

Agenda Item	9
Report No	SCC/17/25

The Highland Council

Committee: Sutherland County

Date: 2 June 2025

Report Title: Sutherland Access Rangers CRF Funding 2024/25 Final Report

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides Members with an update on the delivery of the Access Rangers activities in 2024/25, together with a detailed Access Ranger Season report from the Outdoor Access Manager.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to **note** the information provided by the report and within Appendix 1 as the final claim to the Community Regeneration Fund for this project.

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** - The resources required to operate the Access Rangers have been provided through the Community Regeneration Fund as agreed by Sutherland Members in May 2024.

3.2 **Legal** - There are no legal implications arising directly from this report. However, existing legislation and guidance such as traffic regulations and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code are used in resolving some of the issues identified.

3.3 **Risk** – There is a risk that without the access ranger service, the previous challenges, problems and issues will return to the high levels experienced during the post Covid period. The activities undertaken during the seasons since, particularly the ability to have ‘boots on the ground’ has been recognised by both stakeholders and the Scottish Government as a key factor in mitigating those risks.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – No implications.

3.5 **Gaelic** - There are no Gaelic implications arising directly from this report. However, in keeping with agreed Council policy, Gaelic will be included in all relevant projects and communications.

4 Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is a monitoring and update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5 Introduction

- 5.1 From 2021 to 2023 The Highland Council had received funding from Scottish Government to provide an Access Ranger team to advise visitors and communities on responsible access to the countryside. This funding was discontinued in 2024. The Sutherland Area Members recognised the value of the Ranger team to their area and the support from numerous constituents. As there were significant funds in the Community Regeneration Fund unallocated after the initial process in December 2023, an application for Rangers to this fund was encouraged. In May 2024, £100,000 was allocated for an area Access Ranger team.

6 Access Rangers

- 6.1 A team of four Access Rangers were recruited and commenced on 30 May 2024. They were to cover 4 areas:-

- East Sutherland Coast;
- Assynt & Inverpolly;
- North West Sutherland; and
- North Sutherland Coast

They were equipped and trained and patrolled 3 days per week with 2 days per week to complete repairs or liaise with community interests. The Ranger for North West Sutherland resigned at the end of July. That area was then covered by two existing rangers on different days.

The report within **Appendix 1** below details the data collected by the Rangers over the summer season between June and October 2024 and compares this to data from previous years.

7 Ranger Season Headlines for 2024

7.1 In 5 months (June to Oct) the 3.5 Access Rangers visited 4,665 sites/349 patrols on 3 days per week. This is slightly up on last year's figures - 4,212 sites/410 patrols with 4 Rangers covering a larger area.

5,307 Motorhomes were seen (Jun-Oct), similar to last year's 5547, although an increase in numbers seen per patrol from 13.5 to 15.2, increase noted mostly in East of the County. Large increase in number of roof tents 196, up from 105.

Over 444 off-site tents were found throughout Sutherland. This is about 60% reduction but remains highest in west coast areas, well above pre-covid levels.

Fires are an issue in popular camping areas but are also associated with motorhomes, with 143 recorded, 10 needing to be extinguished. Fewer than last year, likely due to poor weather and increased use of fire bowls.

Outdoor toileting, 628 incidents recorded, a 40% increase this year. Frequently associated with camping but also in busy road laybys.

220 bin bags of litter were collected.

Motorhome black waste spills were similar to last year at 16 incidents.

In 5 months, over 6,091 vehicles were seen parked in car parks and roadside, with over 10,468 people observed, 3,552 people were positively engaged and informed about responsible behaviour/facilities and the area. There were 46 negative engagements. Overall, an increase in the number of people seen but fewer directly engaged.

8 Winter Season 2024/25

8.1 From November 2024 to March 2025, two Rangers were retained part-time. During this period, they undertook several maintenance tasks on countryside sites and core paths, as well as keeping in contact with community interests. The works undertaken are listed in the appendix report.

9 Community Regeneration Fund

9.1 A first claim was made to the fund in February 2025 for £86,811.52, this covered the outlay to the end of January for salaries, vehicles, equipment and materials. A final claim will be made in May 2025 for any remaining costs incurred up to a combined total of £100,000.

