

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL

Environment & Infrastructure Committee

28 October 2020

VISITOR MANAGEMENT IN RURAL AREAS

Report by Executive Director (Housing & Environment) (Report No. 20/199)

This report highlights multi-agency actions taken during 2020 to respond to the unprecedented increases in visitors (especially informal camping and motor homes) in rural areas of Perth & Kinross, as a result of COVID-19 related travel restrictions. The report also sets out proposals to prepare for the future challenges and opportunities presented by increases in visitor numbers.

1. BACKGROUND / MAIN ISSUES

- 1.1 Perth and Kinross has some of the most beautiful scenery in Scotland, which is very accessible, and attracts many visitors to our area. We warmly welcome visitors who act responsibly and respect their local surroundings, recognising that visitors to the area support our vital tourism economy.
- 1.2 In 2020, the number of visitors to many of our rural areas rose dramatically, through day visits to scenic areas, as well as increased informal camping and motorhome users. This increase was due to Covid-related foreign travel restrictions, people wanting to get away from home after weeks of lockdown, and lack of availability of traditional visitor accommodation. This created pressures due to the unprecedented volume of these visitors, but also the anti-social behaviour of a very small proportion - the term **`dirty camping`** is being increasingly used to apply to these irresponsible activities.
- 1.3 The term "dirty camping" should be differentiated from the more established term "wild camping", which relates to lightweight 'backpacking' by people who make use of the "right to roam" access rights under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, to camp out in virtually any unenclosed land, rather than in designated campsites. Traditionally, wild camping has been carried out by people with an affinity for the countryside, and who act responsibly to leave no trace behind them. One of the issues this year has been the unprecedented number of visitors, who would not usually undertake this activity, and are either unaware of, or not inclined to pursue, responsible camping practices. 'Dirty Camping' is often undertaken close to roads, with large tents, equipment and supplies brought by car. Although this could be claimed to be activities within access rights set out in the Act, this is not within the spirit of lightweight non-vehicle based 'wild camping'.
- 1.4 There is a difficult balance between ensuring visitors have open access to the countryside, to meet the aspirations of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#), and implementing some of the restrictions advocated by residents and communities, to curb the inappropriate behaviour of a minority of inconsiderate visitors.

- 1.5 In seeking to restrict certain behaviours, we also need to ensure the positive message that Perth & Kinross is a great place to visit, and responsible visitors are warmly welcomed, is not overshadowed by messaging about the controls that may need to be put in place.
- 1.6 This report reflects on how the Council worked very closely with local communities, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and other partners, to tackle the challenges presented by the increased volume of visitors and the inconsiderate actions of a minority. The report also sets out the proposed steps to prepare for future challenges next year and beyond – assuming substantial restrictions on international travel will continue, and there is a continued increase in people travelling to our rural areas for recreation and overnight stays. With foreign travel uncertain along with changing travel corridors, consumers’ increased interest in day trips within Scotland and staycations are likely to continue. This is highlighted in a recent report by 56degreeinsight showing that Scotland remains the most likely destination for Scottish holidaymakers during 2021.
- 1.7 The main concerns expressed by communities and residents, and witnessed by our officers and partners, during 2020 were:
- substantial increase in vehicular traffic overloading popular destinations
 - inappropriate parking on roads preventing access for residents, farmers and emergency vehicles
 - littering and fly-tipping
 - damage (to fields and trees)
 - human waste not disposed of appropriately
 - unattended campfires
 - other anti-social behaviour through alcohol consumption
- 1.8 Appendix 1 shows images of some of these challenges.

