

Agenda Item	4
Report No	TC/11/21

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Tourism Committee

Date: 6 December 2021

Report Title: Proposal for a Visitor Management Plan for 2022

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an update on the delivery of the activities outlined in the Highland Council Visitor Management Plan for 2022. It then recommends a range of future activities that are considered priorities and which are included in a draft Visitor Management Plan for 2022.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to;
- i. note the information provided by each Service on progress in delivering the 2021 Visitor Management Plan actions as detailed in **Appendix 1**,
 - ii. note the results of the research undertaken by the Access rangers and with comfort scheme providers; and
 - iii. agree the priorities for a revised plan as outlined in the draft 2022 Visitor Management Plan attached as **Appendix 4**.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - The resources required to produce the plan and for the officer group to meet have been met from the relevant Service's budgets. The implementation of the activities described in the 2021 plan have additional resource requirements with these met largely from the £1.5m funding allocation for Visitor management agreed at the Council budget meeting on 4 March 2021. Where additional internal costs such as staffing to plan or deliver some of the activities are required, these have been met from existing service budgets. Proposals for 2022 are based on indications that a further £1.5m is to be allocated for Visitor Management Activity during the 2022 season.
- 3.2 **Legal** - There are no legal implications arising directly from this report. However, existing legislation and guidance such as traffic regulations, the Scottish Outdoor Access Code

and Covid specific requirements are used in resolving some of the issues identified in the Visitor Management Plan.

- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)** - Tourism benefits communities through being a major part of the Highland economy and through helping sustain local facilities and services although some tourism pressures affect mainly our rural communities. Projects designed to address some of the issues described are expected to produce positive benefits for those communities as well as for visitors. Place-based community engagement by individual services is also deemed critical in resolving some of the issues being addressed through the Visitor Management Plan.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** - There are no Climate Change / Carbon Clever implications arising directly from this report, but some projects included in the plan 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 through actions to protect the natural environment and by promoting additional public transport opportunities.
- 3.5 **Risk** - There was a risk that without a visitor management plan and delivery of the actions within it, the previous challenges and issues would continue during 2021. The activities undertaken during the 2021 season helped mitigate those risks but the risk remains that issues will continue to occur if similar activities are not continued in 2022.
- 3.6 **Gaelic** - There are no Gaelic implications arising directly from this report. However, in keeping with agreed Council policy there is a Gaelic element to relevant projects that are subsequently undertaken as a result of being identified in this plan.

4 Highland Council Visitor Management Plan

- 4.1 A Highland Council Visitor Management Plan was approved by the Council's Tourism committee on 21 April 2021. This plan was created to recognise and start to address the issues that were anticipated to occur due to the expected increase in the numbers of visitors to the Highlands as Covid restrictions were relaxed.
- 4.2 As was reported to this committee at their meeting on 28 September 2021 these activities were largely successful in reducing many of the visitor pressures (although not preventing them completely). Section 5 of this report and Appendix 1 provide an update on those activities while Section 6 of the report and Appendix 4 outline proposals for a revised plan for 2022.

5 Delivery of the 2021 Visitor Management Plan activities

- 5.1 The activities detailed in the Visitor Management plan are delivered by teams from across the Council most notably those dealing with roads, parking, public transport, countryside, waste, public conveniences and tourism. In some cases, activities are delivered through a partnership with external partners. To help plan and co-ordinate delivery the Council's cross-service officer group has continued to meet and individual members of this group have also engaged with other groups and public sector partners to assist in the delivery of plan activities.
- 5.2 Many of the activities described in the Visitor Management Plan were specific to the busier season that runs from spring until autumn so are now complete. However, some are still under way either as part of continued service provision or in preparation for 2022. In order to keep Members informed of progress a reporting system was established which involved each service contributing updates on their particular activities to a

dynamic document as and when they take place. The most recent version of this document is attached as **Appendix 1** to this report in order to update members on activity to date.

6 Evidence to support future visitor management planning

6.1 Evidence from the 2021 summer season – gathered from visitors, communities and services themselves have been valuable in showing where interventions were successful but also where additional or further activity might be required. If the maximum benefit is to be achieved it is considered important that wherever possible future decisions should be based on firm evidence

6.2 As they went about their activities during summer 2021, the team of access rangers gathered detailed and comprehensive data regarding specific sites and particular pressures giving much stronger evidence on which to base future decisions and at which locations additional services might be required. More detailed information on the data gathered by the Access Rangers has previously been presented to this committee at its meeting on 28th September 2021 and a written summary is attached as **Appendix 2** to this report.

6.3 In a similar way, the public conveniences team also undertook additional research with their providers which can be used to help plan future services and the results of this research has recently been analysed. A brief background to this and summary results are given in sections 6.4 and 6.5 below and a more detailed analysis is attached as **Appendix 3** to this report.

6.4 The Highland Council currently provides 37 comfort schemes on a 3-year rolling basis, to be reviewed in 2023. Comfort schemes are an asset to the Council and provide a critical service in areas where there is no other public toilet provision or areas which have capacity issues. In more remote areas of Highland, the comfort schemes support initiatives such as Ranger Services, assist in keeping the countryside clean, limits the impact on the environment while also supporting the local economy – for example more footfall for local businesses.

Payments to comfort scheme providers for the 3-year agreements are made from the service budget. With the additional £60k of funding awarded from the visitor management funds, and the £11k of funding from the Better Places grant the Council were able to fund additional providers agreeing to offer their toilet facilities to the public for either seven or twelve months. There was a large amount of interest in the scheme and 14 new providers signed up bringing the total number of comfort schemes in Highland to 51 during 2021.

6.5 At the end of the season in 2021 a survey was carried out with all comfort scheme providers; full results are shown in **Appendix 3**. In summary 86% of providers felt the scheme has been beneficial, with 94% willing to become a provider in the future. 84% of providers would recommend others to sign up to become a comfort scheme and 43% would describe the comfort scheme initiative as above average. 70% believe the providers are adequately advertised and 51% believe the scheme attracts more custom to their business. 73% of providers had more than 20 users of their facility per day.

7 Visitor Management Plan for 2022

- 7.1 The Visitor Management Plan for 2021 included a mix of activities that required “one off” expenditure but also services that required ongoing revenue support. As an example, the provision of additional and / or larger bins required a one-off purchase of the bins while the regular emptying of those bins requires ongoing costs to be met. With this in mind it has been recognised that if pressures are to continue to be addressed, a further Visitor Management Plan and associated budget would be required for 2022. This also suggested that the allocations to different activities would need revised, recognising that there were some “one-off” and some ongoing costs and in the light of the other research evidence and data described above. For example evidence such as the locations where the most wild toileting takes place can help influence where new comfort schemes might be beneficial.
- 7.2 To assist in defining the range of activities and the financial allocations that might be required for each, a workshop involving both Members and relevant officers was therefore held on 5 November 2021. This workshop allowed members to consider the feedback and evidence gathered and give their views on what the priorities might be for a 2022 Visitor Management Plan. The Visitor Management Planning officer group subsequently met and considered this feedback and have produced a draft plan which is included as **Appendix 4** to this report. Members are asked to consider and approve the draft plan for 2022.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

Date: 22 November 2021

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

Background Papers:

**The Highland Council Visitor Management Plan Progress report
September 2021**

Visitor Management Plan Activity	Progress	RAG Status	Budget
Road & Parking improvements			£280,000
General	New roads Technician (Visitor Infrastructure) started 31/05/2021, and will help deliver a programme of improvements, informed by Member input through Ward Business Meetings.	Complete	£35,000
Replacement of damaged or missing Passing Place signs/ road signs.	Glen Nevis – liaising with partners to rationalise road signage & road markings. Glen Etive - Renewal of passing place signs in Glen Etive. Inverness Area Skye Caithness & Sutherland	Ongoing	<u>Estimates</u> £12,000 £10,000 £20,000 £40,000 £40,000
Advance warning Variable Message (VMS) signs where required	New VMS sign at entrance to Glen Etive planned with NTS. New VMS signs sourced for use in Arisaig / Morar area. Temporary VMS for Chanonry Point being sourced.	Ongoing	£5,000 £5,000 £5,000
Road verge protection/ edge strengthening/ marker posts	B8008 Traigh/Tougal/Curtaig area – removed boulders from verge/replacing with verge markers, strengthen road verge, etc. Rosemarkie Marine Terrace	Ongoing	£10,000 £20,000
Traffic orders - additional restrictions such as clearways and parking restrictions to address safety concerns	Glen Nevis, and B8008 Seasonal Parking Restriction Orders created, and possible enhancements for 2022 are under review and in discussion with stakeholders. Rosemarkie Terrace one-way. Glenmore parking restriction order (preventing parking on new footway).	Ongoing	-
Liaising with stakeholders about additional parking areas/ lay-by improvements/ roadside parking	Ongoing process and is being informed by Visitor Management resilience arrangements. Kilmore car park improvements Drumnadrochit	Ongoing	£30,000

	<p>Gairloch Viewpoint & Tornapress Liathach lay-by improvement Torridon</p> <p>B8008 Curtaig area – liaising with partners & parking team regarding possible parking solutions. Similarly, Fortrose overspill car park discussions ongoing.</p> <p>Glen Coe ski centre access road repairs/improvements (£30k? funding to be identified, 2022?) - tbc</p> <p>Loch Fleet Sutherland lay-by/car park design in conjunction with Naturescot - no funding identified yet.</p> <p>Sutherland, Ross-shire, & other areas - various RTIF schemes – Highland Council receive/assist with funding with further visitor infrastructure improvement funds in 2022?</p> <p>Hilton of Delnies beach access car parking Nairn - discussion ongoing with the estate.</p>		<p>£20,000 £5,000</p>
		Total Committe d	£257,000
Car parks			£250,000
Regulation at tourist dominated car parks and locations. Improved signs & regulation.	Ongoing refresh work at tourist car parks – Nairn x 3, Kyleakin & Drumnadrochit complete. Rosemarkie & Chanonry Point traffic management schemes – TTRO required. Glenmore Roadside parking management TTRO required, working with Ward Members. Allow Motorhomes to stay in specific Car Parks for a Max stay of 24hrs in designated Bays to be agreed with members. (£15000) None agreed yet.		(£15,000)
Parking charge schemes - 21 sites to be considered by E&I committee for early intervention	Ongoing local Ward discussions on 21 “Invitation to Pay” car parks. Car parks in Nairn and Inverness have been delivered and work will continue in other areas.		£82,600

with further sites in longer term rollout	Early discussion on Dornoch Beach Area Parking for Invitation to pay also Golspie, Wick, Wester Ross		
Parking Enforcement Officers	Overtime Activity - £5000 Chanonry Point Marshalling - £3000		£8,000
Parking enforcement - review of regulations & improved enforcement / liaison with enforcement agencies	Ongoing through weekly Visitor Management Multi Agency Meetings. VMOG-W, VMOG-N. Chanonry Point CCTV - £8000		£8,000
Signs - upgrade of Car Park signage and information for users	Ongoing rollout of refreshed signing and working with community groups when requested. Mobile VMS Signs £18,000. Glenmore DYs £7000. Glencoe DYs £6000		£31,000
		Total committed	129,600
Access Rangers			£300,000
Employment of 17 seasonal rangers to promote responsible behaviour (litter, parking, fires, dogs) with possible enforcement. To include weekend and evening work to address informal camping issues.	154 applicants, 40 interviewed, 17 recruited as NatureScot confirmed Better Places 2 funding for 7 additional posts in collaboration with community groups. Team now at full strength. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 Rangers started Induction week on 10th May. • 4 rangers started on 31st May. Introductory site visits with Access & LDR Officers. • Supplied with vehicles, uniform and toolkit. Feedback has overwhelmingly been positive. 13/8/21- Site Ranger commenced at Chanonry Point & Rosemarkie for 12 weeks. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Rangers end contact on 30th Sept • 15 Rangers end contract on 31st Oct • 5 Rangers retained on VM work over winter months in Loch Ness, Durness, Ullapool, Dornie and Fort William • Claim submitted to NatureScot Better Places 2 fund 	Complete	£238,440 staff costs to date £15,641 equipment training & uniform to date £40,173 vehicles to date
Ranger team to work in co-operation & co-ordinate with communities, land managers and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What App groups with FLS, NTS, Naturescot and Community Wardens. Some joint patrols and communication 		

