#### **AGENDA ITEM 9**

Agenda Item	4	
Report No	TC-04-21	

#### HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Tourism Committee

Date: 21 April 2021

Report Title: Highland Council Visitor Management Plan

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

#### 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides Members with a final draft of the Highland Council Visitor Management Plan. This is the culmination of meetings of officers from various services that have dealt with issues and complaints regarding the challenges supporting the increase of visitors to the Highland area last summer.

#### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
  - i. Approve the final draft of the Highland Council Visitor Management Plan for 2021;
  - ii. Note the information outlined by each Service in the appendices that gives additional detail on the initial range of activities to be undertaken for the 2021 season; and
  - iii. Agree that where further activities are required that need an immediate solution.

#### 3. Implications

- 3.1 Resources The resources required for the group to meet and to produce of the draft plan have been met from the relevant Services budgets. The implementation of some solutions has associated resource requirements that have been agreed at the Council budget meeting on 4 March 2021. Some investments in new facilities such as public conveniences or motorhome waste facilities could have ongoing revenue funding requirements, and these will need to be considered by the service concerned.
- 3.2 Legal There are no legal implications arising directly from this report. However, existing legislation and Covid requirements are used in resolving many of the issues identified in this report. The cross-service group has considered any new legislation or national guidance affecting the Council or other public bodies with a role to support tourism and environmental protection.

- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) implications Tourism benefits communities through being a major part of the Highland economy and through helping sustain local facilities and services. Projects designed to address some of the issues described would be expected to produce positive benefits for communities as well as for visitors. Place-based community engagement is also deemed critical in resolving the issues in the Plan.
- 3.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever There are no Climate Change / Carbon Clever implications arising directly from this report, but a number of the potential projects likely to be proposed, should they be undertaken, would help reduce climate change impacts. Many of the visitors to the Highlands are vehicle-based and the Plan does attempt to reduce the environmental impact of these visitors by reducing vegetation damage and active travel opportunities
- 3.5 Risk There is a risk that without a visitor management plan the challenges and issues felt last season will be repeated this year.
- 3.6 Gaelic There are no Gaelic implications arising directly from this report. However, in keeping with agreed Council policy there would be a Gaelic element to projects subsequently undertaken as a result of being identified in this plan.

#### 4. Background to Visitor Management

- 4.1 Visitor Management in this report refers to the increasing numbers of visitors to the Highlands. Volume tourism creates pressure on the existing infrastructure at visitor attractions, beauty spots, towns and villages, and increasingly rural roads, remote glens and trail heads where visitor numbers have often not created issues previously.
- 4.2 Last summer, after a quiet spring due to Lockdown, COVID-19 travel restrictions caused large numbers of people to holiday in the UK with particular increases in certain types of tourism, e.g. campervan/motorhomes, informal camping, short breaks and day trippers. Recent announcements regarding the removal of domestic travel restrictions and the reopening of tourism businesses while overseas travel is expected to remain curtailed suggest similar interest in Highland during summer 2021. The fact that the initial reopening will not be during school holidays as in 2020 may lead to a less abrupt increase but it is still appropriate that preparations are made for the anticipated effects that this reopening will have.

#### 5. Highland Council Visitor Management Plan

5.1 The Highland Council's Visitor Management Plan has attempted to recognise the issues that occurred due to the increased numbers of visitors to the Highlands and their activities. A copy of the draft plan that outlined the headline areas of activity was presented to this committee at their meeting on 17 March 2021. Since then officers have continued to meet and a number of meetings have been held with Members at a local level to develop some of the details on what activities would be delivered for each of the subject areas identified. A comprehensive presentation will be given to Committee setting out the latest position. In addition, detailed discussions are underway in every Ward through the programme of Ward Business meetings, and feedback is being collated. An update on progress with this will be given at the Committee meeting.

- 5.2 Some minor changes have been made to the more strategic element of the plan to produce a final draft. However, in order to ensure the plan remains dynamic and can respond to issues or opportunities that may arise during the summer season a series of appendices to the main plan have been produced by the key Council Services involved. These describe in more detail some of the activities that will be delivered to contribute to the overall aims of the plan and, as they are produced at individual service level they can be more easily and quickly adapted where circumstances require this. In particular, the discussions at ward level and in local resilience groups will be integrated into these appendices as the tourist season continues. A copy of the final draft of the Visitor Management Plan along with the more detailed appendices are attached as **Appendix 1** to this report.
- 5.3 In order to further improve this plan, the Council has begun to engage with public sector partners and other interest groups. This is intended to continue and establish a wider visitor management group. In producing this plan there will be a need to take on board the views of a variety of stakeholders including tourism businesses and communities affected.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

Date: 16 April 2021

Author: Colin Simpson, Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism & Film



# Visitor Management Plan 2021 Plana Stiùireadh Luchd-tadhail 2021

Final Draft
Dreachd Dheireannach

April 2021 An Giblean 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 a number of 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)

However, in addition to the benefits those visitors brought, a number of challenges were becoming evident in some of the more popular areas. Notable examples of this were the Isle of Skye, Glencoe & Glen Etive, West Lochaber, Loch Ness and the Glenmore corridor. Many other areas, while not seeing the same overall numbers, did see similar impacts as visitor numbers were high in relation to the carrying capacity and infrastructure available in those areas. Notable examples of this included destinations along the North Coast 500 such as Applecross, the Gairloch area, Assynt and Durness.

Following the first lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, 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. Concerns about virus transmission led to rural areas which were seen to have plenty of space and a low incidence of the disease seeing far greater demand than

cities. The Highlands was no exception, quickly becoming one of the most popular destinations in the UK. At the same time many businesses and some infrastructure were not available or at least not with the same capacity as previously and this meant many of the challenges seen in previous years were even more evident in summer 2020. Some areas also saw new challenges as for example visitors unfamiliar with camping and the behaviour expected took up informal camping in tents or visited in motorhomes.



