



Visitor Management Plan 2022

Plana Stiùireadh Luchd-tadhail 2022

December 2021
An Dùbhlachd 2021

Background

Cùl-raon

Sustainable tourism is one of Scotland's key growth sectors identified in the Scottish Government's Economic Strategy and is the Highlands' most important industry generating significant economic benefits for all areas of Highland. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic tourism had seen years of consistent growth so that by 2019 Highland's 7.5m visitors generated:

- £1.13Bn of direct spend by those visiting the area.
- a further £265m of indirect expenditure by the tourism industry purchasing local goods and services
- over 25,000 jobs (including the self-employed)

With both lockdowns and wider travel restrictions in 2020 and 2021 overall numbers were significantly impacted but many areas of Highland and some business sectors did see a rebound in numbers during summer 2021. However, in addition to the benefits those visitors brought, numerous challenges were evident in both 2020 and 2021 notably in some of the more popular areas including the Isle of Skye, Glencoe & Glen Etive, West Lochaber, the Glenmore corridor in the Cairngorms and parts of the North Coast 500. Other areas, while not seeing the same overall numbers, did still see similar impacts at certain locations as visitor numbers were high in relation to the carrying capacity or infrastructure available in those areas.

Following the first COVID-19 lockdown there was a sudden rebound in tourism numbers as pent-up demand and barriers to overseas travel saw large numbers of UK residents holidaying in the UK. As a typical year sees around twice as many UK residents travelling abroad as come to the UK from other countries, the continued restrictions on overseas travel in summer 2021 saw this repeated with the Highlands again becoming one of the most popular destinations in the UK. Unlike 2020, a greater number of businesses did reopen to visitors, but some restrictions remained – for example some campsites still only accepted motorhomes with self-contained facilities and not smaller vehicles or tents. This in turn led to continued high numbers of wild camping in tents and informal camping in motorhomes with associated pressures on things like public toilets, waste facilities, the environment and neighbouring communities - particularly in some of the "hotspot" areas.



Visitor Management

Stiùireadh Luchd-tadhail

In their guidance on sustainable tourism, UNESCO stresses that managing visitor movements and influencing visitor behaviour are critical aspects of developing sustainable tourism. By managing visitors, a destination can minimize the negative effects on the host community and maximize the

opportunities for them to benefit. From the visitor's perspective, it is not about controlling or spoiling the visitor's experiences but rather it is about creating a good experience for them. In successful destinations, this is achieved through planning to ensure the visitors are well informed, efforts are made to influence when they go there, and what they do there, and a suitable range of facilities and services are provided for them.

At a destination level (and this can be anything from Highland to an individual community within Highland) this will require contributions from a range of partners. Influencing the time that a visit takes place will depend in part on the marketing activities of VisitScotland, destination organisations, local tourism groups and individual businesses. Similarly, the amount and quality of information provided by those organisations as well as by third party providers like travel websites, guidebooks and social media groups can have a significant impact on visitor behaviour.



Finally, the range of facilities and services provided will also depend on the actions of a variety of partners. Many services such as accommodation, visitor attractions or travel and transport services and infrastructure such as some car parks or overnight stops for motorhomes are provided by the commercial sector. Paths and other infrastructure used for leisure purposes or to access natural attractions may be provided by NGOs and public or private landowners and other infrastructure or services such as public toilets, parking and waste facilities are commonly provided by local authorities or communities themselves. Effective visitor management in any given location or destination is likely to require partners in all those sectors to contribute.

The Highland Council's role

Dreuchd Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd

While The Highland Council may provide some commercial services and may assist others who undertake marketing activity, those are not core Council roles, so the Council's activity is largely focussed on the provision of some of the underlying infrastructure and associated services as well as on informing and educating visitors on good practice. While some strategic tourism planning and much of the engagement with businesses and business groups is undertaken by tourism officers within the Council's Economy team, most of the services provided directly to visitors are delivered by various teams across different Council Services as described below.

In order to address some of the challenges seen in summer 2020 an officer group was set up and tasked with producing a Visitor Management Plan for Highland Council services for 2021. This plan was approved by the Council's Tourism Committee in spring 2021 and guided activity throughout the summer season using the additional £1.5m of Council funding set aside for additional Visitor Management activity. The initial expectation was that the plan would continue to evolve to support visitor management in the years beyond and this plan for 2022 has therefore been developed using the evidence and experience gained during the 2021 season. As was the case in 2021, the plan focusses largely on service delivery rather than capital investment in tourism infrastructure. While it is recognised that new or improved tourism infrastructure has an important role to play, this need is being addressed through a complementary piece of work to produce a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan.