<p>other organisations, such as Highlife Highland, NatureScot, Forestry & Land Scotland, National Trust for Scotland, Nevis Landscape Partnership, Police & Fire services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ranger team manager takes part in weekly public sector operations resilience plan group meetings for North and South Highland. • Highland Ranger Managers group meets monthly, info sharing. • Rangers are making many community and land manager contacts and building local networks. • From 3/8/21- Ranger Team Manager attends National VMS Operational Group and submits fortnightly reports on NC500 & Morar/Arisaig 		
<p>Monitoring the use of countryside car parks, roadside parking and informal camping. Minor improvements to, and maintenance of, countryside sites & paths.</p>	<p>First patrols on weekend of 15th/16th May Noted small numbers of campers, many fires sites, some smouldering and doused by Rangers, litter (removed). Largest numbers of motorhomes and off-site tents in north & west.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekend of 29-31st May- notable increase in campers and motorhomes particular hotspots of Glen Etive, Arisaig, Durness. Parking issues in other places e.g. Does. <p>Rangers submitting weekly & monthly reports with user numbers. Highlighting issues with informal camping, parking, litter & overflowing bins, fires, outdoor toileting. Hotspots identified as above and others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By end of October: On 1534 patrols, over 19,724 people spoken to/ advised of Access Code. 8,639 tents off-site with 3463 fires (160 causing a high risk), 4253 toileting sites, over 1500 bags of litter removed. Of nearly 24,573 motorhomes observed, 87 cases of black waste on roadside. Over 75,000 vehicles were observed in car parks and roadside with 278 parking warning notices issued. 		
<p>Work with local communities to establish and train a local volunteer warden scheme to assist with monitoring and liaison with visitors.</p>	<p>JUNE onwards- Contacts made with communities in; WESTER ROSS: Applecross, Shieldaig, Torridon, Kinlochewe, Lochcarron, Lochbroom, Gairloch, Poolewe, Dornie, Glenelg, Arnisdale, Stromeferry, Kyle SKYE: Staffin, Minginish, Glendale, NORTH: Lochinver, Tongue, Strathy, Bettyhill, Melvich, Durness, Dornoch, Brora, Helmsdale LOCHABER: Kinlochleven, Arisaig, Glencoe & Glenetive, Kinlochleven</p>		

	<p>INVERNESS & ROSS: Strathglass, Dores, Glen Urquhart, Glengarry, Fort Augustus, Stratherrick, Fortrose, Nairn, Garve, Alness, Edderton, Ardgay, Ardross, Fearn, Golspie, Nigg, Tain, Tarbet</p> <p>Also numerous land managers, businesses, agencies and individuals.</p>		
Installing and maintaining temporary signage and other communications on safe and considerate visits to the countryside.	<p>Signs received covering subjects such as fires & camping. To be installed by Rangers as required, informed by intelligence gathered through resilience arrangements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SOAC guidance and Highland motorhome guidance leaflets distributed by rangers. 		£3904 materials, signs and leaflets to date
		Total Committed to date	£298,158
Public Conveniences			£60,000
Provide additional comfort scheme provision at key locations, including seasonal scheme if required.	<p>Members at the C&P Committee noted the planned and implemented operational deployment of the £60k additional resource for public convenience provision at the May and August Committees in 2021.</p> <p>The number of seasonal or one-year comfort schemes increased to 50 with 14 new schemes agreed and one of those a replacing a previous comfort scheme in Skye. The Comfort Scheme now includes composting toilets as part of the scheme. As at 31.8.21 the new schemes are located in Acharacle, Traigh Beach, Rum, Ardnamurchan, Dornoch (x2), John O’Groats, Drumnadrochit, Kinlochleven, Glendale, Helmsdale, Portree, Alness, and Kyleakin.</p> <p>Additional comfort schemes have also benefitted from £11k grant from the Better Places scheme.</p>		£24,550
Improvements to interior facilities and installation of motion sensor lighting at Council operated facilities.	Investing around £46k in some of the Council’s 75 buildings for additional charging for showers and toilets, people counter infrastructure and undertaking some vandalism repairs. This affects our facilities in Ullapool, Aviemore, Kingussie, Grantown, Muir of Ord and Dornie. Improvements in other facilities are also being considered with e.g. condition surveys underway. Works are being done within the		£48,000

	<p>following facilities; painting at Portmahomack, drainage works at Castletown, taps replaced at Broadford, improvements at Rogie Falls and supporting Foyers Community Council with funding towards their provision of portaloos.</p> <p>In addition, a review of public conveniences previously identified as surplus to requirements or unaffordable to improve/repair is being undertaken with property surveys underway, commissioned by the Property and Housing Service. This will support the development of options for their use including the scope for further community asset transfers. These could be supported by the new Community Loans Fund agreed by the Council in September 2021.</p> <p>An assessment of capital requirements is also underway for the maintenance and refurbishment of public conveniences and scope for new charging infrastructure.</p> <p>The new Storr toilets opened in May 2021. Until the installation of charging infrastructure is in place for the facilities, a revenue budget pressure for servicing them is created - anticipated to be £10k.</p>		
Promotion of the current network of public toilets and comfort scheme locations through tourism groups, visitor websites etc.	Council website updated with new locations. Wider activity to follow.	Complete	£0 (Covered from existing budgets)
Signage at public conveniences	Provision of signage at public conveniences regarding motorhome waste	Complete	£1,100
Installation of additional footfall counters.	New counter at Dornie comfort scheme - installed	Complete	£1,500
Increase provision of charging at some locations.	See above.		
		TOTAL committed	75,150
Waste management			£180,000
Increased bin capacity through a combination of larger 1100 litre	Procuring and siting of additional waste bins, including larger 1100 litre bins with lid design to reduce the risk of fly-tipping and a larger number of smaller 240/360		£35,000

<p>bins with lid design to reduce the risk of fly-tipping and a larger number of 240/360 litre bins. Bins will be a combination of both general waste and where possible recycling bins.</p>	<p>litre litter bins has been rolled out. The bins are for general waste and recycling. The bins are clearly marked with information on responsible waste disposal.</p>		
<p>Increase collection frequency of litter bins by a combination of swapping bins over using additional seasonal staff and pick-up vehicles and existing refuse collection vehicles and staff.</p>	<p>Increasing the frequency of collections in locations with expected high visitor numbers. This is being done by the recruitment of 8 seasonal staff and additional fleet operating from May to September. The staff are using 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 are mobile and cover areas where they are most needed. They are based in the following locations and augment local teams also supporting the visitor management plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North West Coast – base in Lochinver; • West - base in Ullapool; • Lochcarron; • Portree; • Brora/Golspie; • Fort William; • Aviemore; and • Inverness – Loch Ness areas. 		<p>£145,000</p>
<p>Additional seasonal staff and pick-up vehicles used in the North West, North Coast, East and Central Sutherland, West Coast, Dornoch/Tain areas, Skye, Lochaber, B&S and Loch Ness areas; to swap over full bins, increasing litter picking and fast</p>	<p>See above.</p>		<p>Included in staff costs above</p>

response to reported incidents of fly-tipping.			
Supporting community litter picks.	The waste team has supported over 60 community litter picks. This will be in addition to many informal arrangements undertaken by groups and individuals helping to keep their communities clean and tidy. 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.		Included in staff costs above & from existing budgets
Roadside litter clearing	The first coordinated road verge litter pick took place over the weekend of the 24th and 25th of April in all areas of Highland. This cost £2.5k and was not budgeted. 15 further litter picks have been undertaken/planned. The application for Better Places Funding was not successful, so additional costs involved will be quantified at the end of the season for VMP funding.		Additional costs to be confirmed at end of season
		TOTAL committed	180,000
Motorhome facilities			£200,000
Investigate options for installation of a new facility in Ullapool alongside planned car park improvement work	A project is being developed to install a new facility at the Latheron Car Park, Ullapool. Support is in place from the Community Council. Contractor appointed to finalise design.		
Creation of template design for future motorhome waste disposal points.	Ongoing. Design for Brora facility being used as a template. Funding contributed to assist development of community facilities at:- Nairn - £2,500 Kinlochewe – 3,000 Balintore – 3,000 North Kessock – 3,000		£11,500
Bid in grant scheme for commercial caravan & campsites	Scheme launched early May. 19 sites across all areas of Highland participating.	Complete	£9,500
Promotion - production and distribution of a guide to motorhome waste disposal sites.	Partnership with CAMPA – participating sites have been added to CAMPA website. Destination Organisations and business groups contacted to assist with promotion of sites.		£0

To be circulated through business groups etc.	Enjoy the Highlands in your motorhome guide produced which also includes advice on waste. PDF version being used online and promoted through Social media. Printed copied being produced for face to face distribution by Access Rangers.		£900
Supporting commercial provision through production of a guide to planning and licencing requirements for small scale overnight facilities.	Guide now complete. Available on Council website at https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/23616/guidance for temporary motorhome stopover sites and has been circulated to all those who had previously showed an interest. Additional enquiries continue to be received from landowners.	Complete	£0 (covered by existing budgets)
		TOTAL Committed	22,000
Public Transport			£60,000
Enhanced bus service in North Skye for three peak months. To include a park & ride provision to reduce car traffic to congested locations.	<p>Stagecoach provided enhancements and extensions to existing services during the summer school holiday period, providing five daily return journeys on weekdays between Portree and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old Man of Storr Car Park • Fairy Pools • Fairy Glen <p>GoSkye provided four return journeys each way between Portree and Storr, and between Portree and Fairy Pools, on Saturdays and Sundays. Due to no responses being received to the Invitation to Tender, a direct negotiation was held and the service did not start until 7 August, but it continued until 12 September.</p> <p>The short lead time before the services commenced limited the opportunity to publicise them. Passenger figures reflected this but nevertheless showed that there is demand for such services, which can be built on for future years.</p>		£60,950
Promotion of bus services through development of tourist-oriented transport publicity and a multi-	Passenger figures show the Stagecoach service was being used quite well, although publicity should be improved if repeated. Go Skye was promoted by a press release and through HC Twitter, Webpage and Facebook, as well as locally by Go Skye themselves. Time did not permit introduction of multi-operator ticketing in 2021,		£0

journey or multi-operator ticketing scheme.	which in any case would have been of limited use given that it was only on Saturdays that two operators were available on any route. Provision of free travel by GoSkye mitigated this.		
Bus Partnership Fund bids to Transport Scotland for infrastructure provision which will enable improved bus services.	The BPF bid was unsuccessful but a notification of interest was submitted for the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund for similar projects. A full bid is to be considered next year.		£0
		TOTAL	60,950
Joint activity			£175,000
Joint initiative with Cairngorms National Park Authority to improve visitor management in Glenmore corridor.	Project under way. Involves improved pay & display parallel parking at Loch Morlich (works have commenced, starting at Glenmore end) and changes to speed limits.	Ongoing	£175,000
NC500 Study	Jointly funded study into visitor sentiments and local views on NC500 (with VisitScotland / HIE)		£10,000
Engagement			£0
National Visitor Management Strategy - continued engagement with national visitor management strategy group.	ECO, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy attends to represent Local Authorities. Head of Roads & Transport attends sub-group on infrastructure issues. Outdoor Access Manager attends sub-group on Operational Co-ordination		No additional budget committed - all costs covered through existing service budgets
Establishment of a Visitor Management Partners group for the wider Highlands & Islands area - evolving from the existing Highlands and Islands Local Resilience Partnership and Local Delivery Groups – anticipated to be one for each Police Scotland Area Command.	Council attends and contributes to H & I meetings; chaired by Police Scotland. 3 Visitor Management Operations Groups involving Council & emergency services in place:- Cairngorms National Park VMOG - South – Lochaber, Skye, SW Ross VMOG - North – Caithness, Sutherland, rest of Ross-shire Council staff involved in each, 2 are chaired by senior ward managers. Highland Ranger managers group established with others employing Rangers.		

The Highland Council Seasonal Access Rangers

Annual Report 2021

Date: 12th November 2021

Author: P. Waite, Outdoor Access Manager



Background

As a result of a particularly busy summer tourist season in 2020, The Highland Council created a Visitor Management Plan to improve and co-ordinate its services. Within this, a need for staff to engage with visitors to the Highlands has been recognised and a team of Access Rangers dealing specifically with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code was proposed. These differed markedly from the High Life Highland Countryside Ranger team which have a different remit, have no presence in some busy areas, were on furlough in 2020 and were only part-time in 2021 with limited capability.