## 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 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 should be 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 tourism activity 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 tourism and visitors come from a number of teams across different Council services.

In order to address some of the challenges seen in summer 2020 a visitor management group was set up and while initially seen as a short life working group a decision was taken in autumn 2020 to continue with this cross-service working group. In particular this group was tasked with producing a Visitor Management Plan for Highland Council services for 2021 with the expectation that the plan would continue to evolve to support visitor management in the years beyond.

This Visitor Management Plan is the result of that groups efforts. The plan focusses on service delivery rather than tourism infrastructure. While it is recognised that new or improved tourism infrastructure will have an important role to play, this will need capital funds and will require different regulatory processes to be gone through first, so this is considered a longer-term aim. A separate and complementary Tourism Infrastructure Plan is being developed with some longer-term ambitions and in time this may be able to be combined with this Visitor Management Plan to form a single Visitor Management strategy. However, in view of the more pressing need to

address some challenges for summer 2021, current activity is concentrated on the production of and subsequent delivery of the services in this Visitor Management Plan.

# Particular challenges to be addressed by this plan Dùbhlain sònraichte ris an cuirear aghaidh sa phlana seo

While the summer of 2020 undoubtedly saw communities across Highland face a number of 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 some sites being closed or having 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. The particular challenges this plan seeks to mitigate are a mix of those that have become apparent in recent years as well as some of those more specific to 2020 in recognition of the fact that 2021 is still likely to see some of the restrictions seen in 2020 e.g. reduced levels of overseas travel. The key challenges to be addressed are:

#### **Roads, Parking and Transport issues**

- Insufficient capacity on some narrow rural and single-track roads to cope with large numbers of vehicles; large motorhomes/campervans causing congestion
- Insufficient parking provision in tourist hotspots leading to safety issues parking congestion, obstruction of the carriageway, and inappropriate use of laybys
- Parking overnight in non-designated areas
- Parking on soft verges causing damage to verge and road edges
- Community tolerance 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 placement of boulders/rubble/logs on the verge or in lay-bys



#### **Amenity and Waste issues**

- Lack of 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
- Littering and other unauthorised waste disposal issues



#### **Outdoor Access issues**

- Informal camping and associated anti-social issues; fires, litter, toilet, noise, overuse and congregating
- Landowners and communities trying their own solutions which can disperse the problem to other sites including non-compliant signs or obstructions
- Lack of awareness of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code by newcomers to the countryside
- Increased pressure and erosion on some popular paths
- Limited numbers of Countryside Rangers available to provide advice and guidance or monitor visitor hotspot pressures

#### **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 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 2020 Nithean a bharrachd a rinneadh gus luchd-tadhail a stiùireadh ann an 2020

As described above the 2020 summer season saw some particular challenges and a number of activities were undertaken to try and address some of these. However, the immediacy of some issues, lack of preparation time and Covid related restrictions did limit what could be done with limited notice. Some of the key activities undertaken were as described below, and these form a useful start points for defining what might be done for the 2021 season and beyond.

- Production of a Community and Business guide giving guidance on reopening.
- Investing £60,000 in increased bin capacity and collections at key tourism sites. Support was given to some community litter patrols
- Amenity Services were able to work quickly to open all public toilets
- Access team provided Scottish Outdoor Access Code advice when requested
- Roads teams implemented temporary 'No parking' measures
- Parking regulation signs and officer engagement
- New car parks partially opened
- Engagement with stakeholders, Members and local representatives



# Proposed actions for 2021 Gnìomhan gam moladh airson 2021

	Indicative budget			
Road management and improvements				
Improved passing places and lay-bys, road signs, road verge protection, road £280,00				
traffic orders				
Passing places and lay-	Replacement of damaged or missing Passing place signs and some road			
bys	strengthening			
road signs	Additional advanced warning signs where required			
road verge protection	Strengthening and marker posts			
traffic orders	Additional restrictions such as clearways and waitin address safety concerns	ng prohibitions to		
Any other activity	Liaising with stakeholders about additional parking			
Parking management				
	dominated car parks. Improved signs & regulation. e collection & enforcement.	£250,000		
Parking charge	A list of approximately 21 sites is to be considered by t	he E&I committee		
schemes	for early intervention with further sites to be propos	ed in longer term		
	rollout	Ü		
Parking Enforcement	Employment of 4 additional temporary Parking Enforce	ement Officers for		
Officers	12 months with a view to fund permanent posts fi			
	income in future years			
Parking enforcement	Review of regulations & improved enforcement	/ liaison with		
	enforcement agencies			
Signs	Upgrade of Car Park signage and information for users	;		
Access rangers				
New seasonal access ran	gers	£300,000		
Promotion of	10 x seasonal ranger posts to promote responsible bel	naviour and		
responsible behaviour	possible enforcement (litter, parking, fires, dogs). Red	uce the amount		
	of, and damage from, open fires, littering and outdoor	toileting. Posts		
	to include weekend and evening work to address infor	mal camping		
	issues.			
Partnership working	Ranger team to work in co-operation & co-ordinate wi	ith communities,		
	land managers and other organisations, such as Highli	fe Highland,		
	NatureScot, Forestry & Land Scotland, National Trust f	or Scotland and		
	Nevis Landscape Partnership to arrange joint or overla	pping patrols &		
	monitoring and ensure consistent messaging. Working	g with Police &		
	Fire services.			
Monitoring and	Monitor the use of countryside car parks and roadside	parking.		
maintenance	Monitoring informal camping and related issues. Ranger activity to			
	include minor improvements to, and maintenance of, countryside sites			
	& paths.			
Work with volunteers	Work with local communities to establish and train a leading to the stable of the stab			
	warden scheme to assist with monitoring and liaison with visitors.			