9.2 **Future Funding**

In March 2025 the Highland Council allocated funding for an Access Ranger team to cover the entire Highland area. Recruitment commenced in April, and we are in the final stages of appointing a team to commence on 28 May 2025. There will again be 4 Rangers covering Sutherland or a part of the County this summer. This budget is for one year and it is not yet known if this will continue into 2026.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 14 May 2025

Author: Philip Waite, Outdoor Access Manager

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 - Access Ranger Report 2024/25

The Highland Council Access Rangers

Annual Report 2024/25- Sutherland Area

1. Summary

In 2024 the Council initially employed four Access Rangers patrolling only the Sutherland area and a part-time post at Chanorny Point. Their main purpose was to encourage people to behave responsibly and to follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. They advised on other considerate behaviours in line with legislation, The Highway Code, and Highland Council policies. They also provided information on facilities and places of interest to visitors and worked with communities to minimise the negative impacts of increasing visitor numbers.

The four posts in Sutherland started on 30th May and were funded by the Sutherland Community Regeneration Fund (CRF) administered by The Highland Council. Unfortunately, one Ranger resigned his post at the end of July, two of the existing team then covered that area on different days, in addition to their assigned area. The Chanorny Point post was funded from parking fees raised on the site. The CRF funding also enabled two rangers to work part time through the winter to work on visitor site and core path maintenance as well as continuing to liaise with community contacts.

Prior to the Rangers starting there were occasional patrols carried out by Access Officers on a bank holidays in April and May. Over the summer, there appeared to be an alternating pattern of a busy weekend followed by a quieter one. The weather also acted as a key determining factor in visitor numbers. It was noticeable that through the winter of 2023/24 there a constant stream of lower level presence of motorhomes/campervans. This was further evident when we started occasional recording from Easter and Bank Holidays in May, numbers were already reasonably high. Whilst the vast majority of visitors welcome the advice and information from the Access Rangers there continues to be a number of irresponsible and occasionally confrontational behaviours encountered.

Data was collected by the Access Rangers whilst patrolling in Sutherland on three days per week, which included the weekend, between June and October, with some occasional recording from April. The Ranger at Chanorny Point recorded data from mid-June to October. The highlights of the collated data in Sutherland include:-

- The Sutherland area with the highest informal camping numbers and associated problems this year was Assynt & Inverpolly, particularly campfires. There were only 3 abandoned tents and 1 caravan in the north west. Informal camping appears to have reduced again this year although it is still much higher than pre-covid levels. Over 444 off-site tents were recorded this year in Sutherland, compared with 885 last year. Whilst there is a decrease in the total number this is still far higher than was evident pre-pandemic. To more accurately compare tent numbers due to reduced number of patrols this year we can calculate an average number seen per patrol. This year was 1.27 whilst it was 1.77 in 2023.
- High recreational vehicle (RV) numbers (this includes, motorhomes, campervans and roof-top tents) were recorded around the NC500. A total of 5307 were recorded in Sutherland this year, compared to 7673 last year. To more accurately compare RV numbers due to reduced number of patrols this year we can calculate an average number seen per patrol. This year was 15.2 whilst it was 15.3 in 2023.
- This year the weather was not as dry as the previous year and as such there was reduced fire risk. The Access Rangers are still vigilant of camp fires in unsuitable locations. Fire marks and damage were most commonly found around on the west coast with 61 in Assynt, and 143 overall. This lower than previous years as is the 10 needing to be extinguished from 20 last year. This decrease, as well as likely to be weather related, could also be due to increased awareness and use of fire bowls.

- The problem of blackwater toilet waste dumping decreased this year to 16 from 20 last year. It was most noticed on the east and north coasts
- Outdoor toileting continues to be a big problems with high visitor numbers. In Sutherland there were 628 incidents with a large increas on the east coast. This is likely to more diligent reporting by this years Ranger, as the west coast recrded a reduction. This could also be due to higher numbers of visitors on the east coast.
- Parking issues appear to have reduced this year with only 26 warning notices issued but verbal advice was given on numerous occasions that wasn't recorded.
- Rangers collected nearly 220 bags of litter, which decreased from last year in the west but was roughly the same on the north and east coasts. They reported 77 waste/fly tipping issues which includes overflowing bins. Rangers often removed bin overspill and reported the full bins.
- By the end of October, the Rangers had engaged with 3598 people , compared to 6,649 in 2023 which had a longer period and one more Ranger, mostly to inform them of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and facilities available. However, of these, 46 were negative engagements. Whilst a small number of the total, they are uncomfortable, distressing and possibly threatening to the Ranger involved.

The presence of the Access Rangers has had a significant impact in reducing the irresponsible or inconsiderate behaviour of many visitors and potential causes of distress to Highland communities and other visitors. With Access Rangers patrolling countryside sites, their presence increased compliance within Invitation to Pay car parks increased responsible behaviour and the work that they carry out in removing litter and immediate repairs ensures ongoing visitor enjoyment of our countryside, increasing the likelihood of repeat visits and positive reviews to increase the economic benefit gained from tourism.