Particular challenges to be addressed by this plan

Dùbhlain sònraichte ris an cuirear aghaidh sa phlana seo

While the summers of 2020 and 2021 undoubtedly saw communities across Highland face several challenges, many of these were not new, but were an escalation of issues already being experienced to some degree in other areas or in previous years. Some others were, however exacerbated by the circumstances at the time. Informal camping is one such example with increased numbers due to a variety of factors including restricted capacity, “party camping” by people who would typically have holidayed overseas or attended events such as music festivals that didn’t take place in 2020 or 2021. Many of the activities from the 2021 Visitor Management Plan, most notably the operation of a team of Access Rangers but also the provision of additional waste bins and collections, increased public toilet availability and waste disposal facilities for motorhomes helped address many potential problems but some issues remain, and the recent successes can only be maintained with continued investment in those services.

During the 2021 season the team of Access Rangers collated a vast amount of data as to what was happening at various sites. This evidence has been used to inform both members of the Tourism Committee and relevant officers who held a Visitor Management Planning workshop in autumn 2021 in order to prioritise activities for 2022. Based on this evidence, the key challenges that continue to need addressed are:

Roads, Parking and Transport issues

- Insufficient capacity on some narrow rural and single-track roads to cope with large numbers of vehicles, sometimes exacerbated by large motorhomes causing congestion.
- Inefficient use of passing places in part due to missing passing place signage.
- Insufficient parking provision in tourist hotspots leading to safety issues - parking congestion, obstruction of the carriageway, and inappropriate use of laybys.
- Limited public transport provision to tourist hotspots.
- Inappropriate overnight parking in non-designated areas.
- Parking on soft verges causing damage to verge and road edges.
- Community intolerance of large visitor volumes and behaviour leading to inappropriate responses e.g. erection of signage, barriers across some public roads, introduction of roadside hazards such as boulders/rubble/logs on the verge or in lay-bys.



Amenity and Waste issues

- Limited awareness of Council operated public convenience facilities and Comfort Schemes available.
- Inappropriate use of public toilets; disposal of chemical waste, increased water consumption due to topping up of motorhome containers.
- Lack of suitable motorhome waste disposal facilities.

- Existing bin volume / numbers in key locations not coping with high volumes of waste - including that being disposed of by wild campers or those informally camping in motorhomes who are not using commercial campsite waste facilities.
- Littering and other unauthorised waste disposal issues including those at popular wild camping spots.



Outdoor Access issues

- Informal camping and associated anti-social issues: fires, litter, toilet, noise.
- Cumulative effects where large numbers of informal campers congregate, or usage of a location is particularly frequent.
- Lack of awareness of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code by newcomers to the countryside.
- Increased pressure and erosion on popular paths and locations used for informal camping.
- Landowners and communities trying their own solutions which can disperse the problem to other sites – including non-compliant signs or obstructions.



Environmental and Public Health issues

- Informal camping leading to public health issues with human waste.
- Outdoor toileting and risk to private water supplies.
- Investigating fly-tipping and taking enforcement action.

Public information



- Limited awareness of good practice and guidance such as the Scottish Outdoor Access Code by visitors not traditionally undertaking or familiar with that type of holiday.
- Limited promotion of some key services e.g., locations of public toilets or motorhome waste facilities.
- Dissemination of unhelpful and sometimes inaccurate information – particularly on social media.

Additional visitor management activity undertaken in 2021

Nithean a bharrachd a rinneadh gus luchd-tadhail a stiùireadh ann an 2021

As described above the last two summer seasons saw some particular challenges and various activities were undertaken to try and address these using the £1.5m allocated. This included:

- Improved passing places and lay-bys, road signage improvements, road verge protection and road traffic orders to help address parking issues.
- Installation of charging at a number of visitor dominated car parks.
- Employment of 17 new seasonal Access Rangers to promote responsible behaviour, help manage visitors and undertake small scale remedial action at pressure points. Including 1 site based Ranger at Chanonry Point for 10 weeks
- Increased provision of comfort schemes and investment in public toilet improvements Increased bin capacity and additional collections at key visitor sites.
- Financial support towards additional waste disposal services for motorhomes including a grant scheme for commercial providers to allow waste disposal by non-residents.
- Initial work to provide a public motorhome waste disposal unit at Latheron Car Park in Ullapool – initial work under way but final delivery now due for the 2022 season.
- Promotion of the network of disposal sites and of good practice to motorhome owners.
- Production of a guide to planning and licencing requirements to encourage the development of small-scale overnight stopovers for motorhomes.
- Enhanced bus service to key visitor sites on Skye.
- Joint activity with the Cairngorms National Park Authority to address parking and related issues around Glenmore.