Public Transport				
Enhanced bus services £60,000				
Enhanced bus service -	Bus services from Portree and, if feasible, Broadford to visitor sites on			
Skye	Skye to run for three peak months. Timetables to be defined but will be			
	designed to provide new routes and/or enhance frequencies when buses			
	are not committed to school journeys. These would include a park & ride			
	provision to reduce car traffic to congested locations. Fares income to			
	defray some costs. Dedicated publicity would be produced.			
Promotion of bus	Development of tourist-oriented transport publicity a	nd a multi-journey		
services	or multi-operator ticketing scheme.			
Bus Partnership Fund	Bus Partnership Fund bids to Transport Scotland are b	eing prepared for		
bid	infrastructure provision which will enable improved	bus services, with		
	the specific target of reducing congestion. One bid w	vill be focussed on		
	tourist-related services covering Skye and the Cairngo			
	and can include quick wins (for completion in 2021/22			
	projects. This will include adding bus stop / turning facilities to planned			
	car park provision where relevant, as well as park & ride sites.			
Other activities				
	gorms National Park Authority to improve visitor	£125,000		
management in the Glen	more corridor.			
Partner Engagement		-		
Engagement with other p	Engagement with other partners involved in visitor management costs met fro			
		existing budgets		
National Visitor	Continued engagement with national visitor managen	= -		
Management Strategy	group where Highland Council is Local Authority repre			
Highlands & Islands	Establishment of a Visitor Management Partners gro	•		
Strategic Visitor	Highlands & Islands area - evolving from the existi	•		
Management Group	Islands Local Resilience Partnership Visitor Manageme			
	Police Scotland Scottish Fire & Rescue and other			
	Activities to include helping share information and p	provide consistent		
1 15 11 6	messages to the visiting public.	1 1.		
Local Delivery Groups	Formation of 3 sub-regional groups in Highland to act as a delivery arm			
	of the Local Resilience Partnership Visitor Management Group –			
4.0	anticipated to be one for each Police Scotland Area Command.			
	Continued engagement with existing neutroushing including			
	Continued engagement with existing partnerships including: - National Trust for Scotland - Glencoe & Glen Etive.			
	Members and local representatives in the Arisaig/ Morar /Mallaig area.			
	Additional partnerships will be added as required			
	Additional partiferships will be added as required			



# Project and activity details Mion-fhiosrachadh pròiseict is dèanadais

For each of the areas of activity outlined above more detailed plans are being developed by the Council Service responsible for their delivery. These plans are designed to provide more details on aspects such as locations, level of provision or frequency of service, but also to be more dynamic plans than this strategic document. This is intended to allow changes to them to be made quickly in response to changing demand or opportunities that arise. The more detailed delivery plans for each area of activity are included as appendices to this document.

# Projects under way during 2021 Pròiseactan a thathar a' gabhail os làimh ann an 2021

In addition to the visitor management plans described, a number of capital projects have been completed during winter 2020/2021 or are under way that are expected to be completed during spring / summer 2021. By providing new and improved tourism infrastructure these will provide further support to ongoing visitor management.

Those new projects that will be ready during the 2021 season are: -

- Lochinver motorhome waste disposal
- Falls of Shin motorhome parking and waste disposal
- Brora motorhome waste disposal and signage
- Golspie, tourism signage
- Dornoch visitor parking; phase 1
- Tain Rose Garden public toilet improvements
- Invergordon Shore Road laybys to support cruise sector
- Cromarty motorhome site and facilities
- Rosemarkie public toilet improvements
- Cromarty and Nigg; new ferry slipways
- Uig Fairy Glen parking
- Staffin, Quiraing parking
- Staffin Kilt Rock parking extension
- Storr new public toilets, motorhome waste disposal and additional parking
- Dunvegan Coral Beach parking
- Portree car park extension and motorhome facilities
- Bealach na Ba layby/viewpoint improvements
- North Kessock motorhome parking and waste disposal unit
- Inverness motorhome waste disposal unit
- Isle of Eigg public toilets
- Mallaig public toilets
- Glenfinnan footbridge linking the new car park to the viaduct viewpoint
- Corpach, Fort William Puffer Pier slipway
- Fort Augustus Car Park extension



#### **Members Briefing Note**

#### Title: Visitor Management – Seasonal Access Rangers

Date: 30th March 2021

A VERBAL UPDATE WILL BE GIVEN AT COMMITTEE ON FURTHER PROGRESS.

#### **Background**

As a result of a particularly busy summer season in 2020, a need for staff to engage with visitors to the Highlands has been recognised. The use of Rangers dealing specifically with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code is a proposed solution. These differ from the Highlife Highland Countryside Ranger team which have a wider remit, have no presence in some busy areas and were on furlough in 2020 and will only be part-time in 2021 with limited capability.

Visitor numbers have been steadily increasing over many years but the situation caused by Covid 19 has increased issues with irresponsible access and created a number of anti-social issues related to informal camping, such as; overcrowding, dirty camping, bad parking, littering, fires, damage to trees, outdoor toileting and overflowing bins, creating resentment from local communities and land managers. The Council received numerous complaints and there are high expectations in many areas that Highland Council will assist communities and land managers in dealing with the problems.