2. The Access Ranger Team Set-up & Operation

The Rangers job description was to.

- Engage face-to-face with visitors to explain and encourage responsible behaviour following the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.
- Monitor visitors use impacts and 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.
- Reduce the amount of litter by encouraging visitors to take home what they bring. Rangers will also collect litter when necessary and report large quantities.
- Encourage responsible parking and prevent obstructive parking. Rangers will assist with parking enforcement, if necessary, with the issuing of Parking Warning Notices
- Liaise with communities and landowners when issues arise, working together on solutions.
- Improve and maintain Highland council owned or managed countryside sites and work with land managers on other sites.
- Improve and maintain some of the most heavily used paths particularly to popular natural visitor attractions.



The 2024 Sutherland Access Rangers

2.1 Deployment

The 4 Access Rangers covered the areas on the map below;



Equipment for the team included a leased THC van with Scottish Ranger magnetic logos, THC and Ranger branded uniform, a mobile phone and a laptop. Each ranger was given a tool bag of hand tools, plus several other tools to undertake basic maintenance on visitor sites or paths especially where public safety was a concern.

Training was primarily an induction course on the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and devised Standard Operating Procedures for many of the key issues, delivered by experienced Access, Parking and Waste Officers. It also included sessions with Police Scotland and Scottish Fire & Rescue Service. A further session on tool safety training was given

when those were issued. The training was supplemented by webinar training on Conflict Avoidance arranged by Naturescot.

A Ranger Handbook had been developed with the past two years' experience and a copy was given to all new Rangers. This included all the information required on functions and procedures, other Services, equipment, communications, and contacts. It is intended to be revised before the start of each summer season.

Supervisory Management of the Ranger team was undertaken by a Senior Ranger with reference to the Outdoor Access Manager. The Access Officer for Caithness & Sutherland and the Project & Facilities Officer gave other assistance, particularly for the winter work programme.

The Rangers generally worked five days per week which included weekends, having two days off mid-week. They patrolled on 3 days per week, recording the observed data those days. This was always on a Saturday & Sunday, and usually a Friday but was Tuesday in the Durness area. Over the course of the summer, they spoke to 3552 people. They were most vigilant in engaging with people conducting irresponsible behaviour and often advised on actions to leave no trace. They would also provide a welcome face for general information on the area or nearby facilities. As a conversation starter, handing out a guidance leaflet for responsible campers or motorhome users was especially useful. had produced The camping leaflet was produced by Nature Scot, whilst THC produced a generic Highland-wide motorhome user leaflet. Venture North have also produced area specific motorhome leaflet with a map of facilities. During these patrols they recorded numbers for site monitoring reports specifically on camping, vehicles, people and any remains of camping activities. Whilst on patrol they may clear a dirty site, note it for further work or report it to another Council or agency service. On the two other working days, the rangers made community or land manager contacts, worked on popular sites, arranged volunteer workdays, or conducted core path inspections.

3. Visitor Engagement, Site Monitoring & Reporting

The site monitoring reports were completed by each Ranger weekly and submitted to the Senior Ranger every Monday. The data collected in this continuous recording over the seven-month period has been used to create graphs & charts showing the distribution of specific types of visitors and a number of issues. This information will be made available to numerous services and can aid identification of areas to target service or infrastructure improvements. These figures are representative and can be comparable between areas and years but cannot show the absolute numbers of visitors to the area.



3.1 Access Ranger Patrols & Sites

The Access ranger patrol areas that were decided upon in 2021 worked well and were retained in the following years. However, with Sutherland only funding, some adaptations were made to reduce areas of Ross & Cromarty and Caithness covered by these posts.

It was also accepted that keeping the same patrol areas would provide continuity in the collection of the data. These areas took into consideration, known popular locations, reports of issues from the past 3 seasons and where Rangers from other organisations covered.