Visitor numbers had been steadily increasing over many years but the situation caused by Covid 19 increased the 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 expectations to assist communities and land managers in dealing with the problems.

These new posts liaised with other services and partners and took a co-ordinated approach to visitor management particularly in honeypot sites. They were the eyes and ears of the Council and reported back to relevant services. Data was collected on patrols over 3 days within a week. This was collated by the Outdoor Access Manager (OAM) and is presented later in this report.

Following the allocation of Highland Council funding, the recruitment process was started in March 2021, with interviews held the following April. Concurrently, an application to NatureScot's Better Places 2 Fund (in partnership with Skye Connect, Wester Ross Biosphere, Applecross Trust and Visit Inverness/Loch Ness) was submitted and approved and so enabled a larger team of 17 Access Rangers to be appointed to better cover all areas of the Highland region. The Access Ranger team was then able to commence in May 2021.

Equipment

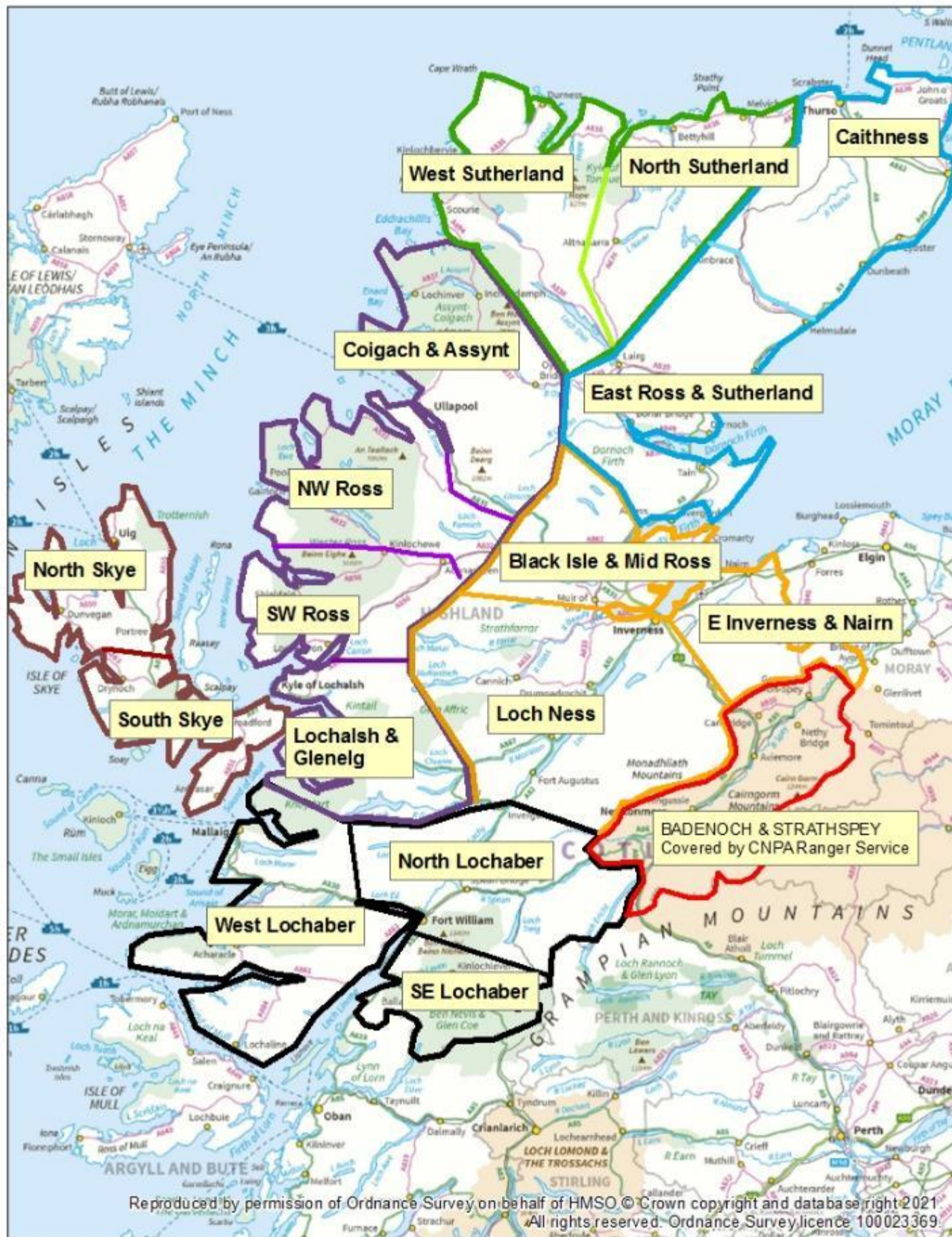
Prior to commencement of the posts the OAM arranged to have fleet/hire vehicles for each of the Ranger team. The Rangers were to work individually because of mainly the size of the area to cover and also that Covid regulations advised against passengers being in the same vehicle. A uniform was procured consisting of Ranger and THC branded polo shirts, softshell jackets and waterproof jackets, along with work trousers. Suitable tools and equipment was also acquired including a laptop and mobile phone.

Patrol Areas

The Patrol areas were subject to much discussion within The Highland Council and the communities it serves. Many areas were insisting that a Ranger covered their area. The OAM took into consideration, known popular locations, reports of issues from summer 2020 and where existing Rangers from other organisations covered. The involvement of specific destination groups; Skye Connect, Wester Ross Biosphere, Visit Inverness/Loch Ness (VILN) & Applecross Trust also ensured a focus in those areas. The final deciding factor on patrol areas was the location of successful candidates. Temporary accommodation in much of the Highlands is extremely difficult to find, and so people living locally had an advantage, three potential candidates had to withdraw due to accommodation problems.

Deployment

The 17 Access Rangers covered the areas on the map below;



Ref:
Date:

Acces Ranger Patrol Areas 2021

0 5,000 10,000 22,000 33,000 44,000
Meters

1:1,100,000



Seasonal Access Rangers

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 visitor 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. They may also issue fixed penalty notices if appropriate
- Encourage responsible parking and prevent obstructive parking. Rangers will assist with parking enforcement if necessary with the issueing of Parking Warning Notices
- Liaise with communities and landowners when issues arise, working together on solutions. Establish local volunteer rangers to assist in busy periods
- 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

14 posts were recruited for 6 months and 3 posts were recruited for 4 months. The three x 4 month posts were assigned to areas where a sub-team had a patrol rota. i.e Lochaber, Skye & Inner Moray Firth.

Management

Two Senior Access Ranger posts were appointed, to advise the team deal with day-to-day management issues and collate the monitoring information. The Senior Access Rangers reported to the OAM, who organised and arranged the entire teams operation. The senior posts were assigned in sub-team areas which coincided with those co-operating in the partnership for Better Places 2 funding, i.e Skye Connect & Visit Inverness/Loch Ness, which permitted cover when they did not have time for a full patrol. Their locations also permitted a division into a North and a South team of 9 and 8 rangers respectively allowing easier contact & communication. Other Highland Council staff, (3 x Access Officers and the Facilities Officer), were involved in procuring equipment and materials, advising and guiding the seasonal staff.

Training

The OAM and Access Officers delivered training on the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and devised Standard Operating Procedures for many of the main issues. This was supplemented by webinar training arranged by Naturescot. The Rangers were given training on Litter prevention and Fixed Penalty Notices by Keep Scotland Beautiful and arranged by THC Environmental Heath. We were also able to deliver an in-house course on 'Leave No Trace' by one of the new team. Unfortunately training by West Highland College could not be delivered.

Additionally, the OAM also provided training to the Seasonal Rangers employed by Glencoe & Glenetive Community Trust, National Trust for Scotland and the North West Geopark.

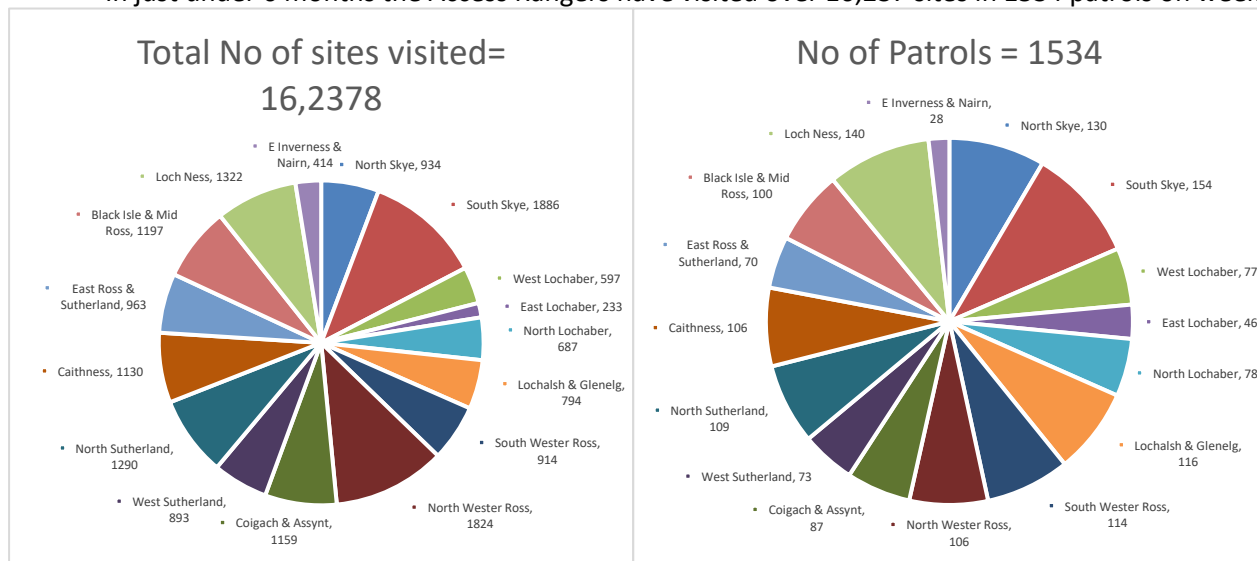
The Working Week

The Rangers worked five days per week, having two days off mid-week. Rangers patrolled on 3 days per week, always a Saturday & Sunday and usually a Friday, recording the figures for those days. Over the course of the summer they spoke to nearly 20,000 people. They were most vigilant in engaging with people conducting irresponsible behaviour but often advised on the right way to do things to leave no trace. They would also provide a welcome face for general information on the area or nearby facilities. They often would start a conversation by the handing out of guidance leaflet for responsible campers or motorhome users. During these patrols they recorded numbers for site monitoring reports specifically on camping, vehicles and the remains of camping activities. They cleared most of these sites, noted it for further work on another day or reported 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 carried out core path inspections.

Visitor Engagement, Site Monitoring & Reporting

The site monitoring reports had to be completed weekly and submitted to the Senior Rangers every Monday. A collated continuous summary of these has been attached to this report. The data collected in this continuous recording over the six month period has been used to create graphs & charts showing the distribution of specific types of visitor and a number of issues. This information will be made available to various services and can aid identification areas where to target service or infrastructure improvements.

- In just under 6 months the Access Rangers have visited over 16,237 sites in 1534 patrols on weekends.



Informal Camping

This issue has seen a huge increase in numbers over the past 2 years and is causing the most concern to local residents. There are many reasons for this but mostly linked the consequences of the Covid pandemic. Unfortunately, some people misinterpret the Scottish access legislation as a free for all and do not act responsibly. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code describes wild camping as lightweight, in small groups for 2 or 3 nights leaving no trace. It was common for all these factors to be ignored. A fairly new problem has become that of abandoned campsite where tents and other equipment have been left behind and thus become 'fly-tipping'. A Standard Operating Procedure was developed, endorsed by Police Scotland, to ensure equipment was not removed pre-maturely and aid notification in case people were lost or injured.