These new posts will liaise with other services & partners and take a co-ordinated approach to visitor management particularly in honeypot sites. They will be the eyes and ears of the Council and report back to relevant services. This briefing provides Members with details of Outdoor Access team's response to the anticipated high numbers of visitors to Highland in 2021. The planned Outdoor Access tourism action contributes to a cross-service Visitor Management Plan that was detailed at the Tourism Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

#### **Seasonal Access Rangers**

The Rangers will;

- Engage face-to-face with visitors to explain and encourage the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.
- Monitor visitor use, impacts & incidents and reporting on a weekly basis.
- Speak to informal campers to explain responsible access and leave no trace
- Reduce the number of open fires by explaining the impacts which cause damage to vegetation and alarm to residents and improve awareness of risks and how to mitigate the if fires are used
- Reduce the amount of litter by encouraging visitors to take home what they bring. They will also collect it when it has been left and report large quantities. They may also issue fixed penalty notices if appropriate
- Encourage responsible parking and prevent obstructive parking. They will assist with parking enforcement if necessary.
- Liaise with communities and landowners when issues arise, working together on solutions. Establish local volunteer rangers to assist in busy periods
- Improve and maintain the council owned or managed countryside sites
- Improve and maintain some of the most heavily used paths particularly to popular natural visitor attractions

#### Deployment

The new Access Rangers will cover the following areas;

Skye

- West Lochaber
- North West Sutherland (Assynt to Tongue)
- Caithness & N Sutherland (Tongue to Whalligoe)
- SW Ross including Lochalsh (Glenelg to Gairloch)
- North West Ross (Gairloch to Assynt)
- East Sutherland & E. Ross (Nigg to Helmsdale\_
- Inner Moray Firth (Black Isle, Mid Ross & Nairn)

The priority has been to fill in the gaps in Highlife Highland Countryside Ranger team, which also coincide with popular visitor areas and THC managed sites. I have then considered what other Rangers are available in an area, internally I have asked the Long Distance Routes rangers to extend their remit to cover visitor sites close to the Great Glen Way and West Highland Way. The Cairngorms National Park, Forestry & Land Scotland, Naturescot, National Trust for Scotland, John Muir Trust and Nevis Landscape Partnership are employing extra rangers this season.

Eight posts will be recruited for 6 months and two posts will also be recruited for four months. The 2 x 4 month posts will be assigned to areas assessed to have most need with some consideration of the location of the best candidates. **A senior post** will collate monitoring information, advise the team and deal with day-to-day management issues. The shorter period for two posts is to address a budgetary issue on grading.

#### Other areas of high visitor pressure;

- Glens Coe & Etive- covered by 3 NTS rangers and volunteers. West Highland Way Rangers will patrol on Mondays, Fridays & occasional weekends.
- **Glen Nevis** covered by 2 Forestry and Land Scotland rangers, John Muir Trust staff, Jahama Estates staff and NLP applying for funding (poss.4 posts)
- Loch Ness covered by 2 FLS rangers, the Great Glen Way Rangers will patrol on Mondays, Fridays & occasional weekends. New Inner Moray Firth Ranger will include Dores. VILN applying for ranger funding
- Cairngorms National Park- covered by CPNA ranger team 8 seasonals, now recruiting 4 permanent posts.

I am assisting with applications to Naturescot's Better Places 2 fund for rangers which may also become part of the THC team, in the following places;

- Skye Connect- 2 posts
- The Applecross Trust 1 post
- Visit Inverness/Loch Ness- 1 post

#### Training

West Highland College is putting together a short programme on appropriate topics derived from their 6 month ranger training course. An enquiry has been made to Learning & Development Team for the 'Dealing with challenging behavior' course. They will be given training on Litter prevention & FPNs by Keep Scotland Beautiful. The Access Officers will deliver a course on the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

#### **Equipment**

Each ranger will be provided with a van with 'Ranger' livery, smart phone, tool kit, bin bags, gloves, water tub. They will be provided with an identifiable uniform and we are considering body cams.

#### **Contacts**

They will be provided with contact numbers for appropriate Council staff, i.e Access officers, Parking enforcement, Waste operatives, Dog Wardens, Roads and Amenity Services. They will also have contacts

for local Police, Fire Service and other organisation's Ranger services. They will work with Highlife Highland rangers for ½ day per week.

#### **Area Access & Countryside Sites Contacts**

Area	Name	Email	Phone	
Main Contact, plus Philip Waite		Philip.waite@highland.gov.uk	07818 588214	
Ross & Skye				
Caithness &	Matt Dent	matt.dent@highland.gov.uk	07825 116480	
Sutherland				
Inverness, Nairn &	Stewart Eastaugh	stewart.eastaugh@highland.gov.uk	07884 752289	
Lochaber				
Countryside sites	Alastair Stewart	alastair.stewart@highland.gov.uk	07825 117647	

#### **Members Briefing Note**

Title: Visitor Management - Waste

**Date:** 19<sup>th</sup> of March

#### **Background**

After lockdown restriction were lifted in 2020, areas experienced unprecedented levels of visitor numbers during the summer period. The environmental problems most commonly experienced within communities were directly attributable to certain types of tourism, e.g. campervan/motorhomes, informal camping, short breaks and day trippers. Problems included overflowing bins, areas that were heavily littered, fly-tipping and all types of mess connected to dirty camping. The problems were well reported throughout last year. Although the expected visitor numbers for this year are not certain, it is reasonable to expect a further increase in 2021.

This briefing provides Members with details of Waste Management's planned response to the anticipated high numbers of visitors to Highland in 2021. The planned Waste Management tourism action contributes to a cross-service Visitor Management Plan that was detailed at the Tourism Committee on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 2021.

#### **Enhanced Service**

The enhanced service will be achieved through a combination of providing larger 1100 litre bins with lid design to reduce the risk of fly-tipping and a larger number of smaller 240/360 litre litter bins. The bins will be both general waste and where possible recycling bins. The bins will be clearly marked with information on responsible waste disposal. There will be increased bins and/or an increased frequency of collection within all Highland areas with focus on areas of high risk locations.