Proposed actions for 2022

Gnìomhan gam moladh airson 2022

Activity		Indicative budget
Roads management		
Road management and small-scale improvements		£240,000
Signage	Passing place signs/ road signs/ variable message signs	
Verge maintenance	Verge protection/ edge strengthening/ marker posts	
Lay-by improvements	Roadside parking/ lay-by improvements	
Project officer	Technical support/ project officer	
Traffic Management	Parking orders/seasonal restrictions	

Parking management	
Managing visitor usage of Council car parks 2022/23	£160,000
Invitation to pay	Phase II of invitation to pay rollout at 17 car parks (£18k)
Overnight stops for motorhomes	Introduction of a short stay (max 24hr) overnight parking option – initially at 11 car park locations (£22k)
Chanonry Point	Improve passing places for vehicle and pedestrian safety. (£25k)
Motorhome parking - Inverness	Daytime motorhome parking provision in conjunction with harbour trust. (£10k)
Cemetery Car parks	Incorporate 100 Cemetery Car Parks into the Off-Street Traffic Regulation Order to limit stays and ban all overnight parking in Cemetery Car Parks. (£50k)
Increased Enforcement Resource	2 posts, Ullapool & Mallaig to be sustained on Fixed term Contracts until 31 st March 2023 – summer costs to be met from VMP budget; any winter costs to be met by service budgets. (£35k)
Public Transport	
Provision of public transport (including park & ride) to tourist hotspots	£110,000
Enhanced public transport provision in Skye, Lochaber and Cairngorms	Building on 2021 experience of shuttle buses from Portree to popular scenic locations in Skye, develop these services further, and apply a similar approach around Fort William and in the Arisaig/Mallaig area. Enhance bus frequency between Aviemore and Glenmore in partnership with CNPA.
Promotion of bus services and ticketing scheme(s)	Promotion of bus services through development of tourist-oriented transport publicity and a multi-journey or multi-operator ticketing scheme. To include dedicated web-based publicity, supplemented by printed publicity, to promote public transport to tourist hotspots. Co-ordinate ticketing schemes where more than one operator is involved.
Access Rangers	
Seasonal Access Rangers	£350,000
Seasonal Rangers	Employment of 14 seasonal rangers (2 of which Senior) for 6 months to promote responsible behaviour (litter, parking, fires, dogs) with possible enforcement. To include weekend and evening work to address informal camping issues. Costs also include staff training and end of season reporting / debriefing.
Winter Rangers	Continue employment of 4 of the seasonal rangers above over winter 2022/23 to maintain and improve visitor sites, core paths and continue community and landowner liaison.
Ranger Manager	Employ a Ranger Manager to manage, supervise and co-ordinate the team, the data collated and the co-operation with other agencies
Volunteer Rangers	Work with local communities to establish and train a local volunteer warden scheme to assist with monitoring and liaison with visitors.
Peak season rangers*	Employ 6 site-based Rangers for 4 months at hotspot locations such as Durness, Arisaig and Chanonry Point.
Information Ranger*	Employ 1 Information Ranger for 4 months at North Kessock Ranger Base to provide in person information to visitors, social media monitoring and other communications
Ranger Base*	Upgrade & Improvement of North Kessock Ranger Base