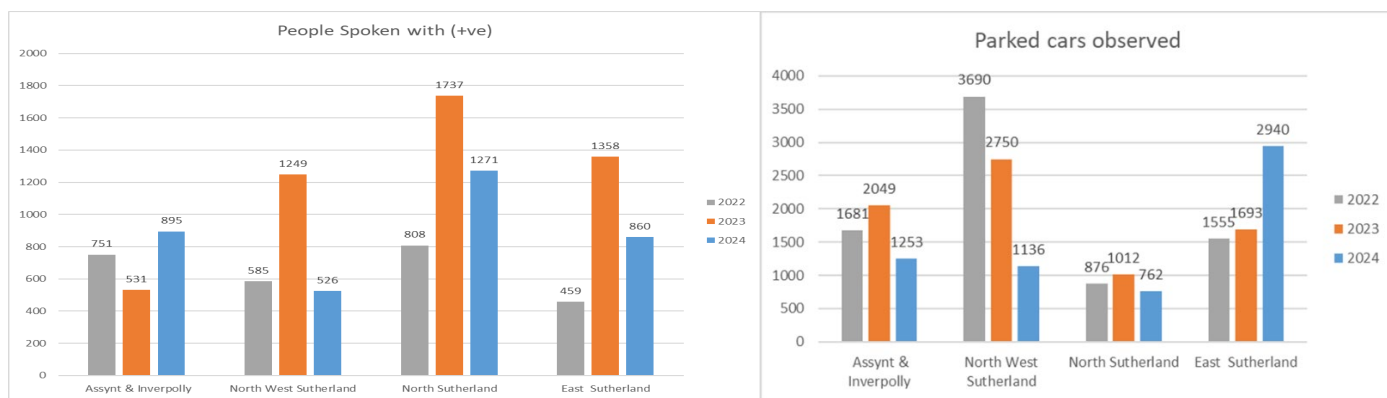
The number of patrols in Sutherland was in total 61 fewer than last year, there was a later start date of 30th May and 3 rangers instead of four for most of the season.

The number of sites in a patrol area can vary due to size, attractions, and popularity. The chart below shows their distribution. Areas with fewer sites can allow the ranger more time on a site to talk to people or carry out other tasks.

3.2 Visitor Engagement

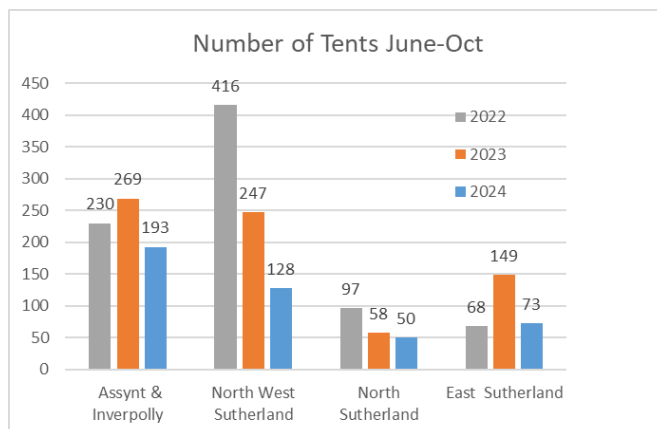
The Access Ranger role is primarily to engage and educate people on the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, but they will also welcome people with advice and information about the countryside, landscape and the area they are visiting. This year the Rangers were able to engage with 3598 people.

In addition to the figure below for 2023 are a further 46 engagements that were negative, with the person concerned being argumentative, abusive, or aggressive.



3.3 Informal camping

These are the number of tents observed camping off a formal campsite. They are most often by the roadside or in close vicinity to a vehicle, and not truly wild camping. The Access Rangers will engage with the people seen to ensure that they are aware of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC) and show consideration for both the environment and people living or working locally. The SOAC states that camping should be lightweight, small numbers, max. 3 nights in one place, avoiding enclosed fields, well away from roads or buildings and leave no trace.



Over 444 off-site tents were found throughout Highland. This is about a 60% reduction but remains highest in west coast areas well above pre-covid levels.

These figures show a steady decrease in most areas in the numbers of tents seen but still a relatively high figure, and considerably higher than anecdotal pre-covid numbers. The availability of overseas travel and more accommodation options is probably reducing the camping numbers.

There are many examples of inappropriate informal camping, that is not compliant with SOAC, in the wrong location, the wrong equipment or with lack of consideration for the environment or others. Driving off-road onto land without consent can be an offence. Pitching a tent or 'encamping' within a road is also an offence.



3.3.i Abandoned Tents - There were only 3 abandoned tents found in Sutherland, but also one caravan. A procedure for this was developed in 2022 and continued this year. Involving placing a laminated notice on the tent when observed untouched for 2 days and then removed if still seen after 5 days. The removal process is done carefully, photographing everything, and packed in bags. It is then stored for at least 2 weeks before either given to charities, if in good order, or disposed of if not.



3.3.ii Cumulative camping is a particular problem in some popular locations even when some individuals are following Scottish Outdoor Access Code guidance. As soon as one group leaves the space is occupied by another group. The vegetation has no time to recover, degrades and eventually bare earth or sand appears. This is particularly a concern in areas of rare or fragile habitat such as 'machair'. This is a calcareous grassland with a distinctive ecosystem only found in western Scotland and Ireland.

We continued with creating small camping exclusion areas or 'Habitat restoration area at Ceannabeinne at Durness. Whilst the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code are not explicit on this, there is scope within sections 3.45 & 3.47 of SOAC that highlight damage to habitats with repeated recreational activities and to follow local advice.

The areas showing most degradation was identified, each approx. 10m diameter, were either roped off, with a single line of blue rope or surrounded by green barrier mesh. Both methods were chosen specifically to be visually subtle in the surroundings. Smaller signs stating 'Please Keep Out- Habitat Restoration In Progress' were attached to the rope or mesh. The Rangers were able to check on these areas on each patrol. They discovered that hardly any visitors camped in the 10m areas, and they were respected. Occasionally campers were found right up to the rope/mesh, or they were used as drying lines. The ropes and mesh were taken down at the end of October. Some of these areas, especially those that have been excluded for two years have a very evident recovery of the vegetation.

It is intended that they will be reinstated next year, ideally for the whole summer period on the most damaged areas. We will also assess if the area size or number should be increased. We will also consider if other locations also should have excluded areas.



Map left- Camping Exclusion Areas marked

Photo left- Machair grassland and dune grasses becoming heavily eroded by repeated camping. The grass sward is worn down and fire sites burn off the vegetation.

Photo Right- Signs of recovery at end of one season

Lower Photo After 2 years exclusion





PLEASE KEEP OUT HABITAT RESTORATION IN PROGRESS

Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003

Scottish Outdoor Access Code – section 3.45 & 3.47



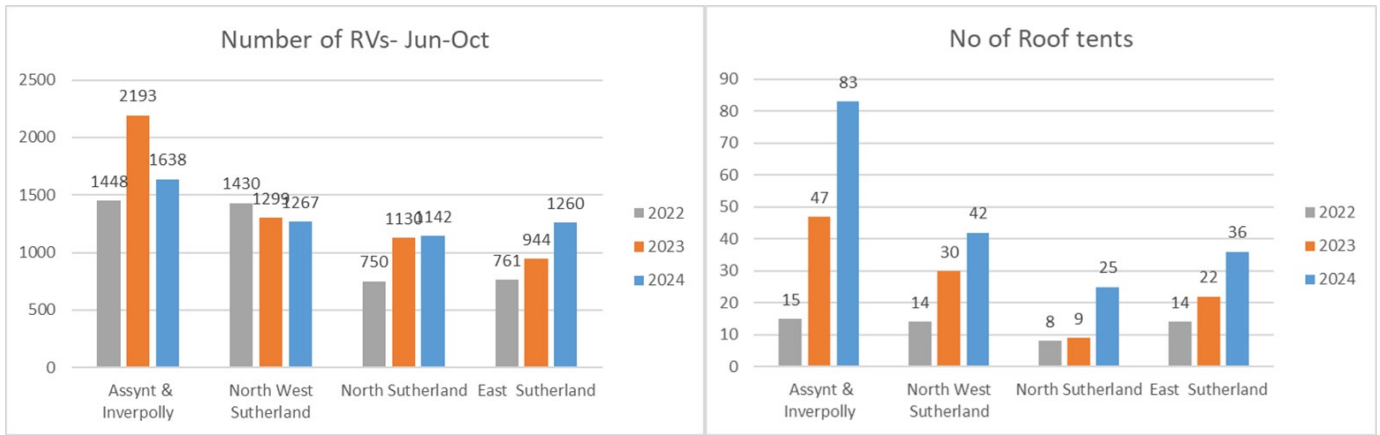
3.4 Recreational Vehicles (RVs)

These are the numbers of motorhomes, campervans and roof-top tents observed parked up, mostly overnight but some may be in daytime car parks. There is no distinction made between types of vehicles other than they are all 'adapted for sleeping purposes'. The inclusion of roof-top tents was necessary as these continued to be regularly observed this year. These vehicles are often seen parked off-road even though a tent being on a vehicle does not convey it access rights and so these vehicles are more akin to motorhomes. However, when overnight parking in a layby in this type of vehicle it is not possible to do so without 'encamping' and thus if being strict, would be an offence in section 129 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984. There is some reluctance by these owners to be referred to as motorhomes.

There has been an increase in the numbers of 'aires' and car parks permitting overnight stays (for a fee) including several Council car parks. These are often well used by drivers wanting to be respectful of local concerns.

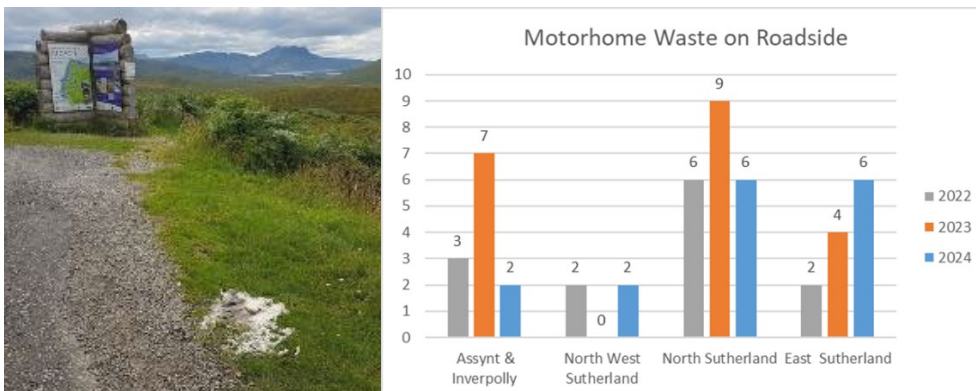


This year's patrols observed 5,307 Motorhomes between June and October, similar to last year's 5,547, although an increase in number seen per patrol from 13.5 to 15.2. The largest increase was seen in the East Sutherland area. There was almost a doubling in the number of roof tents seen at 196, up from 105 in 2023, with Assynt being the most popular area.



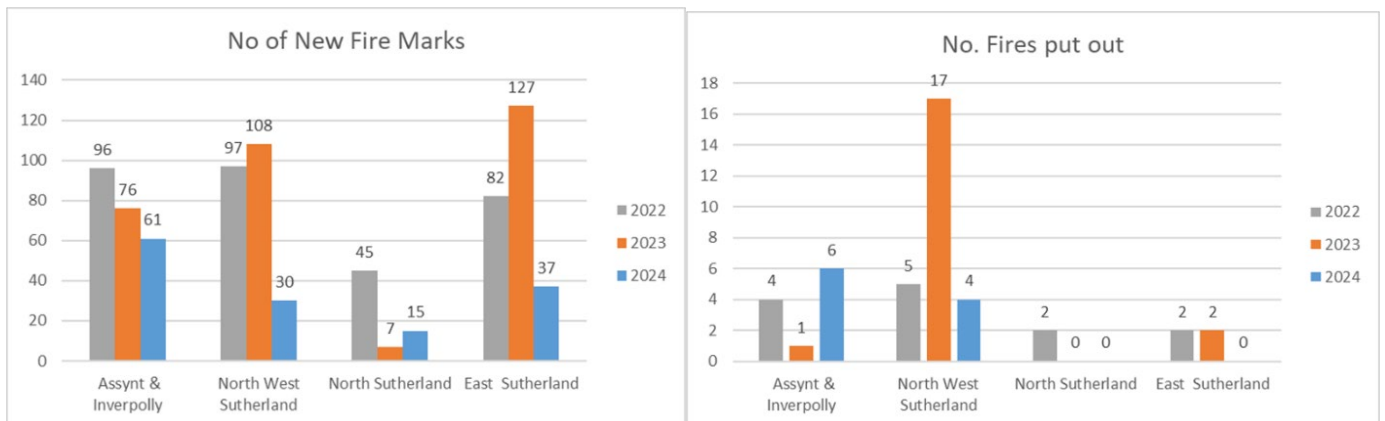
Incidents of motorhome black waste dumping were similar to last year with 16 incidents, and it is still a problem that causes great concern. Being a mixture of chemicals and human waste, it can cause great harm in water courses and to vegetation, and distress to anyone, or their pet, that steps in it. Currently the Council do not have an effective method of clearing these spills. The number of disposal points is slowly increasing but it appears to still be a long way from sufficient. Even where sites exist the signage appears to be inadequate with many drivers saying, they were unaware of existing facilities.

There is a significant difficulty in remote areas in dealing with this waste. The disposal points need to be either connected to the mains sewer or it is collected in dedicated tanks. These dedicated tanks require specialist collection and disposal which can be expensive. Most public toilets are connected to septic tanks which are deactivated by the chemicals and often cannot cope with the quantity of waste.



4. Visitor Behaviours

Associated with tent camping, and to some extent RVs, are several activities that may cause concern to communities or land managers. These are fires, outdoor toileting and litter.



4.1. Campfires

A fire is often seen by many as an essential accompaniment to camping. However, many people do not consider the risks and damage that they can cause. There is potential to spark a wildfire in prolonged dry periods and especially in woodlands or on peaty ground. Even in other areas damage to the ground or vegetation used to fuel the fire can take years to recover. There is existing legislation aimed to prevent fires close to roads or buildings, but it is very difficult to enforce. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code advises to use a stove in preference and to avoid lighting a fire in woodland, forests, farmland, on peaty ground and near buildings and cultural heritage sites. The evidence of previous fires in an area often encourages more visitors to light their own. The Rangers have always discouraged fires unless it is raised off the ground and it is likely to leave no trace.

- Fires are an issue in popular camping areas but often with motorhomes too, with 143 recorded, with 10 needing to be put out. Fewer than last year likely due to worse weather and increase in fire bowls.





The above photos also show other damage that can be caused by lighting fires such as damage to car parks surfaces, prominent boulders, historic artifacts (millstone), branches for fuel, tree roots and picnic tables. Often litter is left partially burnt in old fire sites.

4.1.i Disposable barbeques are also fires and pose similar risks of wildfire and scorched ground. They can pose unique risks too, such as often being left behind, creating litter as they remain hot for a long time. If buried in sand have been known to burn feet. On occasion these are placed in bins, whilst still hot and may cause bin fires (photo below- middle).



Access Rangers placed advisory No Fires signs, endorsed by The Highland Fire & Rescue Service, which were successful in reducing fires in some locations, but not in others, where signs were removed or even burnt.



4.1.ii Fire Site Restoration

Most fire sites were removed to discourage further use, however there is debate about retaining some fire sites to minimise new ones being created. A method used by Rangers near beaches was to cover fire sites with seaweed or sand once the debris was removed. This made the site less unsightly and encourages vegetation regrowth. Sand covered sites were often where any new fires were lit, whilst seaweed discourages further use, both methods in different ways reduce any new damage to the grassland. Other methods of restoring fire sites were tried, such as covering with turf, staking hazard tape around site, or jute matting. All these methods worked to some degree and encouraged vegetation regrowth, but it was variable as to whether visitors left them undisturbed. In general, far fewer fires were made by visitors at restored fire sites, where there was also a sign. No method was completely successful in deterring further fires. An increase in the number of portable raised fire pits is at least a welcome development to reduce ground damage.

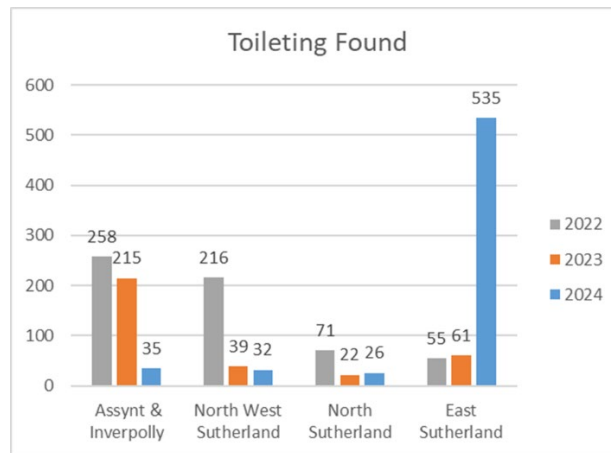


The Access Rangers apply a removable magnetic sign on their vans when a High Fire Risk Warning was issued for the area.



4.2. Outdoor toileting

This is often found in association with campsites but also on roadsides, in laybys. The Rangers did their best to discourage this by placing signs notifying the nearest public toilets. This year's signs were printed and thus more 'official' and included a QR code of a public toilet map.



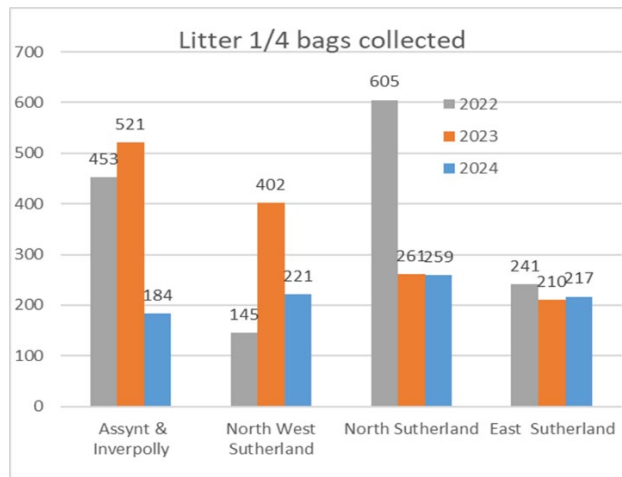
These photos are deliberately kept small as often quite repulsive. Photo far right is a discarded disposable urinal.