The most significant element of the response will be the use of 8 seasonal staff. The 8 additional staff will be operational between May and September. The staff will use pick-up vehicles to exchange full litter bins and through an increased frequency of service, keep the hotspot areas clear of litter and refuse. The staff will be mobile and will cover areas where they are most needed, the anticipated base of the additional seasonal staff is set out below:

- North West Coast Base is Lochinver
- West Base is Ullapool
- Lochcarron
- Portree
- Brora/Golspie
- Fort William
- Aviemore
- Inverness Loch Ness areas

#### **Volunteer Community Clean-ups**

A positive response to the tourism problems experienced in 2020 was the noted increase in volunteer community led litter picks. The number of requests from Community Groups to carry out litter picks has remained encouraging into this year. The Council will support as much as possible any group wishing to carry out a clean-up of accessible public areas and open spaces. Groups can request litter-picking sticks,

bags and arrange for the waste to be collected by the Council after the event. Area Waste Management Officers are the point of contact for Community Groups:

#### **Area Contacts**

Area	Name	Email	Phone
Caithness	Kenny Gow	Kenny.Gow@highland.gov.uk	01955 641284
Sutherland	Andy Shaw	Andy.Shaw@highland.gov.uk	01408 635202
R&C	Katrina Taylor	Katrina.Taylor@highland.gov.uk	01349 781810
Inverness	Mick Haymer	Mick.Haymer@highland.gov.uk	01463 644377
B&SN	Callum Mckenzie	Callum.Mckenzie@highland.gov.uk	01463 644702
Lochaber	Ian Cameron	lan.Cameron3@highland.gov.uk	01349 781126
Skye	Morag	Morag.Greenshields@highland.gov.uk	01463 644739
	Greenshields		

## **Members Briefing Note**

#### **Title: Public Conveniences**

#### Date: 16<sup>th</sup> April

- Proposal is for additional seasonal or one year comfort schemes and some additional charging as below;
- Ullapool (Ward 5) charging (including showers) one paddle gate system (cash and card) and contactless for showers (£12k for the paddle gate system, we are getting shower charging free of charge)
- Shower charging (Aviemore, Kingussie, Grantown, all three in Ward 20) £7k per site (total of £21k)

In terms of new comfort schemes, interest has been positive to date - 18 different providers out of which the following are being considered;

- Dalwhinnie service station (Ward 19);
- Salen, Acharacle (Ward 21);
- Torridon Community Hall (Ward 5);
- Canna Café (Ward 11);
- Armadale Village Hall (Ward 1);
- Traigh beach (Ward 11); site is a composting toilet therefore only eligible for amended version of the scheme;
- Rum Enterprise (Ward 11); awaiting confirmation on sites on offer, suggested two facilities in their email; propose to support one
- Staxigoe Village Hall (Ward 3);
- Sea View Hotel, John O'Groats (Ward 3);
- Altnaharra Hotel (Ward 1);
- Roybridge Hotel (Ward 11);
- Cleadale, Eigg (Ward 11); site is a composting toilet therefore only eligible for amended version of the scheme;

Agenda Item	11
Report No	CP/18/21

#### **HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

Communities and Place

**Date:** 12 May 2021

Report Title: Progress report on implementing the Visitor Management

Plan

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

#### **Purpose/Executive Summary**

1.

- 1.1 This report describes the plans for visitor management in relation to waste management and public conveniences, two aspects of the new Visitor Management Plan supported by additional one-off investment agreed by the Council in March 2021.
- 1.2 The service enhancements have been shaped by experience last year. They will continue to be shaped by ongoing engagement with local Members and communities to be responsive to issues and opportunities arising this season.
- 1.3 A verbal update from the time of writing can be provided at Committee on:
  - any new service ideas emerging;
  - any new provision secured; and
  - any issues arising from the further lifting of travel restrictions and re-opening of hospitality expected on 26.4.21.

#### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to note:
  - i. the planned operational deployment of additional resources this year of £60k for public convenience provision by growing our comfort scheme of 37 providers and investing in six of the Council's 75 public conveniences as described in paragraphs 5.5 and 5.6;
  - ii. the planned deployment of £180k for waste management through procuring and siting additional waste bins and increasing the frequency of collections in known hot spots supported by 8 new seasonal staff and supporting community litter picks as described in paragraphs 6.1 to 6.4;
  - iii. engagement with Members is underway through Ward Business Meetings and will continue throughout the season to deal with service issues and opportunities arising:
  - iv. that the service will apply for Better Places funding administered by NatureScot to enable further response;

- v. in responding to issues as they arise this could create budget pressures. To date this includes additional costs of roadside litter clearing. Any pressures will be monitored, reported and mitigated where possible and if necessary, opportunities for further investment will be submitted as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> tranche of one-off investment possible this year at the Council meeting in June 2021;
- vi. the service will contribute to the proposed Tourism Infrastructure Plan and this will include the support from the community asset transfer process and reviewing public conveniences previously regarded as surplus to requirements or unaffordable to improve/repair;
- vii. the service will continue to contribute to partnership and resilience meetings throughout the season; and
- viii. the Environmental Health team will continue to support business in the tourism sector and in their Covid compliance.

#### 3. Implications

#### 3.1 Resource

In 2020 an additional £60k was invested in enhancing the waste service to respond to high visitor numbers from July to October.

- The Visitor Management Plan (VMP) considered at the Tourism Committee on 21.4.21 outlines how the one-off resource agreed by the Council in March 2021 for 2021/22 will be deployed, namely: road management and improvement (£280k); parking management (£250k); access rangers (£300k); public conveniences (£60k); waste management (£180k); motorhomes facilities (£200k); public transport (£60k); and other joint activities (£125k).
- This report focuses on resources for public conveniences and waste, managed in the Communities & Place (C&P) service. Potential further resources may be available through Better Places Funding administered by Naturescot to help alleviate tourism pressures. The service is currently developing bids for additional comfort scheme provision and additional roadside litter picking for the next round of applications in May 2021.
- 3.4 Responding to new service demands out with the planned investment may lead to new budget pressures. These will be monitored throughout the season and included in any financial monitoring for Members along with any planned mitigation. Flexibility will be required to respond to new issues arising and if necessary, opportunities for further investment will be submitted as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> tranche of one-off investment possible this year at the Council meeting in June 2021.

