cases, the availability of a nearby location may be a suitable alternative to onsite provision.

Whatever the services provided (or not provided) all operators should be clear as to what is provided in any marketing materials so as to manage visitor expectations.

## Useful links

[Business Gateway](#) – The Highland Council run business advice service. They can provide free advice on aspects such as starting your business, growing your business, taking on staff & accessing finance.

[Highland Council Planning pages](#) – More detailed advice, guidance and links regarding planning permission.

[Scottish Water](#) - Advice for business customers on water supply and waste facilities.

[Scottish Environment protection Agency \(SEPA\)](#) – guidance on waste and waste management.

[Campervan & Motorhome Professional Association \(CAMPA\)](#) – the trade body for the Scottish motorhome hire sector. They provide guidance on rules and good practice advice to hirers and other motorhome users on aspects such as driving a motorhome, overnight stays and waste disposal.

[VisitScotland Camping and Caravanning research](#) – Research from VisitScotland including occupancy rates and patterns. Largely based on formal caravan & campsite visits but includes useful intelligence about the sector.

[Pitchup Facts & Figures](#) – Commercial booking website with a useful section containing statistics on the sector across the UK.

[Campaign for Real Aires \(CAMpRA\)](#) – A group campaigning greater provision of more facilities such as the Àirigh the Highland Council are encouraging. Their website includes useful guidance and case studies for providers of these stopovers.