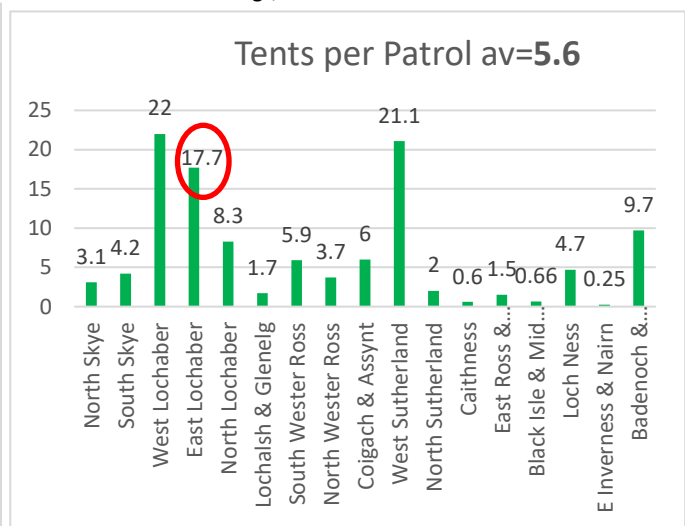
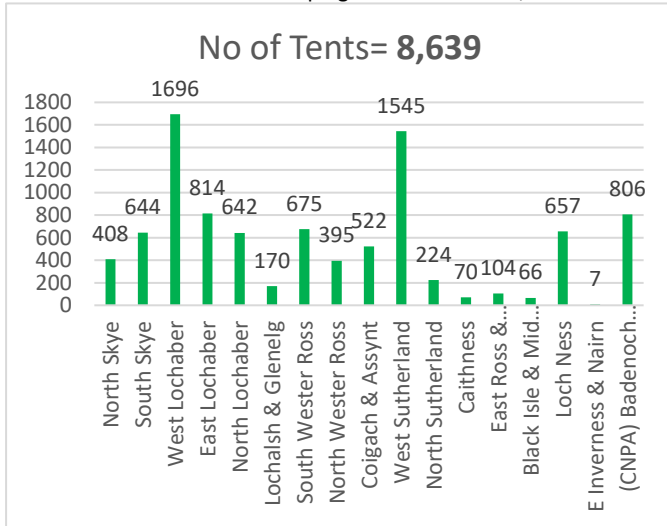


Mass camping at Toigal Beach, Arisaig

Informal camping of 8,639 tents were found throughout Highland with the highest concentrations in Lochaber (Arisaig) & West Sutherland (Durness). It was also significant in Applecross, Assynt and Loch Ness. There were least incidents on the east coast. Included on the graph is data for Badenoch & Strathpey in the Cairngorm National Park for comparison but not included in total figures. It is interesting to note that the National Park had similar numbers to East Lochaber (which had fewer patrols) but half that of West Lochaber and West Sutherland.



Camping at Cennabeinne, Durness. A common site on most evenings, this site has no facilities



Recommendations from Access Ranger De-briefing

- **Clearer & precise definition of 'wild camping' in Scottish Outdoor Access Code.** E.g have a minimum distance from road, building etc, specific min or max tent size, maximum number of tents per site.
- **Allow local areas to be excluded from camping without having to resort to byelaws**
- **Promote 'Leave No Trace' message**
- **Areas that most need attention are:**
Ceannabeine, Traigh, Toigal, Ardvreck, Glen Etive, Glen Brittle, Glenelg, Duntelchaig, Dalcrag, Loch Tarff, Clunes, Loch Arkaig, Duncansby Head.

Motorhomes

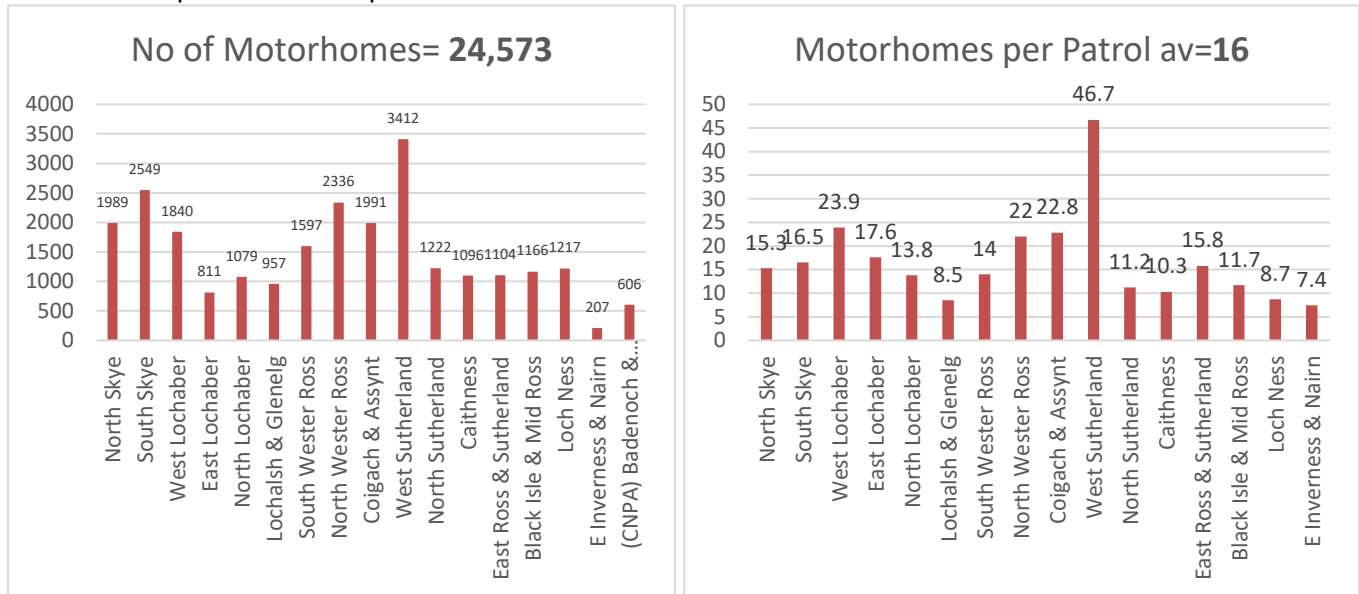
Many motorhome or campervan users have the mistaken belief that they are 'wild camping' and are thus covered by the access legislation and Scottish Outdoor Access Code. The Access Rangers engaged with motorhomers where they considered it was necessary to inform them that they were parking inconsiderately and that they were in fact overnight parking and not 'wild camping'. The Rangers would also inform them where they could find facilities to stay or empty waste. The Highland Council created and printed a number of leaflets to assist motorhomers enjoy the Highlands responsibly and safely.



Motorhomes and Campervans DL Lanc



Over 24,573 Motorhomes visited all parts of Highland with the highest numbers in Skye, West Lochaber and the North West. The figures for Badenoch & Strathspey (not included in totals) are much lower than every other patrol area except East Inverness & Nairn



Recommendations from Access Ranger De-briefing

- Increase number of aires and waste disposal points, especially in areas listed below.
- Leaflet were extremely well received and a good conversation starter.
- Provide clear information online as well as continue with leaflets
- Work with hire companies to ensure bookings, waste disposal and parking areas are understood
- Check other online sites give correct information e.g On SOAC, parking etc
- Areas that most need attention are:
Ceannabeine, Oldshoremore, Balnakiel, Strathy, Gruinard, Redpoint, Torridon, Traigh, Toigal, Ardvreck, Achmelvich, Glen Brittle, Duncansby Head.

Fires

Fires were a major issue, many people associate a 'wild camp' with having a fire as part of the experience. Unfortunately only a few people bring their own fuel and equipment to leave no trace. Most frequently fires will leave a scorch mark or remains, often including part burnt litter, which damage ground vegetation and roots. Some people will cut nearby trees or vegetation to use as fuel or occasionally cut timber fences, tables or handrails as fuel. Disposal barbeques are a further problems, no only do they scorch the ground but are often left behind when still hot. This then is an unattended fire risk and littering the area. The Rangers tried frequently to discourage fires and disposable barbeques for these reasons.



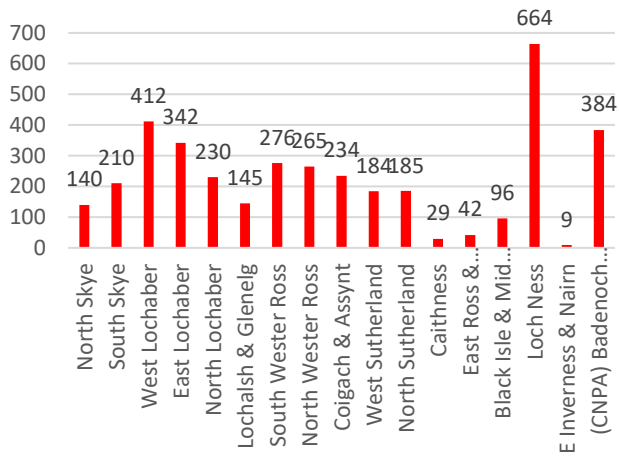
Fire site with litter



Camp fire with 'borrowed' cut timber logs

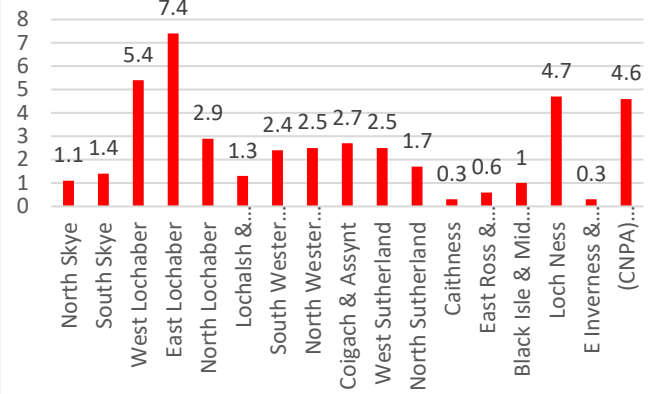
- The Rangers observed 3,463 fire marks seen in high camping areas but often with motorhomes too.

No of New Fire Marks =3,463



No of new Fire Marks per patrol

av=2.26



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.

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 sand once the debris was removed. This made the site less unsightly, and was often where any new fires were lit reducing any new damage to the grassland. The sand could also promote vegetation re-growth.



A No Fires sign at Loch Duntelchaig



The burnt debris removal and sand cover method at Ceannabinne.

Recommendations from Access Ranger De-briefing

- Promote 'Leave No Trace' message
- Permanent signs required in worst locations
- Better understanding with Police & Fire Service when called out
- Better promotion of No Fire message nationwide. Target 'bushcraft' courses and popular imagery
- Lobby local shops and/or supermarkets not to sell disposable BBQs
- Link of increasing fires with CO2 emissions, and climate change

Outdoor Toileting

Outdoor toileting has become a major issue in areas where informal camping has increased. There are often no facilities nearby and with sites being used continually the amount of toileting became unsustainable in some locations. The Rangers did their best to discourage this by placing signs notifying the nearest public toilets and in areas where there was overuse and rocky ground, encouraging people to bag & bin their poo. '#Bag It and Bag It' was a promoted Highland Council campaign with signs and posters around the area. A hand out Poo Kit was developed with North West Geopark and given to campers around Durness.

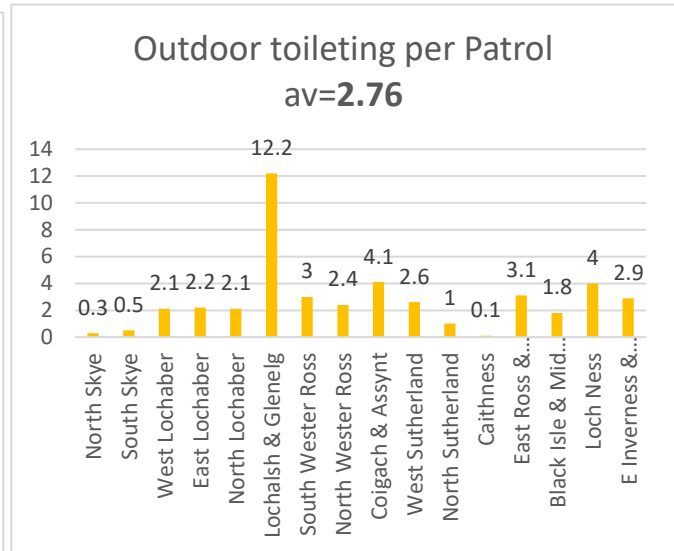
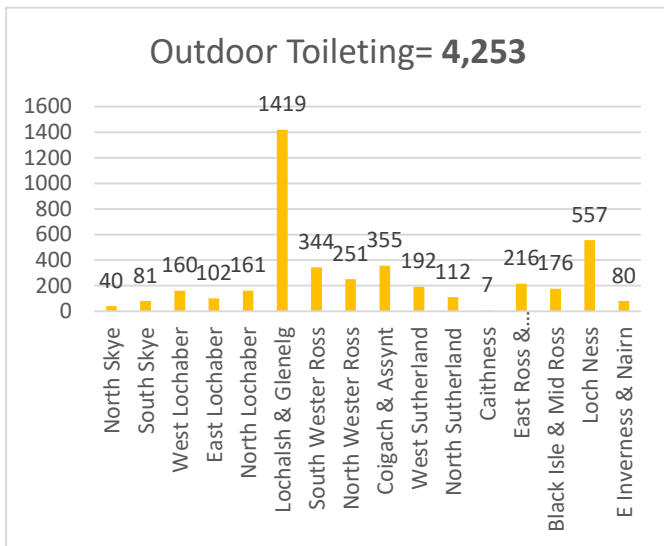


A nearest toilet sign



A Bag & Bin it poo kit.