2. MULTI-AGENCY RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE IN 2020

- 2.1 Appendix 2 gives a summary of the multi-agency activity so far, working with communities. It highlights, via a community bulletin, the measures that were taken to mitigate the negative impact of increased visitor numbers, and how public services and communities worked together to tackle challenges such as dirty camping.
- 2.2 The approach taken was preventative in nature and designed to work with local communities and visitors. Each weekend community volunteers with around 10-14 Council and partners’ staff, offered advice and encouraged positive behaviours amongst people camping in our rural areas. They worked closely with Police Scotland officers, also deployed on duty in rural areas. Activities included:
- providing advice on safe camping and fires, and where necessary persuading people to move on for example, if they were camped in a field with livestock
 - handing out leaflets on the Scottish Outdoor Access Code

- establishing `Clearways` in response to community concerns, to limit parking in heavily used hotspot areas, and providing education and enforcement for drivers
- reporting intelligence to Police Scotland on inappropriate/illegal behaviour
- handing out bags for rubbish
- carrying out significant number of additional waste collections in these areas
- establishing a multi-agency working group which met weekly, to review the previous week's activity, tasking actions for the next week's patrols, and managing communications messages to visitors and communities

2.3 The agencies involved were:

- Police Scotland
- Scottish Fire and Rescue
- Forestry and Land Scotland
- Loch Rannoch Conservation Association
- Council Services:
 - Community Greenspace
 - Parking Services
 - Safer Communities Wardens
 - Waste Services

2.4 Council officers also worked closely with both the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs and Cairngorm National Parks Authorities, on their joint approaches to tackling these challenges, in areas of the National Parks which are located in Perth & Kinross. Lomond & the Trossachs National Park (LLTNP) also held weekly multi-agency meetings and additional community liaison meetings were arranged in St Fillans, at which the Council were represented. These meetings are continuing until after the October school holidays and will subsequently be taking a more strategic role, in preparation for the 2021 season.

2.5 Wherever possible, staff sought to feedback to communities and elected members to make it clear their concerns were being listened to and taken seriously. This approach also helped to develop good working relationships with local communities and landowners and helps form a basis for future shared discussions on joint solutions, detailed in sections 5.2 and 5.3 below.

2.6 This multi-agency approach was welcomed by local communities and commented on favourably by both local and national elected representatives, as an example of good practice. It is, however, clear that providing service coverage to such a wide geographical area is challenging, even with the level of staff resource deployed during 2020. A lessons-learned process is being carried out to review the resources and targeting activity for the 2021 season.

3. NATIONAL SITUATION

3.1 The pressures arising from increased visitor numbers, and dirty camping, were not confined to Perth & Kinross. These issues were reflected across

multiple rural areas in Scotland as well as being reported nationally, while also being raised at the Scottish Parliament.

- 3.2 On 14 September 2020, Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing, and Malcolm Roughead, Chief Executive of VisitScotland chaired a meeting to discuss how to “future proof” visitor demand. There was a recognition that Scotland needs to do more, and has to share collective responsibility to find and deliver solutions to visitor management.
- 3.3 The meeting was convened to discuss what could be achieved collectively across all agencies Scottish Government, VisitScotland, Cairngorm National Park Authority, Loch Lomond National Park Authority, Local Authorities, Naturescot and Forestry and Land Scotland etc. A Visitor Management Response Group is to be set up. That group is to have a “short life” span and come forward with proposals and action points by the end of 2020.
- 3.4 Within Perth and Kinross and in other areas, communities, residents and elected representatives, frustrated with the behaviour of some visitors, have suggested that local camping byelaws, and/or alcohol bans, should be implemented to control antisocial behaviour.
- 3.5 The procedures for establishing camping byelaws and alcohol bans are set out in national legislation, and are not simple or quick solutions. Based on the legislative process, and the experience of others in introducing such controls, these measures could take years, and require significant officer capacity, and evidence of strong community support, to implement. Further analysis is contained in Appendix 3.
- 3.6 A national legislative approach may be more effective than local byelaws in ensuring consistent standards are set for visitor management across the whole of Scotland. This would avoid duplication of effort between all rural local authorities and the National Parks Authorities. It would also ensure a clear and consistent approach across Scotland which would be understood by visitors, communities as well as the agencies and organisations involved in visitor management. It also avoids pushing the problem from one area to another, as some individuals may choose to camp in the areas with lower standards of control.

4. RURAL TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

- 4.1 The Scottish Government's [Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund \(RTIF\)](#) supports collaborative projects which focus on improving the visitor experience in rural parts of Scotland that have faced pressure on their visitor infrastructure, or where there have been negative impacts on local communities due to increases in visitor numbers. RTIF aims to address anticipated future `pinch points` as a result of growth initiatives such as route development, major events, film and TV production as well as the continued growth in the motorhome sector.
- 4.2 RTIF awards are available from £75,000 up to a maximum of £375,000, with RTIF providing support up to 70% of approved project activity. Applicants

must provide a minimum of 30% for projects. The match funding can be in-kind support and in the form of labour or land value. Only Local Authorities or a National Park Authority can apply to the fund.

- 4.3 The deadline for submission of applications for the current round (round three) of the RTIF was extended from 10 July 2020 to Wednesday 14 October 2020. All projects must have submitted an Expression of Interest (EOI) and received approval for the EOI, before they submitted a full Stage 2 application on 14 October 2020. Projects should also have applied for planning permission by that date.
- 4.4 Council officers have been working closely with partners and have previously submitted three Expressions of Interest to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, which were all approved to move to full stage application. Officers have been working in collaboration with the various partners towards the deadline and have now submitted two applications detailed below. Awards announcements are expected by 4 December 2020.
- 4.5 The two projects submitted are:

River Tay Way, Aberfeldy Car Park

New toilet block & shower block, waste disposal points for camper vans, River Tay Way information point

- Application led by Perth & Kinross Countryside Trust
- Project Cost: £340,737
- Match Funding: based on land value of £100,0000
- Planning application submitted and has received planning consent

Loch Leven Heritage Trail

New toilet block, including changing places toilet and accessible toilet, increased car parking including disabled parking, vehicle charging points

- Application led by RSPB Loch Leven
- Project costs £447,445
- Match funding coming from RSPB £128,952
- Planning application submitted 15 September 2020. No outcome yet.

- 4.6 If successful, these RTIF facilities will not be operated by the Council, but by the lead partner. If these arrangements are unsuccessful in future, and there is a community expectation that the Council takes on the operation of these facilities, this would be subject to a Council decision on the budget required to support that operation.
- 4.7 The third project is led by Loch Rannoch Conservation Association (LRCA) to support a package of measures including two toilet blocks, one at Carie and one at Kilchonan Car Park, with waste disposal points and recycling points.
- 4.8 Although council officers have been working extensively with the LRCA, some elements of the project were incomplete at the point of the RTIF deadline. These include the need to demonstrate 30% match funding; evidence of ongoing maintenance funding plan; landowner permissions and community engagement.

4.9 Therefore, unfortunately, the Council was not in a position to submit a bid for this project in this current round of RTIF funding. Officers will continue to support Loch Rannoch Conservation Association as they develop this project, with a view to it being submitted for a subsequent round of RTIF funding.

5. PROPOSALS

5.1 In anticipation of increased visitors to our rural areas next year, the following sets out our proposed multi-agency approach, on the basis of three main elements:

- **Information** – supporting visitors to adopt positive behaviours
- **Enforcement** – working in partnership with other bodies – taking enforcement action only when absolutely necessary
- **Infrastructure** – supporting the development of visitor facilities

5.2 Section 2 of this report has demonstrated the partnership approach that has already taken place with local communities. This approach is aligned with the Perth and Kinross Offer, which establishes a new direction for the Council to transform the way we work with our communities, citizens, partners, businesses, employees and other stakeholders, to ensure that public services can be co-created and delivered sustainably to achieve better outcomes for the people of Perth & Kinross. The proposals in this report builds on the Offer approach.