#### 3.5 Legal

The Council does not have a statutory responsibility to provide or operate public conveniences and there are no specific legal obligations to provide litter bins. The relevant duty for waste is contained within the Environmental Protection Act 1990, Section 89 which is to ensure that all land in our direct control which is open to the air and to which the public has access is kept clear of litter and refuse, so far is practicable.

#### 3.6 <u>Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)</u>

The VMP aims to support positive visitor experience given the economic benefits to the region, and to reduce potential harms and nuisance for communities. In many locations community bodies have improved infrastructure and found solutions to support visitor management. The report highlights the need for ongoing support,

engagement and joint work with local Members and communities responding to issues and opportunities arising in-season.

#### 3.7 Climate Change/Carbon Clever

As noted in the VMP many of the visitors to the Highlands are vehicle-based and the Plan does attempt to reduce the environmental impact of these visitors by reducing vegetation damage and active travel opportunities.

#### 3.8 Risk

There is a risk that without additional public conveniences and waste facilities that the challenges and issues of anti-social behaviour experienced last year will be seen again this year. This creates a reputational risk for the Council and potentially an economic risk to the region's reputation as a desirable tourist destination.

#### 3.9 Gaelic

There are Gaelic implications for any new signage required ensuring it has bi-lingual content in keeping with the Council's policy.

#### 4. Background

- 4.1 Following the Council budget meeting in March 2021 when one-off investment for visitor management was agreed, a draft <u>Visitor Management Plan</u> was discussed by the Tourism Committee on 17 March 2021 and a <u>final draft of the plan</u> was considered at the Tourism Committee on 21.4.21. This plan highlights:
  - managing visitor movements and influencing visitor behaviour are critical aspects of developing sustainable tourism and require a partnership response;
  - the need to prepare for the anticipated effects of increasing numbers of visitors to the region and mitigate the pressures arising from volume tourism on infrastructure, beauty spots, towns and villages, rural roads, remote glens and trail heads:
  - the need to learn from the experience in 2020 when the Highlands were one of the most popular destinations in the UK;
  - the need for the plan to be dynamic, responding to issues and opportunities arising in-season;
  - the importance of place-based community engagement to resolve local issues;
  - ongoing joint work with partners including local and regional resilience partnerships; and
  - a separate and complementary Tourism Infrastructure Plan is being developed with some longer-term ambitions and in time this may be able to be combined with this Visitor Management Plan to form a single Visitor Management strategy. This will include new or improved tourism infrastructure that is supported by capital funds, including external funding.
- 4.2 The Visitor Management Plan (VMP) identifies that Council activity should be focussed on the provision of some of the underlying infrastructure and associated services as well as on informing and educating visitors on good practice. If focuses on the following issues: roads, parking and transport; public conveniences and waste; outdoor access; environmental and public health issues; and public information. Responsibilities lie with the Infrastructure and Environment (I&E) Service and C&P.
- 4.3 The C&P services within the VMP relate to:
  - public conveniences, with an allocation of £60k to increase provision of comfort schemes and investment in public toilet improvements and;

- increased bin capacity and waste collections for key visitor sites with an allocation of £180k.
- 4.4 The plans for this year build on our experience of the challenges last year when the Service:
  - was able to work quickly to open as many of the 75 public conveniences closed during lockdown, mainly due to initial staff absence on health grounds, but most comfort schemes did not re-open;
  - an additional £60k was invested in new waste bins and more frequent waste collections and street cleaning from July to October 2020; and
  - the service was involved in local discussions, partnership and Government meetings and subsequently submitting a bid for temporary infrastructure which unfortunately did not proceed.

Members too were heavily involved in contact with their constituents and MSPs and in trying to find local solutions.

- 4.5 Some challenges last year were heightened because of earlier budget reductions in public conveniences dating over three years from 2016/17, however additional budget feeds last year enabled re-opening of public conveniences on supply routes. The additional funding in 2021/22 can enhance service further.
- 4.6. The Service has other contributions to visitor management and the visitor experience. This includes:
  - the support for community asset transfers, with two long leases reported to this meeting of the Committee which would enable local community benefits including much improved public convenience provision;
  - the wider grounds maintenance and play parks service;
  - the Registration service and particularly marriages, with many couples from outwith the region choosing the Highlands as a destination for their wedding, as reported separately to the Committee;
  - the role of Environmental Health in providing support for tourism businesses as described below; and
  - community testing facilities as described below.
- 4.7 The Environmental Health Team currently play a key role in responding to the Covid 19 pandemic. In addition to being one of the appointed regulators for implementing and ensuring compliance with the Covid 19 legislative restrictions, a vital part of their work is supporting businesses by providing advice and assistance in interpreting the vast array of Covid 19 guidance that has been published. Other work has included updating website information, posting social media updates on Covid 19 guidance, undertaking compliance checks in businesses and where necessary investigating any positive Covid 19 cases to minimise the spread of infection in the Highlands.
- 4.8 Over the last 12 months the team has dealt with over 350 covid related enquiries; 300 complaints and conducted follow up investigations for nearly 400 positive cases throughout the Highlands. The team has 4 newly appointed covid compliance officers to help further support businesses and ensure the spread of infection is minimised within the Highlands. To date these officers have conducted in excess of 250 visits to business premises.
- 4.9 As the tourism and hospitality sector is such a key industry, with around 4700 food businesses in the Highlands, the officers will be focussing on this in the weeks and

months ahead to offer advice and support as businesses re-open and emerge from lockdown. Any business within this sector that is looking for Covid 19 related advice is asked to submit their enquiry to: <a href="mailto:envhealth@highland.gov.uk">envhealth@highland.gov.uk</a>.

4.10 The Council is working with NHSH to provide place-based community testing for people without symptoms. This will be focused where public health requests are made and most likely associated with any local Covid outbreaks that may arise. The Council has three mobile units and trained staff to deploy where that is required. Visitors as well as residents can attend our facilities for this service. Our community testing units will complement the universal offer of community testing expected to begin on 26ht April 2021 and the arrangements in place with travel providers to encourage anyone planning travel to the islands to order a home test kit online in advance of travel.