4.3. Litter

Litter was collected by the Access Rangers at popular countryside sites around the area. This is usually found around the site and sometimes beyond the road verge that otherwise would not be collected the Waste team. This year the Waste team did not have funding for the Seasonal Waste Assistants that operated in previous years. The Rangers therefore more often collected overflow rubbish out with bins that may be spread by animals or wind and reported full bins to the Waste team. This year had to issue the Access Rangers with a sharps safe box after syringes were found in a couple of locations.

The data shows a sizeable increase in the amount collected of 220 full bin bags. Some areas have seen consistent levels while others show a big change.



4.4. Other Council Services

4.4.i. Parking

As well as additional litter collection, the Access Rangers undertake a few activities that assist other Council services. One of these is parking, where the Rangers issue Parking Warning Notices provided by Parking Services, to advise that someone is illegally or inconsiderately parked and that they should move or may risk receiving a penalty charge. This often has the desired effect and discourages others from similar parking. It is quite common to find cars parked in passing places and thus causing an obstruction. These cars risk being removed by the Police, as they may be obstructing traffic.

At Chanonry Point, the Parking Notices are often placed on cars that have not bought a parking ticket, which other people see attached to windscreens and then encourages compliance. Thus, the Ranger presence makes a significant impact on the income generated without having to issue Penalty Charge Notices.

Some verge parking occurs where there is no car park for a site that has become an internet hotspot such as Wailing Widow Falls and Drumhollister (Puffin Cove). This is how the Fairy Pools phenomenon began. A people counter there in 2002 recorded 13,240 visits, 67,062 in 2014, this has reached 200,549 visits in 2023 to the end of October.



4.4. ii. Fly -tipping and other issues

The Rangers will often make reports on The Highland Council's website 'Report a Problem' to advise other services of something that requires attention. This most frequently will be Waste for full/overflowing bins, Environmental Health for fly-tipping or Roads for issues seen such as flooding or damaged signs.



5. Site Improvement Works & Maintenance

From 1st November 2024 to 28th March 2025 the Rangers completed a programme of works that improved popular visitor sites and several core paths. Some of this was maintenance works whilst other work was to reduce damage caused by vehicles or people. Where possible contact was made with local groups and involved volunteers. These works were:

- Shin Falls handrail repairs to falls view point path – 1.5days
- Beinn Tongue core path waymarker installation – 1 day
- Distribution of replacement picnic benches to sites around Sutherland. Some installation on HC sites, a number to store in Lairg and a number to sites outside Sutherland – 2 days.
- Granite dust resurfacing of Smoo Cave, Durness west approach steps – 2 x 0.5 day.
- Ceannabeinne beach core path, handrail remedial works – 0.25day
- LANTRA training course for brush cutting and strimming to allow maintenance of paths and Council sites – 1.5days.
- Removal of damaged Caithness slab table at Kylesku South car park and installed replacement picnic bench – 2 days.

- Melness Core paths inspections – 0.5day
- Clachan Cemetery path, Bettyhill, path repair and bridge improvements – 1day
- Verge maintenance and general path on Beinn Bhraggie core path, Golspie – 3 days
- Replacement of storm damaged fencing along east approach path at Smoo Cave – 2 days
- Core path sign installation, Backies, Golspie – 0.5day
- Installation of two pedestrian gates in place of stile at core path by Coul Railway line path to Dornoch from Fourpenny – 1.5 days
- Signage installation to inform public of closure of public toilets at Bonar Bridge – 0.5day
- Strimming, vegetation of Spinningdale core path – 0.5day.
- Achmelvich Beach Car Park, pole installation for sign information – 0.5day
- Installation of new pedestrian access gate to Dornoch Meadows – 1 day
- Ardvreck Castle Car Park community liaison on future plans – 0.5day
- Clashnessie Core Path survey/inspection – 0.25day



6. Communications

The generic email address continued to be the main way in which the public contacted the Ranger team of incidents or for general queries. Some rangers having worked with the Council over winter were in place at Easter and on the IT system, others took some time to be set up and these messages had to be forwarded by the OAM or Access Officers. Eventually the Rangers received Council email addresses and were able to make direct contact. As the Ranger team had acquired dedicated phones last year these were available immediately to new Rangers who then could make immediate contacts in their area.

7. Future plan for 2025/26

The Highland Council has approved and allocated budget to re-instate the full Access Ranger team throughout Highland for the 2025/26 year. The two Sutherland rangers will be retained, their experience being invaluable. Patrols were re-commenced during the Easter school holidays from 4th April 2025. Recruitment is currently taking place for all other areas with an Induction Day planned for 28th May.

Philip Waite, Outdoor Access Manager

9th May 2025