Site Improvements	Visitor Site improvements and installing and maintaining temporary signage and other communications on safe and considerate visits to the countryside.	
Site monitoring	Monitoring the use of countryside car parks, roadside parking and informal camping.	
* Total cost of delivering this activity is £500,000 with an anticipated £150,000 - £200,000 being bid for from NatureScot. Those activities marked with a * will proceed only if this is successful.		
Public Toilets		
Public toilet improvements and additional comfort schemes		£190,000
Comfort Schemes	Supporting additional Comfort Schemes (£20k)	
Charging	Installation of additional charging schemes (£50k)	
Improved facilities	Hand driers to be installed in all facilities (which don't already have them) to improve service and reduce vandalism issues (£20k)	
Improved facilities	Minor improvement works to bring sub-standard facilities up to an acceptable level - painting, new taps, replacement consumable holders etc. (£100k)	
Waste Management		
Enhanced Seasonal Waste Service		£220,000
Increased Service - seasonal staff	Employing 9 seasonal waste staff & providing hired vehicles (May – Oct) to provide an increased frequency for emptying litter bins and to keep known hotspot areas clear of litter and refuse. The enhanced service will also include additional weekend working. £195k	
Materials	Additional litter bins, bin stands and stickers. £25k	
Motorhomes		
Improved provision and promotion of services for motorhomes		£55,000
Additional motorhome waste disposal points	Support the provision of publicly available motorhome waste disposal points by communities or as an addition to other appropriate developments. (£50k)	
Motorhome waste disposal points	Production of signs (to new Transport Scotland approved design) to direct users to public waste disposal points. Installation to be undertaken during routine visits where possible to minimise additional costs. (£5k)	
Communications		
Promotional activity, public information and guidance		£15,000
Online promotional materials	Production of social media animations / banners to help push good practice messaging. (£2k)	
Promotion of guidance for motorhome visitors	Production and distribution of a dedicated flyer and electronic equivalent giving good practice guidance and details of motorhome waste disposal sites. To be circulated by rangers, through business groups, online and via social media groups. (£1k)	
Online activity	Online promotional activity including paid social media posts around key behavioural messages – in particular as a way of addressing immediate concerns at hotspot locations. (£7k)	
Increased dissemination of good practice guidance	Dedicated officer time to more proactively distribute national good practice messaging both to visitors and to others who engage more directly with visitors such as destination organisations and NC500.	

online and through partners	Additional local activity as required. Support for the Information Ranger detailed in Access Ranger section above (£5k)	
Other activities		
Joint initiative with Cairngorms National Park Authority to improve visitor management in Glenmore corridor (£100k), including PC provision (£60k). Additional phases; innovation ongoing with CNPA and FLS.		£160,000
Partner Engagement		
Engagement with other partners involved in visitor management		costs met from existing budgets
National Visitor Management Strategy	Continued engagement with national visitor management strategy groups where Highland Council is Local Authority representative.	
Highlands & Islands Strategic Visitor Management Group	Continued engagement with the existing Highlands and Islands Local Resilience Partnership and Visitor Management Groups involving Police Scotland Scottish Fire & Rescue and other Local Authorities. Activities to include helping share information and provide consistent messages to the visiting public.	
Local Delivery Groups	Continued engagement with 3 sub-regional Visitor Management Operational Groups (VMOGs) that lead on delivery of activities. Continued engagement with existing partnerships including: - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Trust for Scotland - Glencoe & Glen Etive. • Member/ local representative group for Arisaig / Morar area 	



Project and activity details

Mion-fhiosrachadh pròiseict is dèanadais

For each of the areas of activity outlined above more detailed plans and contract specifications are developed by the Council Service responsible for their delivery. These are designed to complement this more strategic plan by incorporating elements such as locations, designs, level of provision or frequency of service which are not an appropriate level of detail to include here.

This approach of compiling a strategic plan with more detailed project or service elements developed at service level also allows a more dynamic approach to be taken where circumstances change as the season progresses thereby necessitating changes to be made quickly in response to changing demand or opportunities.

Projects under way during 2021

Pròiseactan a thathar a' gabhail os làimh ann an 2021

In addition to the visitor management plans described, numerous capital projects have been completed during 2021 or are under way with funding from other sources. These are expected to be completed during spring / summer 2022 and will contribute to the delivery of many of the visitor management initiatives described above.

Visitor related infrastructure projects expected to be ready by spring / summer 2022 include:

- Wick public toilets
- Helmsdale public toilets
- Dornoch visitor parking
- Balintore waste disposal unit
- Tain Rose Garden public toilet improvements
- Cromarty motorhome site and facilities
- Kinlochewe waste disposal unit
- North Kessock motorhome parking and waste disposal unit
- Inverness motorhome waste disposal unit
- Foyers public toilets
- Fort Augustus waste disposal unit
- Uig Fairy Glen parking
- Staffin Kilt Rock parking extension
- Dunvegan Coral Beach parking
- Elgol toilets parking and waste disposal unit
- Isle of Eigg public toilets
- Ardnamurchan Point parking and visitor facilities
- Glen Nevis parking improvements
- Duntelchaig & Dalcrag off-road parking barriers
- Strathy off-road parking barriers
- Toigal Beach access
- Gruinard Beach access
- Ceannabeinne Beach access
- Oldshoremore Beach access
- Gairloch Beach access

Appendix

Frequently Asked Questions

Ceistean Cumanta

Can the Highland Council introduce byelaws to ban wild camping?

No! Wild camping is a legitimate activity under access rights within the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. Proper wild camping should be well away from buildings, roads and not within enclosed fields. It should only be done considerately, for a maximum of 3 nights and leave no trace (including from fires). Roadside camping, out-with the road boundary, is acceptable if done responsibly. Dirty camping often contravenes other existing legislation

Why not install Portaloo's to meet high demand in summer?

We have considered this, however, although appropriate for short term e.g. event use where staff are always around, there are many reasons why portaloo's are not an appropriate option for the Council to install and service as longer-term facilities. There is currently no budget for the hiring and emptying of these units and portaloo's also require regular checking and emptying and the Council team does not have the capacity to be able to do this.

There are further concerns around managing their cleanliness and infection control as they require different cleaning (products and regimes) and have bespoke consumables which the Council does not use. There are also additional risks associated with the operating of portaloo's such as people becoming locked in, the unit becoming unstable or wind causing damage such as doors coming off, all of which deem the provision of portaloo's untenable.

Will Highland Council close or restrict access to some single track or cul-de-sac roads in busy periods?

This is a process that needs to be implemented by a temporary Traffic Regulation Order that must satisfy certain criteria and may not be appropriate for all routes. We must also consider the requirement for residents to access their properties and closure may not be achievable.

Why does the Council not use a clearway order to prevent cars, motorhomes etc. parking on certain stretches of road?

While this is a legal possibility, a clearway can be a blunt way of addressing the problem and can cause unintended consequences as it prevents all forms of stopping on that stretch of road. This could restrict visitor activities such as stopping to take a photograph as well as local people going about their regular businesses – e.g. a local activity operator / guide stopping to offload a canoe near the shore or a farmer stopping to feed livestock. It may however be an appropriate solution in some places where alternative parking or access is available or where other forms of access such as public transport, park and ride or active travel options are provided.

Can the Highland Council introduce a permit system for motorhomes and campervans?

Current legislation does not give Local Authorities the powers to charge users of certain types of vehicles from accessing their areas or their roads unless through traffic orders so a permit system cannot be used. Some work has been undertaken around introducing a tourism levy (tax) on visitors and the Council's response to the Scottish Government was that visitors in motorhomes should be levied in the same way as those using other forms of accommodation. Once this legislation is passed a permit system may be a way of motorhome users paying their share of any levy.

Why not have long term parking fees at all council car parks, especially for overnight parking?

This is worth considering but must address local and non-visitor usage and how that may impact on local communities. There are also legal and planning considerations if the Council is allowing land designated for parking to be used for any other purpose such as "camping" by motorhomes. However, the introduction of more paid for parking can generate vital income that can be used to invest in wider infrastructure improvements for communities effected by visitor activities. A programme of consultation is under way about locations where this approach may be suitable.

Can Countryside / Access Rangers carry out parking enforcement activity?

Technically yes, however they would require to be identifiable from their uniform as Parking Enforcement Officers and would require suitable accreditation for the role.

Will the Council empty car park litter bins more frequently in summer?

The Council will provide a seasonally enhanced litter bin emptying service; however this may not always prevent litter bins from being full. People are encouraged not to leave waste beside a full bin, it will cause litter contamination to the wider area.

Will litter be picked up by refuse collection staff, if not by who?

Litter around bins will be cleared by refuse collection staff but wider litter issues will require to be cleared by other cleansing staff. To help keep areas clear, People are encouraged not to leave waste beside a full bin.

Can the Council install more motorhome waste disposal points?

The Council is considering how this can be done effectively and efficiently. Guidance on regulations regarding wastewater, chemicals and planning is being produced for private providers and communities. The Council is also considering which public toilets could have extra facilities constructed to take wastewater where they are connected to the mains sewer. Standalone non-connected facilities would require daily monitoring which the Council cannot commit to. The Council is also financially supporting a number of community run facilities and will continue to do so in 2022 where appropriate.