- There were 4,253 incidents on human waste found, again an issue with camping where there maybe lower WC provision, eg Lochalsh and the far north west.



Recommendations from Access Ranger De-briefing

- Place signs to locate closest toilets
- Promote 'Leave No Trace' message and include bury waste or bag & bin in popular areas
- Encourage more comfort scheme sites in worst areas, e.g Lochalsh. Discuss with Amenities team
- Need to find a way to install temporary or low cost public toilets in some remote locations, e.g. Ceannabeinne, Camusdarroch, Duntelchaig

Litter & Fly tipping

This is one of the more obvious and persistent issues in the countryside. People litter for many reasons and it is not just an issue associated with informal camping. The litter is not only unsightly but causes a health risk to wildlife and people. Much litter is left behind by day-trippers and there were numerous incidents of fly tipping by local residents. However, the Rangers undertook actions to discourage people littering with conversations and had the power to issue notices if necessary, although non were. This was as much to do with being unable to corroborate and procedure, as well as some promises to clear up by people were not able to be followed through.

The Rangers actively cleared a number of popular visitor sites of litter, reported extensive littering & fly tipping to Waste Management Operatives and also notified them of overflowing bins.



Overflowing bins at Silverbridge



Fly tipping at Achilty

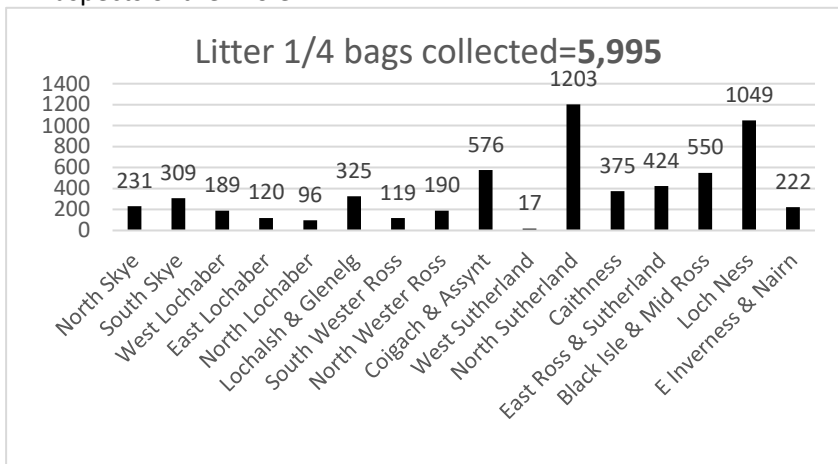


Remains of a weekend camp at Duntelchaig



Collected rubbish at Loch Tarf and Laggan.

- Nearly 1500 full bin bags collected of litter were collected. Litter appears to be more of a problem around Loch Ness and North Sutherland. Although some allowance must be made for Rangers focussing on different aspects of their role.



Recommendations from Access Ranger De-briefing

- Promote 'Leave No Trace' message
- Some locations require more bins whilst others should have bins removed, discuss with Waste Team.
- Large lockable bins required for Ranger use when some distance from Recycling Centres e.g Drumnadrochit
- Worked well with Waste Operatives, need to continue increased frequency of collections.

Roadside Parking

The popularity of of some Highland sites and particularly the intensive marketing of the NC500 has caused continuing problems of overflowing car parks and roadside parking in many areas. In a number of cases this causes road obstruction and also damage to road verges and sometimes infrastructure. The answers to this problem are many fold and requires proper planning and funding to develop infrastructure, maintenance and repairs.

In the short term the Rangers have assisted with trying to reduce inconsiderate parking and damage to some sites by talking to drivers. Where no driver is present, they have issued Parking Warning Notices and informed either Parking Services or the Police if appropriate where penalty notices or removals are required. At Chanonry Point, parking became so troublesome that a Ranger specific to that site was appointed. This Ranger also advised on dolphin watching and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. The Rangers have also worked with other Council services to install bollards and parking signs where necessary.



Parking issues were most evident at the Arisaig beaches.

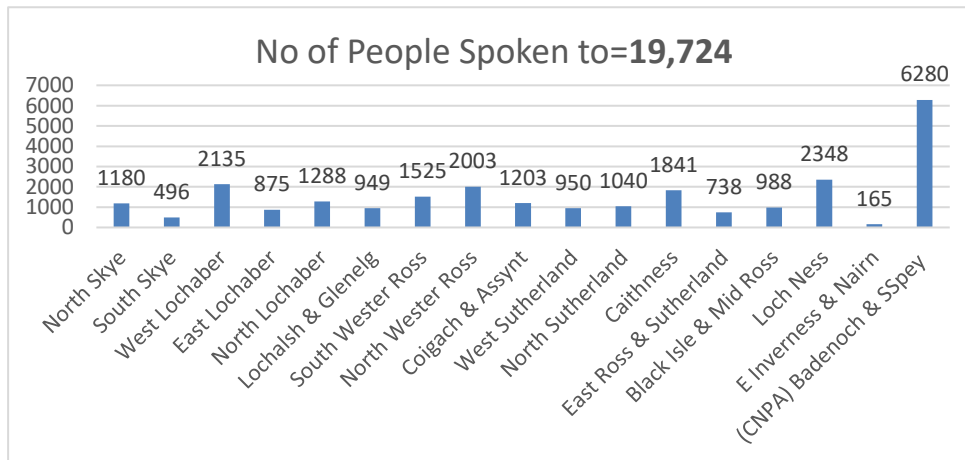


Chanonry Point car park



Car park near Durness

- In less than 6 months, over 75,000 vehicles were seen parked in car parks and roadside, with over 47,173 people observed and 19,724 of them have been informed or reminded of responsible behaviour. Again the figure for Badenoch & Strathpey in CNPA is shown for comparison but not included in total numbers. The figure for the National Park is considerably higher as 4 rangers covered an area comparable to 1 THC Access Ranger.



Engaging motorhomer in Wester Ross



On patrol near Foyers

Recommendations from Access Ranger De-briefing

- **'Invitation to pay' sites need to be rolled out as quickly as possible.**
- **Some areas need clearway orders and/or No Parking areas before next Easter especially if close to pay car parks e.g Arisaig, Glen Brittle, Glen Etive, Smoo, Gruinard, Ceannabeinne, Claigan/Coral Beach, Rosemarkie, Balnakiel, Plockton**
- **Some sites require increased car parks e.g. Mellon Udrigle, Stac Pollidh, Dores, Duntelchaig, Whaligoe, Duncansby Head, Dunnet Head, Puffin Cove,**
- **Explore Park & Ride/Walk possibilities at: Arisaig, Glen Brittle, Claigan, Storr, Fairy Glen, Plockton.**

De-briefing

Monthly progress reports were submitted to highlight the busiest hotspot sites and groups worked with. At the end of season, a collated hot spot recording form was requested along with site improvement report. These can be used to justify the allocation of resources and as supporting evidence for any future funding bids.

These were not received in time from every Ranger. However, this was partly anticipated and a De-briefing workshop was held on the last Saturday of the contract to gather the thoughts of the Rangers on service improvement, working with others and site management suggestions.



The Ranger De-briefing Workshop at Fairburn Activity Centre

Working With Others

The Rangers were provided with contact numbers for appropriate Council staff, i.e Access officers, Parking enforcement, Waste operatives, Dog Wardens, Roads and Amenity Services. They also had contacts for local Police, Fire Service and other organisation's Ranger services. Contact details for community representatives and land managers were also given and they were encouraged to make more.

During the season the Access Rangers worked hard to co-ordinate their patrols with other organisation Rangers and to inform Services and Police about any relevant incidents. They contacted most of the community councils or trusts in their areas (approx. 62), gaining information and building trust. Some volunteer workdays were arranged with these groups including beach cleans in Dornie and Poolewe.

Many land managers were contacted and discussions were had regarding managing visitors on their sites to co-ordinate any actions and provide assistance. The Access Rangers created Whats App groups with Forestry & Land Scotland, NatureScot and National Trust for Scotland rangers in specific areas. This greatly improved co-operation and co-ordinated their patrols.

The OAM was involved in weekly Visitor Management Operations groups in North and South Highland, reporting and co-ordinating actions with other Council services, emergency services and land managers. He also established a fortnightly reporting meeting with the ranger partners and a monthly meeting of Highland Ranger Managers. From August, the OAM was invited onto the national Visitor Management Strategy Operational sub group and submitted fortnightly RAG reports to the national Visitor Management Strategy Group for the North Coast 500 and Arisaig/Morar areas.

Site Improvement Works & Maintenance

The Rangers were able to undertake a number of tasks that improved popular visitor sites. 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 volunteers projects were done at Chanorny Point, Dornie, Gruinard, Dores and Durness.



Repairing a bridge at Gairloch



Installed a handrail at Gruinard to prevent dune erosion



Rebuilt a dyke at Durness, prevents off-road parking



Path work at Chanonry Point with volunteers to improve disabled access

Communications

Initially as the team was becoming established there were some issues with communications. Many people wanted to contact the Rangers to inform them of perceived problems and to expect immediate resolution. However, despite discussions with the Council’s communications team an ideal way of dealing with these was not found. A generic email address was set up as a stop-gap but remained the main way for people to report or contact the Rangers. As the Rangers took some time to be placed on the Council’s IT system 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. There were similar delays in issuing of phones.

A Facebook account for the Ranger team was also set up. This became a good way to issue information & advice and show the work of the Rangers. The page had achieved 3000 followers by early August. The maximum reach by a single post was 174,457 people with 15 others reaching over 10,000. Some posts caused some controversy but when further explanation was given overwhelming support was achieved. During the season a number of press releases were issued to give updates on the teams progress and this was reported in the Inverness Courier, Ross-shire Journal and other local papers. At the end of the season an STV News report was made from Durness highlighting the Access Ranger service.

Summary and Support

The Access Ranger team has received numerous compliments and messages of support from local residents and visitors. This has been directly by word of mouth, email and Facebook posts. This support has been recognised by Highland Council Ward Members and Senior Management and continuation of the service will be most likely in 2022. Review and re-assessment will be necessary after that. Attached is a PDF copy of a Survey conducted by a popular Facebook group on the Access Ranger team, with 85% support from 921 responses for permanent posts.