#### 5. VMP and Public Conveniences

#### 5.1 Current provision

The Council currently operates 75 Public Conveniences throughout the Highlands and has 37 Comfort Scheme agreements with local businesses and Community Groups. This provides an essential amenity for our residents, businesses and visitors.

- An operational restructuring of the service has resulted in the majority (59) of Council run facilities being serviced by mobile teams. This in turn has delivered improvements in the cleanliness and condition of our facilities. Facilities not maintained by mobile teams are in more remote locations, where this model of service delivery is less effective. These are serviced by individual members of staff.
- The 37 Comfort Scheme agreements with businesses and community groups are aimed at meeting demand in areas that are not served by Council run facilities. There are three levels of payment (£100, £200 or £300 per month), and these are dependent on the quality of the facilities offered. Payment for composting toilets has just been added to the scheme with a payment of £50 per month. Information on the assessment for comfort schemes, including photographs for examples of standards is attached at **Appendix 1.** Details of where comfort schemes are located and how operators can join the scheme are available on our website.
- 5.4 Additional Provision for 2021 to date (accurate at the time of writing)
  Using the additional one-off £60k resource agreed by Council, the service can increase the number of seasonal or one-year comfort schemes and invest in some of our buildings for additional charging and people counter infrastructure and some vandalism repairs.
- 5.5 Investment in our buildings is programmed for:
  - Ullapool charging (including showers) one paddle gate system (cash and card) and contactless for showers (£12k);
  - Shower charging in Aviemore, Kingussie and Grantown (£7k per site, £21k total);
  - Contributing to vandalism repairs at Muir of Ord (up to £11.7k); and
  - installation of a people counter in Dornie Hall public convenience (£1k).

Improvements in other facilities are also being considered with e.g. condition surveys underway.

- 5.6 New comfort schemes have been encouraged and at the time of writing over 20 different providers have come forward and the following are being considered;
  - Altnaharra Hotel (Ward 1);
  - Staxigoe Village Hall (Ward 3);
  - Canna Café (Ward 11);
  - Roybridge Hotel (Ward 11);
  - Cleadale, Eigg (Ward 11); site is a composting toilet therefore only eligible for amended version of the scheme;
  - Loch Ness Hub, Drumnadrochit (Ward 12)
  - Dalwhinnie service station (Ward 19);
  - Muir of Ord Hub (Ward 8)

At the time of writing the following new comfort schemes have been agreed:

- Salen, Acharacle (Ward 21);
- Traigh beach (Ward 11); site is a composting toilet therefore only eligible for amended version of the scheme;
- Ardnamurchan Natural History and Visitor Centre (Ward 21)
- Rum Enterprise; Isle of Rum (Ward 11);
- Sea View Hotel, John O'Groats (Ward 13);
- Coach House Dornoch (Ward 4) whilst Council operated PC is being upgraded with Common Good Fund monies
- 5.7 A verbal update can be provided at the meeting as more schemes are expected to have been agreed by then.
- 5.8 To contribute to the Tourism Infrastructure Plan a review of public conveniences previously identified as surplus to requirements or unaffordable to improve/repair will be undertaken. Bringing any back into use would likely require significant capital resources and consideration of sustainability, value for money as well as any community interest issues.

#### 6. VMP and waste management

#### 6.1 Waste bins

The enhanced waste service with £180k one-off resource will be achieved through a combination of providing larger 1100 litre bins with lid design to reduce the risk of flytipping and a larger number of smaller 240/360 litre litter bins. The bins will be both general waste and where possible recycling bins. The bins will be clearly marked with information on responsible waste disposal. There will be increased bins and/or an increased frequency of collection within all Highland areas with focus on locations with expected high visitor numbers.

#### 6.2 Additional waste collections

Another important service enhancement is the deployment of 8 seasonal staff. The 8 additional staff will be operational between May and September. The staff will use pick-up vehicles to exchange full litter bins and through an increased frequency of service, keep the hotspot areas clear of litter and refuse. The staff will be mobile and will cover areas where they are most needed, the anticipated base of the additional seasonal staff is set out below:

- North West Coast Base is Lochinver
- West Base is Ullapool

- Lochcarron
- Portree
- Brora/Golspie
- Fort William
- Aviemore
- Inverness Loch Ness areas

Recruitment is timed for staff to be in post for 26.4.21 when some lockdown restrictions are expected to be lifted.

6.3 The use of the additional seasonal staff will allow Waste Management core staff to focus additionally on areas not covered by seasonal work.

#### 6.4 Supporting community litter picks

A positive response to the tourism problems experienced in 2020 was the noted increase in volunteer community led litter picks. The number of requests from Community Groups to carry out litter picks has remained encouraging into this year. The waste team will support as much as possible any group wishing to carry out a clean-up of accessible public areas and open spaces. Groups can request litter-picking sticks, bags and arrange for the waste to be collected by the Council after the event. Area Waste Management Officers are the point of contact for Community Groups.

#### 6.5 Roadside litter clearing

In advance of visitors expected, the waste team has arranged special roadside litter clearing. On the weekend of the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of April, all areas of Highland participated in a coordinated road verge litter-pick. Other dates are planned, this is additional work that is not currently budgeted and may be reported as a pressure in future budget monitoring.