5.3 Managing the increased visitor numbers is a complex challenge, and communities, landowners and residents are well placed to identify solutions and take action, often supported by council officers and other partners. For example, community representatives worked alongside council staff and partners to carry out weekend patrols over the summer; council staff and community groups have worked together in cleaning up badly littered areas; at least one landowner has already established additional car parking at a `hotspot` area ; and officers are also working with other landowners over potential physical improvements in other areas, to improve car parking and other facilities. The joint working with community groups over RTIF, detailed in section 4, is another example of our joint working with communities.

5.4 Following a review of communities` and officers` experience from the 2020 season, the main `hotspot` areas for future priority action are:

- Clunie Loch
- Foss Road
- Rannoch
- Schiehallion
- St Fillans & south Loch Earn
- Kenmore and Loch Tay

Information

5.5 It is proposed that our successful partnership and multi-agency approach working with communities and landowners, to encourage positive behaviours

amongst visitors, will be continued over the visitor season in 2021. The proposed priorities for information include:

- developing an overall communications strategy including key messaging around responsible disposal of litter, raising awareness to visitors of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and signposting to local visitor facilities available including camping, parking and toilets.
- an engagement and communities plan including local communities, stakeholders and national Government
- clear site signage and on-site education e.g. speaking to individual campers to encourage positive behaviour.
- undertake a trial project with community partners to tackle human toilet waste modelled on best practice developed by Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park.
- information for visitors, both online and in the local area, with details of facilities such as toilet waste disposal points, publicly available toilets and authorised parking areas.

Enforcement

- 5.6 As highlighted in section 2.2, the approach taken to date with visitors has been more preventative in nature, with enforcement only as a last resort. For 2021, the multi-agency group is developing a shared enforcement manual outlining the powers and responsibilities of each partner, to ensure a more robust approach is taken to enforcement, if the circumstances require this.

Infrastructure

- 5.7 There is a need to work at a strategic level with local and national partners to ensure a coordinated approach is taken to visitor management, across Perth and Kinross, and Scotland as a whole. The objective would be to welcome responsible visitors to the area, and support them with sufficient infrastructure to ensure their visit is a positive experience, both for them and the communities they are visiting. A coordination of approach and resources would ensure the maximum efficiency, effectiveness and consistency and would include:

- encouraging businesses & landowners to look at a range of alternative temporary or permanent camping offers – low key overnight parking, overnight parking with waste disposal, temporary tent areas with toilets
- looking at fast track approvals processes and any funding opportunities.
- developing a coordinated communications strategy
- considering a camping 'comfort scheme' and extension of the Council's Community Environmental Challenge Fund
- promoting Perth and Kinross and Scotland as a welcoming destination
- monitoring success of interventions and adapt as appropriate
- implementing any longer-term infrastructure proposals

- 5.8 In Perth & Kinross, based on community feedback, and observation of officers on duty over the summer, the proposed priority issues for infrastructure are:

- parking
- toilet provision
- litter
- waste water and toilet waste disposal points for camper vans and motorhomes

5.9 To develop future infrastructure opportunities effectively will take:

- additional staff capacity to develop proposals. This will be achieved through re-prioritising work, to free staff resources to this activity
- community engagement and involvement in solutions
- a mapping exercise to identify what facilities are currently available, so that new initiatives are not started in locations where existing facilities may already be suitable. This will ensure any funding is targeted at areas of greatest need
- funding for infrastructure – the aim is to maximise external funding sources. Any Council funding for infrastructure would have to be approved via the capital budget process.

5.10 To date, responding to both the wider challenges of COVID19, and also dealing with the response to the surge in visitors, meant that officer capacity to work with communities and landowners to develop infrastructure solutions has been limited over the summer.

5.11 In recognition of this, the Council and Police Scotland (through the Police Scotland Communities Fund) are seeking to pool financial resources to create a temporary co-ordinator's post, with the following objectives:

- work with communities and landowners to develop 'very-local', low-cost, short-term solutions – parking, toilets and litter
- identify external funding opportunities, including the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, and Community Environmental Challenge Fund (see 5.12 below)
- develop community-led projects and support them in bidding for funding which is not available to the Council.
- work with colleagues in the Council and partners to support the development of these projects. This includes working with the Council's Communities Team, which has extensive local knowledge of community organisations that may be interested in helping
- further developing the partnership approach to mitigating the impact of dirty camping and co-ordinating the operational response.
- develop a network of local activists to support the statutory and voluntary partnerships in engaging with visitors

5.12 To support smaller scale local infrastructure improvements, it is proposed to extend the Council's popular [Community Environmental Challenge Fund](#) (Report No. 20/132) to encourage landowners, supported by communities, to put in a range of basic facilities. The Fund is aimed at community groups leading and delivering projects, which would make a significant difference to

their local environment and be widely supported within the community. Up to £100,000 of funding has been made available annually since 2011/12.

- 5.13 CECF funding could include new or extended hardstanding areas for parking at the key hotspots, for example at the start of popular walks; or other support such as additional bins or basic campervan parking areas. Using the CECF gives communities access to smaller scale funding (£2,500-£10,000). This complements the RTIF (see section 4) which is more suitable for larger scale projects (£75,000 or higher)
- 5.14 At this early stage, there is no detail on potential financial implications on the Council for infrastructure requirements. We would seek to maximise external funding for infrastructure costs, to reduce direct costs to the Council. Any proposals that require either capital or ongoing revenue funding from the Council will be reported to Council or Strategic Policy & Resources Committee for approval.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The Committee is asked to agree:

- a) the proposed approach to dealing with future increased visitor challenges as detailed in this report.
- b) to prioritise activity to the geographical areas and facilities as detailed in section 5.4 and 5.8 of this report.
- c) to extend the funding criteria for the Council's Community Environmental Challenge Fund to include works to improve visitor facilities, as detailed in sections 5.12-5.13 of the report.

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1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Strategic Implications	Yes / None
Community Plan	Yes
Corporate Plan	Yes
Resource Implications	
Financial	None
Workforce	None
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	None
Assessments	
Equality Impact Assessment	None
Strategic Environmental Assessment	None
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	None
Legal and Governance	Yes
Risk	Yes
Consultation	
Internal	Yes
External	Yes
Communication	
Communications Plan	Yes

1. Strategic Implications

Community Plan and Corporate Plan

1.1 This report contributes to (iii) and (iv) of the following strategic priorities:

- (i) Giving every child the best start in life
- (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens
- (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy
- (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives
- (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations

2. Resource Implications

Financial

2.1 At this stage there are no financial implications. Any future financial considerations will be submitted to Council or Strategic Policy & Resources Committee for approval.

Workforce

2.2 There are no workforce implications.

Asset Management (land, property, IT)

2.3 There are no direct asset management implications for the Council from the proposals in this report.

3. Assessments

3.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is required to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between equality groups. This section should reflect that the proposals have been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment process (EqIA) with the following outcome:

- (i) Assessed as **not relevant** for the purposes of EqIA

Strategic Environmental Assessment

3.2 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 places a duty on the Council to identify and assess the environmental consequences of its proposals.

Risk

3.3 The risks for this activity have been considered by a multi agency working group which has been dealing with this issue over the summer. The main risk relates to being unprepared for a potential increase in visitors, wild camping and dirty camping over Summer 2021.

4. Consultation

Internal

4.1 The Head of Legal and Governance has been consulted in preparation of this report.

External

4.2 Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

5. Communication

5.1 The report contains proposals to engage with communities over future shared actions, as well as a communications plan for promoting positive behaviours amongst visitors to our area.

2. BACKGROUND PAPERS

2.1 None.

3. APPENDICES

3.1 Appendix 1 - Examples of Dirty Camping

3.2 Appendix 2 – Information Bulletin for Local Communities July 2020

3.3 Appendix 3 – Wild Camping and Alcohol Byelaws Briefing Note