NC500 The Land
Weeps Poll on Seas

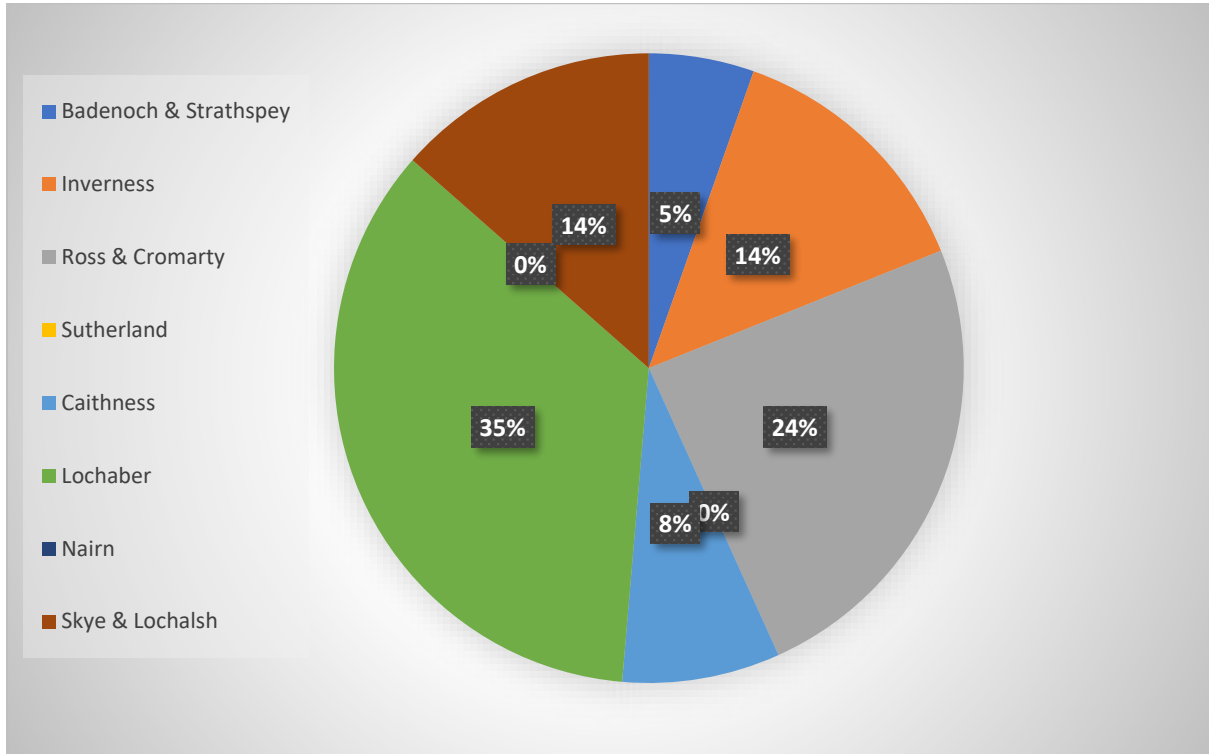
Reports and updates of the Rangers actions and progress was made to several Highland Council Committees, notably the Tourism Committee and Area Committees who unanimously commended the Ranger team on the difference they were making to our local communities and countryside.

As some of the Council’s visitor management funding allocated to Rangers remains, we have been able to employ 5 Rangers for a further 6 months over the winter season to produce and implement a number of location action plans for Arisaig, Durness, Assynt and Glen Brittle as well as other site improvements on a number of heavily visited sites such as Ardvreck, Applecross, Coral Beach (Skye), Strathy, Duntelchaig and Gruinard. They will continue working and liaising with communities and land managers to improve visitor sites in preparation for future years.

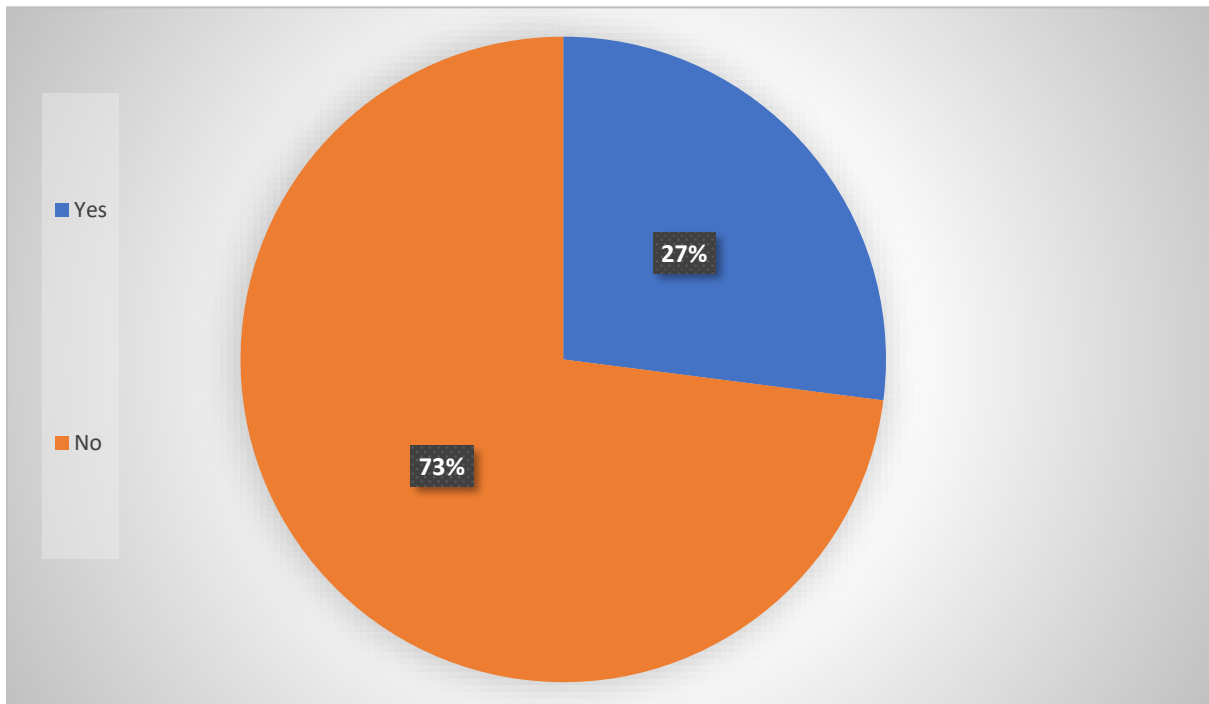
Highland Comfort Scheme Survey 2021

Pie Charts

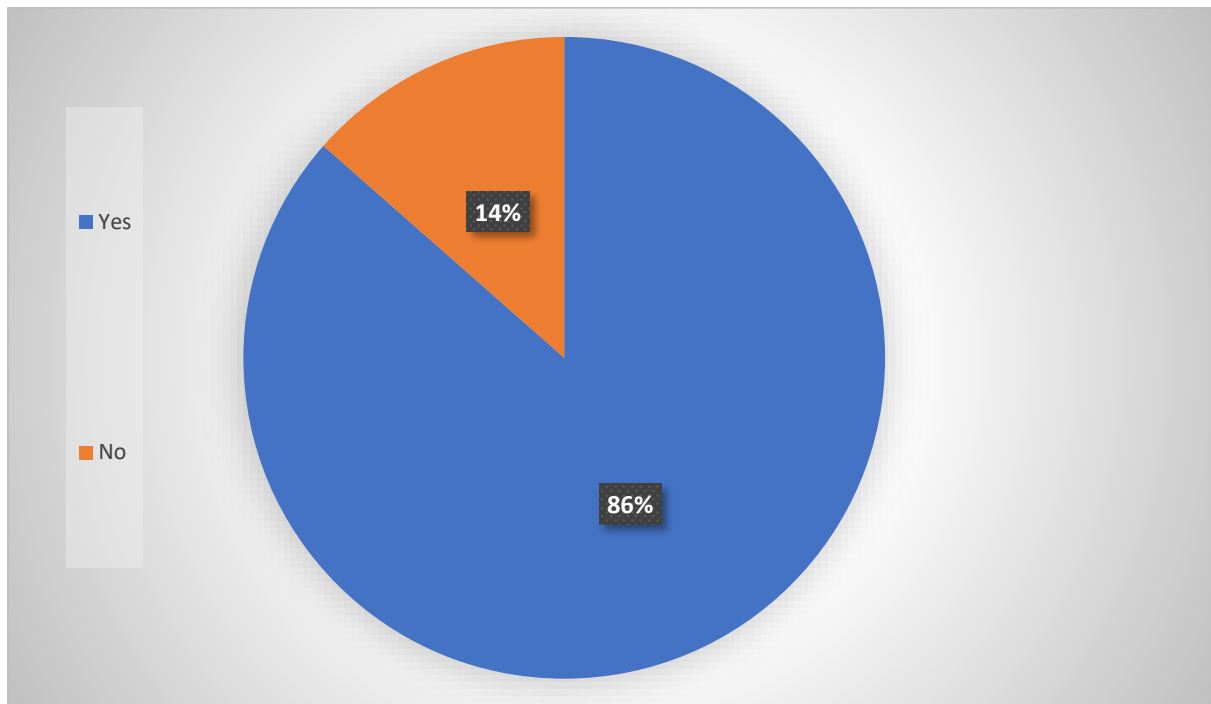
Which Highland Area is the Comfort Scheme in?



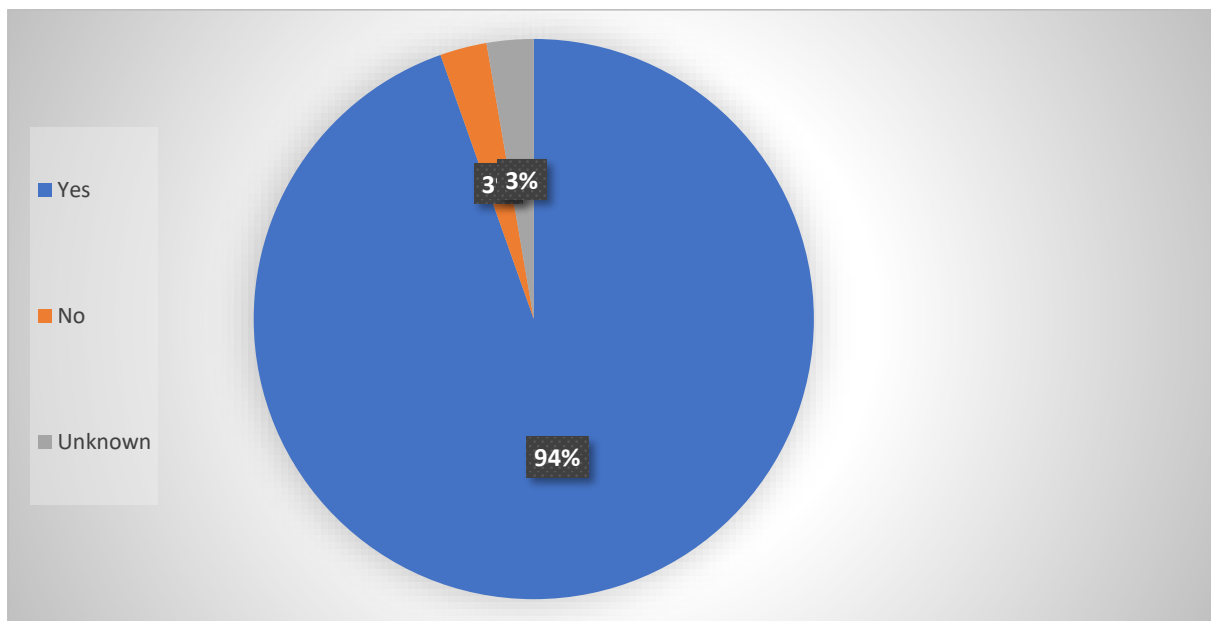
Is the Comfort Scheme on the NC500?



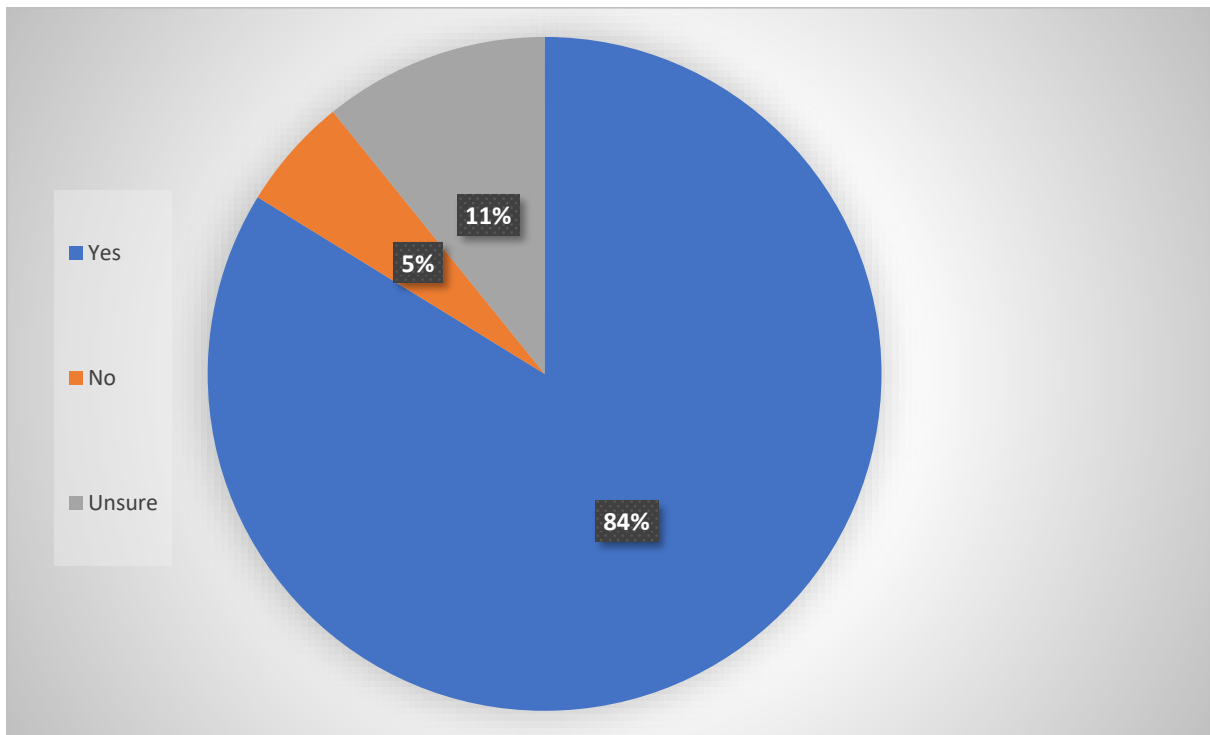
Has the Comfort Scheme been beneficial?



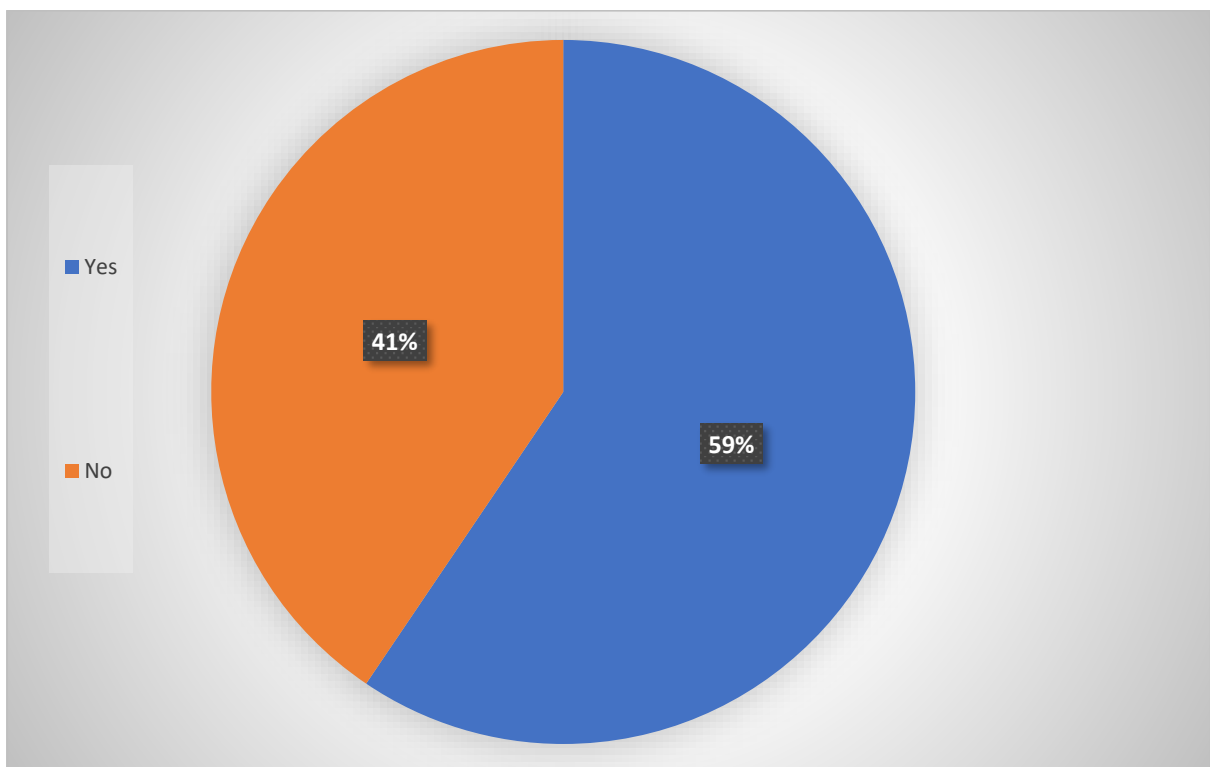
Would you become a Comfort Scheme Provider again?



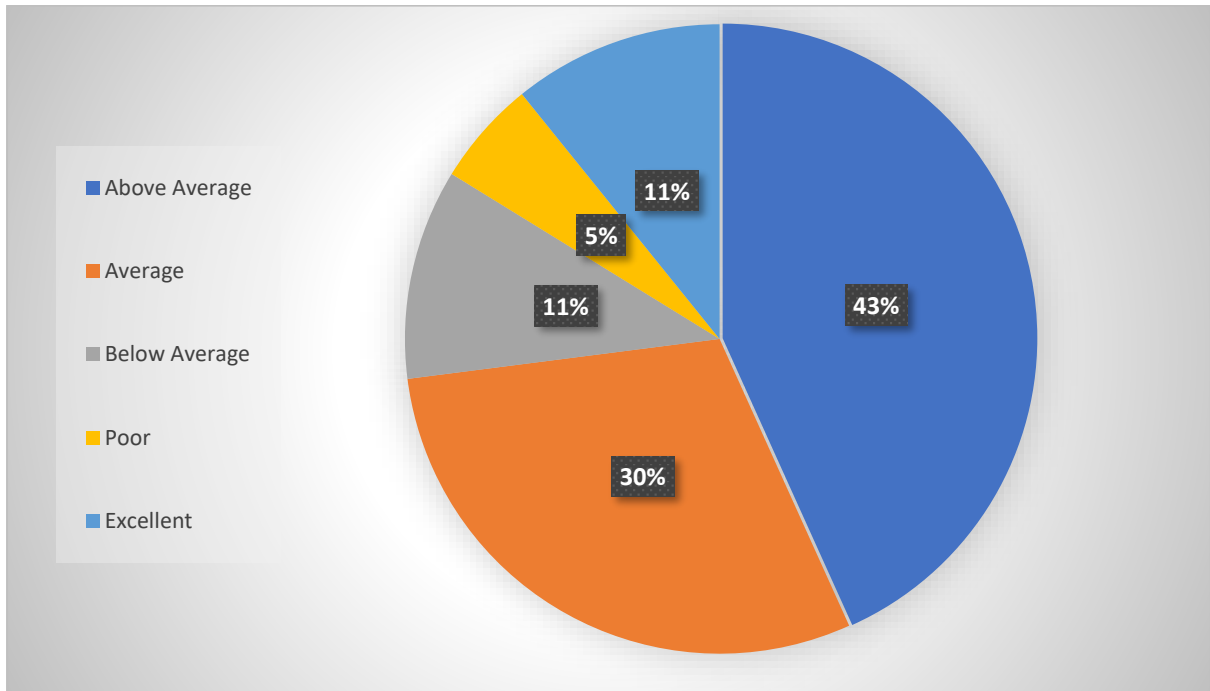
Would you recommend others to sign up to the Comfort Scheme?



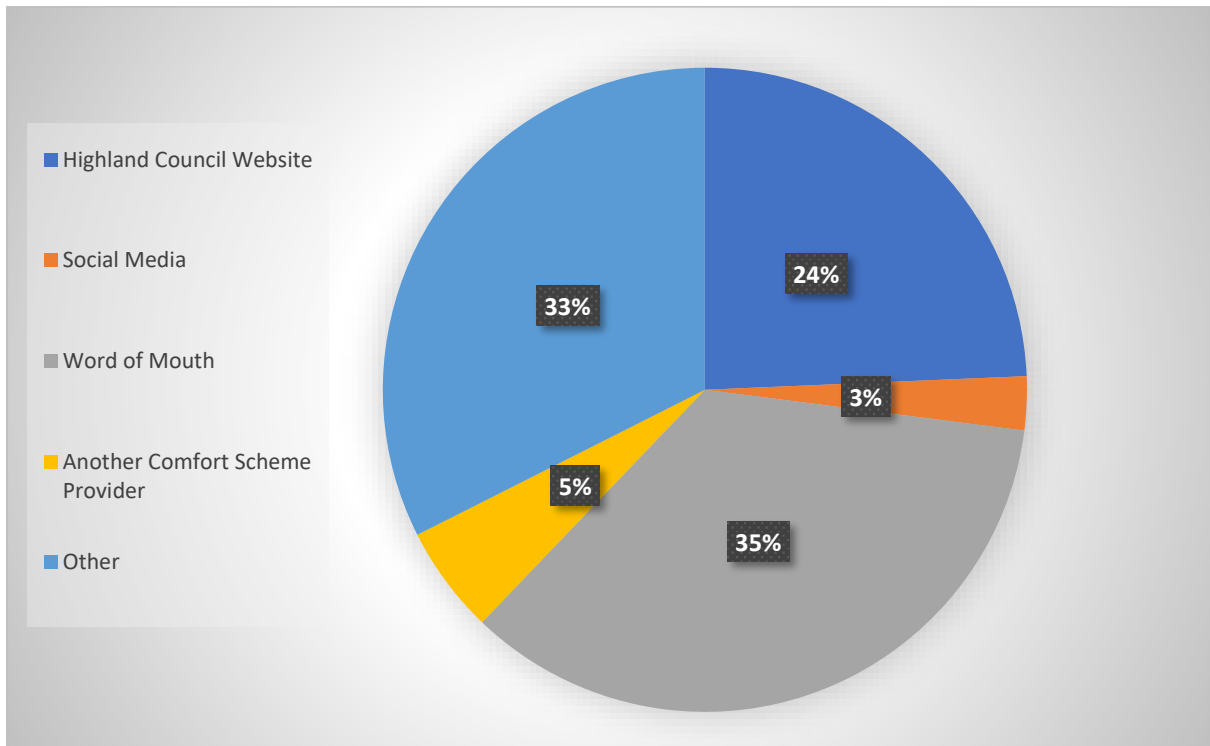
Does the Comfort Scheme have an honesty box installed?



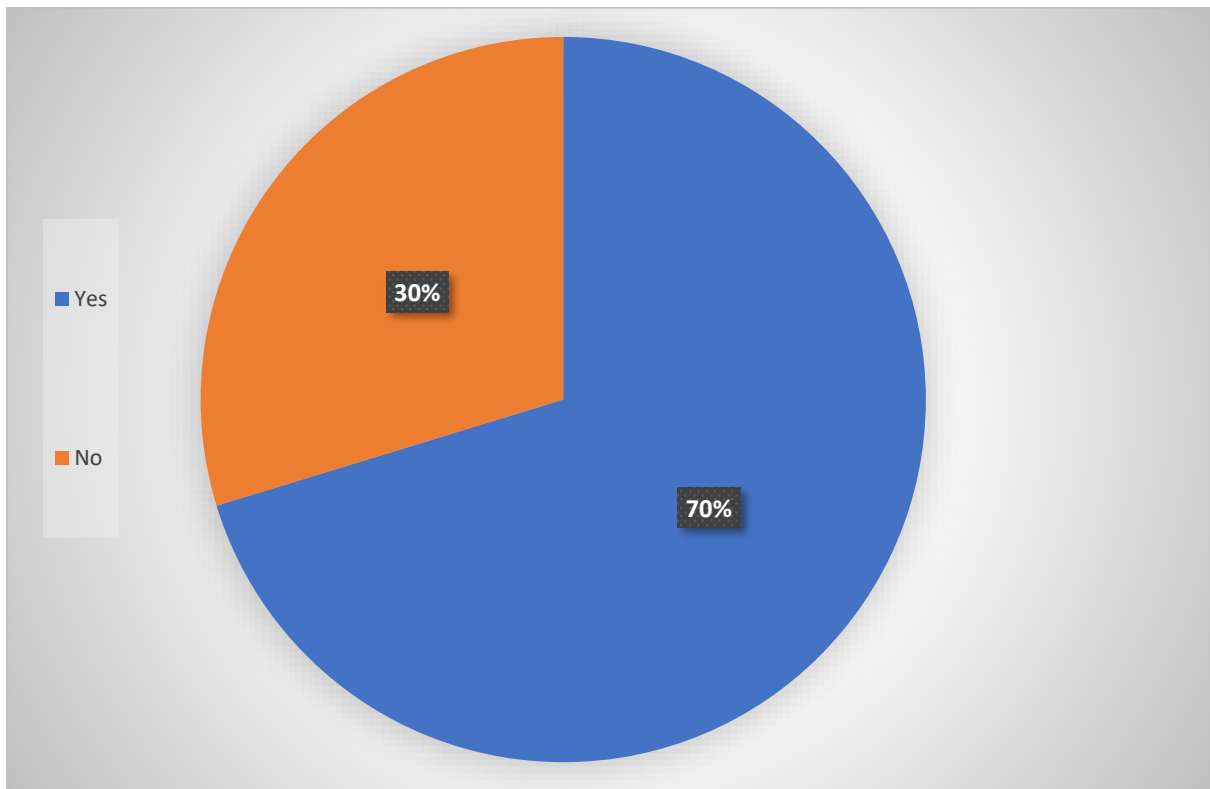
How would you describe the Comfort Scheme Initiative?