#### 7. A dynamic VMP and responses services

- 7.1 While we anticipate a very busy season it is not known if the enhanced service described above will be enough or best targeted for effective visitor management. Our response on public conveniences and waste management will have to adapt based on experience and with budget flexibility. As noted above any additional costs arising may need to be submitted as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> tranche of one-off investment possible this year at the Council meeting in June 2021.
- 7.2 A round of engagement with local Members is underway through Ward Business Meetings, and the majority of meetings in our 21 Wards will have taken place by the time the Committee meets. These discussions may identify further areas for enhanced services and potential joint working with community bodies. With the plans above shared for public conveniences and waste services, Member feedback will be important on whether there are any other public convenience locations to cover and any other points on waste management. Engagement will be on-going throughout the season so that services can respond and adjust as far as possible.
- 7.3 It will be important to learn as we go. The experience of the Easter weekend, when travel restrictions had not been lifted highlighted some limited issues, which included:
  - litter and mess from wild camping in several areas; and
  - increased litter and some fly-tipping in lay-by areas of Loch Ness.

- 7.4 Issues were dealt with quickly by existing staff. The additional seasonal waste management staff will help provide a quick response throughout the season to the anticipated high number of similar environmental issues. Arrangements for communication with the new Rangers team are in place to respond to issues emerging and weekly partnership forums are established to deal with cross service issues arising.
- 7.5 Travel restrictions were lifted within Scotland on 16.4.21, earlier than expected, and enabled travel for outdoor socialising, recreation and exercise. This led to partnership resilience meetings being held, operational plans put in place and local public advice communicated. The key messages were:
  - reminder that facilities for overnight stays and many other visitor facilities are not open until 26 April;
  - urging people to follow current Government advice on movement and gatherings, and to follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code;
  - particularly important as there is a heightened risk of wildfires at the moment and people are being urged not to use anything involving a naked flame; and
  - a strong reminder for people visiting beauty spots to leave no trace and also to park responsibly to allow for emergency access.
- 7.6 A verbal update of any additional pressures and responses can be provided given that it was announced on 20.4.21 that as expected, the Government confirmed that:
  - hospitality venues such as cafés, pubs and restaurants can reopen, along with tourist accommodation. Non-essential retail outlets and close contact services such as beauty salons can also reopen, in addition to indoor attractions and public buildings such as galleries, museums and libraries; and
  - all parts of the country will move to Level 3 from Monday 26 April. The remaining travel restrictions within Scotland will be lifted and travel within the UK will be permitted for any purpose.

At the time of writing the impact of these changes is unknown.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

Date: 23.4.21

Author: Caroline Campbell, Head of Performance and Resources

Alan McKinnie, Senior Waste Manager Debbie Sutton, Amenities Service Manager

Gregor MacCormick, Senior Environmental Health Officer

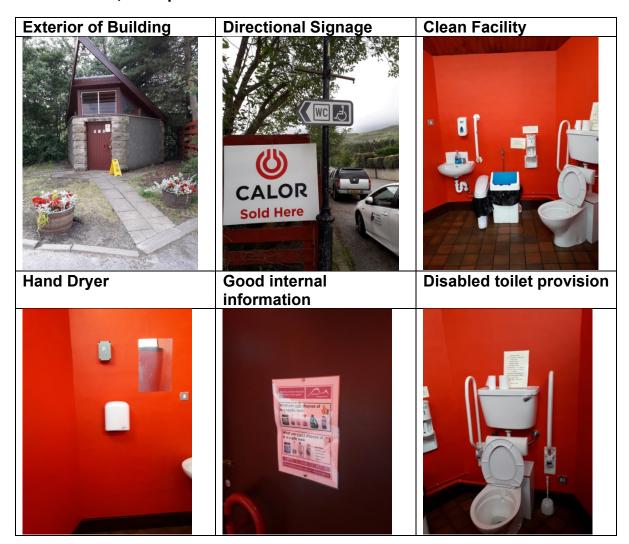
Carron McDiarmid. ECO Communities and Place

# Appendix 1

# **Comfort Scheme Scoring Matrix and Examples**

Standards Scoring	Composting Facility	Basic Standard (1)	Meets expectations (2)	Exceeds Expectation (3)
Adequate directions to the toilets for both foot and car users. (Where appropriate).	<b>✓</b>	*	<b>✓</b>	<b>✓</b>
Proper signage, both outside and inside the toilets, including name of Location, facilities available, person/authority responsible and how to contact if required and advertising the Comfort Scheme	<b>*</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>4</b>
Adequate facilities for female toilet users. (No. Of male cubicles + no. Of urinals x 2 = required no. Of female cubicles).			4	✓
Adequate hand cleaning facilities (i.e. santiser)	✓			
Single entrance Unisex toilet		*		
Hot and cold running water to wash basins in all facilities provided, with adequate provision for soap.		<b>✓</b>	✓	<b>✓</b>
Showers Provided				✓
Adequate provision for hand drying.		✓	✓	✓
Lockable toilet tissue dispensers, preferably with spare rolls/tissue.			<b>✓</b>	✓
Sanitary towel disposal units inside all ladies cubicles.			<b>*</b>	✓
Properly designed and equipped accessible toilets, to include adequate sanitary disposal facilities.				✓
Basic Baby Change Facility within Male and Female Facility			✓	✓
Dedicated and properly equipped baby change facilities in both male and female toilets, to include adult toilet Facilities and room for double pushchairs.				✓
Child/family friendly cubicles and/or family toilets, properly equipped, large amount of floor space				✓
Older child/adult fixed or height adjustable changing bench in accessible or dedicated cubicle(s).				4
Changing Places Toilet facility or similar with track hoist system, adjustable changing table, adequate space and non slip flooring				✓
Effective cleaning regime and management, to ensure proper Standards of cleanliness at all times.	✓	4	4	✓

### £100 a month, example 1:



#### £200 a month, example 2:

# Sign describing CS and other initiatives 2 Clean & maintained stalls 2 Sinks, hand dryer, mirrors, hand towels and built built careally half-amended by the first the stalls 3 Sinks, hand dryer, mirrors, hand towels and built built careally half-amended by the first the stall beautiful built careally half-amended by the first the stall beautiful bea

#### £300 a month, example 3:

