

National Park Authority Board Meeting



Agenda Item 9 – Appendix 1

Your Park Project Update

Paper for information

Your Park Project Update

The second season of the Camping Management Byelaws began on 1st March and will be operational until 30th September. During and after the first season a large amount of feedback was received from communities, visitors, landowners, businesses as well as from our staff and Board members. This feedback was used to help modify and improve the new internal systems, processes and activities that are required to operate the byelaws.

Recently an internal audit of the Camping Management Byelaws was carried out by the National Park Authority's internal auditors, West Dunbartonshire Council. The report of the audit findings is due to go to the Audit & Risk Committee on 6th March.

As a result of the communications work and media coverage, awareness of the Camping Management Byelaws should be greater. Weather depending, this combined with the positive feedback received from those who camped last year, may lead to an increase in campsite and permit area use in the 2018 season.

With refresher training for full time Ranger staff now completed and seasonal staff recruited, our focus is to provide a high quality experience for our visitors, whilst continuing to positively manage the pressures associated with wild camping within the Camping Management Zones

Ranger Service

- Learning from the first season we have employed an additional Seasonal Ranger Team Leader. This is a key role to manage and support the Rangers whilst on patrol and deploy them to where they are most needed.
- Our Ranger deployment model has been refined using data from the previous season to focus more Ranger resources on the periods and times of day when they are needed most. This deployment model allows flexibility for our Rangers to engage in other areas of work

such as community engagement, education visits and Loch Lomond island patrols during the season.

- Rangers inspected all permit areas prior to the season starting and undertook light touch maintenance tasks. In season, Rangers will undertake monthly inspections to remove litter and manage vegetation where appropriate, with our Land Operations Team carrying out more specialist improvement works.

Signage

- Additional information signage for key locations in the Camping Management Zones is being installed during the start of the season. A small number of land owners were unwilling to grant permission for signage and therefore we will aim to increase awareness in these areas using our Rangers and our social media channels.
- We will be making minor adjustments to roadside threshold signage to highlight that camping is by permit only, and ensuring that the precise dates of operation are included.
- At key locations; such as along the West Highland Way we will look to install some bespoke signage to help convey key byelaw messages around issues such as fires and toileting using user-friendly infographics.

Permit Areas

- Over the winter, survey work identified potential new permit areas across all four Camping Management Zones. We are now liaising with land owners and local communities regarding these proposals and hope to bring an additional 20 additional camping spaces on stream by the end of May. These sites will give extra flexibility to vary capacity depending on levels of demand and ground conditions at sites.
- From the start of the new season there will be 24 hour access to the disabled user toilet facilities at Firkin Point, to improve the visitor experience and help with the sustainability of this permit area.

Campsites

- Six new campsite wardens have been recruited and trained to provide cover for Loch Chon campsite and the new Loch Achray campsite, which is due to open in late May.
- The installation of satellite broadband at both campsites will now allow customers to pay online for camping firewood or to make a booking on site.

- 19 pitches at Loch Chon have now been upgraded to a more robust all-weather surface, with four pitches having camping platforms constructed. The all-weather pitches are permeable to allow vegetation to grow through them to reduce the visual impact on the landscape.

Communications

- A 'You said, we did' webpage was prepared for the start of the season to highlight the key changes that were undertaken from the feedback received over the season. This will be updated throughout the season as we respond to feedback or make adjustments.
- Updated descriptions of our permit areas and Loch Chon campsite have also been made on our website.
- Along with the satellite broadband installation at our campsites, we are working with partners and private businesses to identify 'booking stations' that will allow campers to use local business WiFi spots to book a permit. A map of all public WiFi hotspots is already available on our website.
- Press releases were issued to remind people that the camping byelaws were in effect again from 1st March 2018. The 'Camping in the Park' and 'Respect Your Park' materials (which make it clear how to adhere to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code when camping) have been distributed at key visitor stop-off points throughout the National Park.

Partnership and Stakeholder Working

- The pre-season Operation Ironworks meeting was held on the 20th February to ensure that this important partnership is maintained and that resources are directed to where they are needed. Representatives from Police Scotland, the National Park and Forest Enterprise Scotland were in attendance.
- We will be designing the next Stakeholder Forum for the spring. We are keen to engage with stakeholders and would like to reach new people that wish to engage about camping in the National Park.
- The Communications Team have set up a series of meetings with partners to ensure a clear understanding of the Camping Management Byelaws and the way that they are being managed. To support these meetings an information pack has been produced.
- Whilst many improvements have been made to systems and procedures, 2018 will be a year to refine and develop our service with a focus on strengthening relationships with the people who live and work within the National Park.

Camping Development Strategy

- During the season the Visitor Operations Team will continue to investigate opportunities for additional permit area capacity, for potential development in the 2019 season.
- With increasing numbers of motorhomes in the National Park we will look to get a better understanding of the behaviour, requirements and impacts of motorhome use, alongside the facilities that are currently present within the National Park. An activity plan will be created using this data to explore how the National Park Authority can work together with public bodies, the private sector and local communities to provide infrastructure that supports this growing market, but ensures longer term sustainability and helps reduce associated negative impacts.
- A working group has been set up to find solutions to help tackle the ongoing issue of human waste at some popular wild camping locations in the National Park. The group's objective is to trial a variety of solutions to tackle the issue and will look to work with partners to assess the effectiveness of the methods used.
- The Camping Development Strategy has been an important document to direct investment in infrastructure where it is needed most. Following the completion and review of the first operational season it is now an appropriate time to review the strategy to ensure that moving forward it aligns with the new National Park Partnership Plan and forthcoming Corporate Plan, and is also informed by the experience gained through managing the byelaws.
- We will be further developing our Monitoring Framework with a particular focus on the development of a Sustainability Framework that will help inform data collection and analysis, to steer management decisions aimed at protecting sensitive natural environments.

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