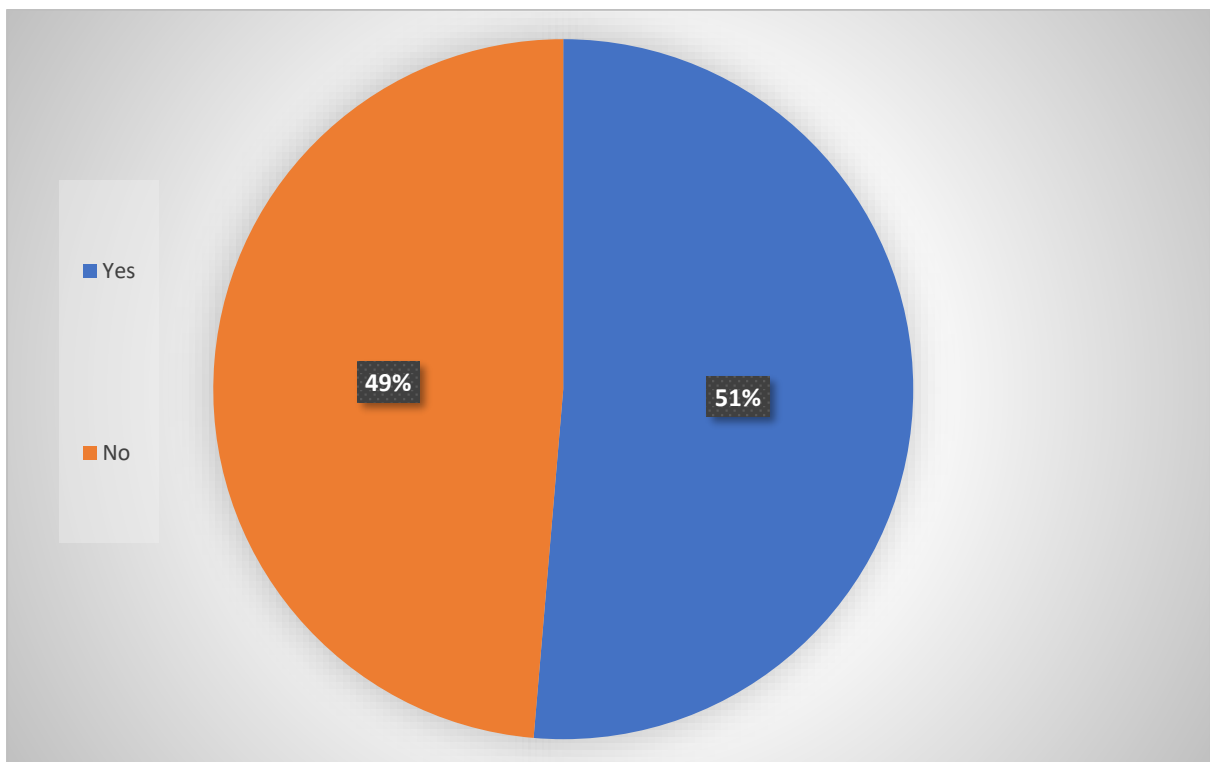
How did you hear about the Highland Comfort Scheme?



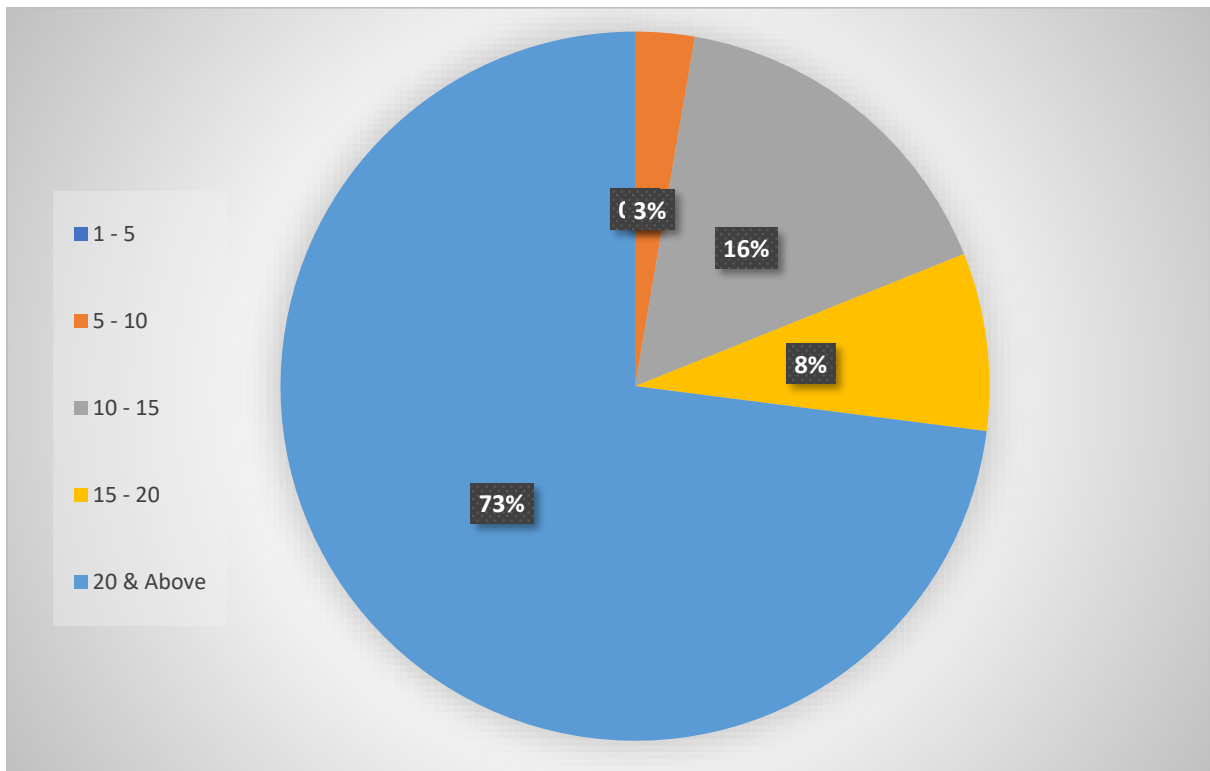
Are Comfort Scheme Providers adequately advertised?



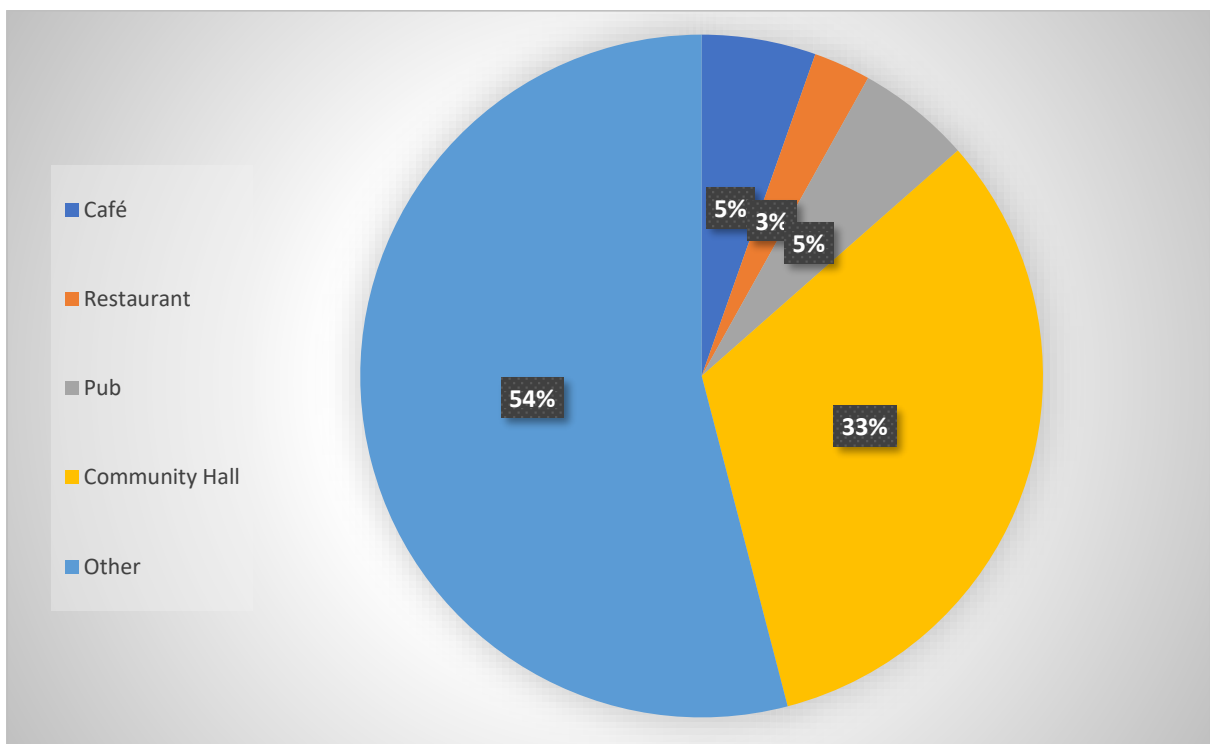
Does providing a Comfort Scheme attract more custom to your business and/or Community?



On average how many people use the facility daily?



What type of facility is the Comfort Scheme?





Visitor Management Plan 2022
Plana Stiùireadh Luchd-tadhail 2022

December 2021
An Dùbhlachd 2021

Background

Cùl-raon

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

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

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

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



Visitor Management

Stiùireadh Luchd-tadhail

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

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

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



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

The Highland Council's role Dreuchd Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd

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

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

Particular challenges to be addressed by this plan

Dùbhlain sònraichte ris an cuirear aghaidh sa phlana seo

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

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

Roads, Parking and Transport issues

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



Amenity and Waste issues

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

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



Outdoor Access issues

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



Environmental and Public Health issues

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

Public information



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

Additional visitor management activity undertaken in 2021

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

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

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



Proposed actions for 2022

Gnìomhan gam moladh airson 2022

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

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

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

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



Project and activity details

Mion-fhiosrachadh pròiseict is dèanadais

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

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

Projects under way during 2021

Pròiseactan a thathar a' gabhail os làimh ann an 2021

In addition to the visitor management plans described, numerous capital projects have been completed during 2021 or are under way that are expected to be completed during spring / summer 2022 and which will contribute to ongoing visitor management.

Those new projects expected to be ready by spring / summer 2022 are:

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

Appendix

Frequently Asked Questions

Ceistean Cumanta

Can the Highland Council introduce byelaws to ban wild camping?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

While this is a legal possibility, a clearway can be a blunt way of addressing the problem and can cause unintended consequences as it prevents all forms of stopping on that stretch of road. This could restrict visitor activities such as stopping to take a photograph as well as local people going about their regular businesses – e.g. a local guide stopping to offload a canoe near the shore or a farmer stopping to feed livestock. It may however be an appropriate

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

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

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

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

Can Countryside / Access Rangers carry out parking enforcement activity?

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

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

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

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

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

Can the Council install more motorhome waste disposal points?

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