

## Visitor Management Review of 2020 and 2021 Planning

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### *Paper for noting*

#### 1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper and appendix is to give Board an overview of the 2020 visitor season in the National Park, including the work of the National Park Safe Reopening Action Group partners and plans for preparations ahead of the 2021 season.

#### 2. Recommendation

- 2.1. Members are requested to:
  - (i) note the contents of this paper and associated appendix 1 (2020 Season Review report).

#### 3. Background

- 3.1. In the CEO Update Paper to Board in September 2020, Members were provided with an update on how the visitor season had progressed so far, with a key focus on how the National Park Authority and other partners from the National Park Safe Reopening Action Group (NPSRAG) were working together to try and best manage the acute visitor pressures associated with the relaxation of the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.
- 3.2. The 2020 visitor season has been unprecedented in its nature and whilst many of the visitor related pressures experienced, such as traffic congestion, littering and irresponsible behaviours are not new to the Park, the combination of factors resulting from the pandemic lockdown meant that there were felt particularly acutely this year, and placed considerable extra strain on our public agencies and some local communities.
- 3.3. The 2020 Season Review captures the key headlines and experiences from the NPSRAG partners this year and provides the basis for our collective work over the winter months to prepare for what is assumed will be another very busy season in 2021, with some travel restrictions and financial pressures expected to continue.

#### 4. Headlines from 2020 Season Review

- 4.1. Appendix 1 contains full details of the Season Review carried out in conjunction with partners, but Members are asked to note some key headlines below:

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- On a positive note the Park gave opportunities for many thousands of people; visitors and locals alike, the chance to enjoy nature and the outdoors at a time when it has been most needed. The rise in domestic travel and staycations meant that new audiences came to enjoy the hospitality and recreation opportunities the Park offers;
- Camping in the Park continues to prove increasingly popular with many people including families, and offers the opportunity for people to connect with nature and experience an overnight stay at low cost;
- Through the necessity of needing to work together in order to tackle common visitor challenges, the season brought to light opportunities for closer partnership working with our local authorities, Police Scotland, Transport Scotland and Forestry and Land Scotland colleagues;
- In addition, due to the extent of visitor pressures in other parts of Scotland, the profile of visitor management was raised at a national level leading to positive strategic developments in this area;
- The necessity for home working created the conditions to trial virtual meetings with local communities and stakeholders which proved a successful and efficient communications tool;
- Challenges were very significant however and included the need to bring in at short notice an extensive range of management measures from all the public bodies, at significant cost and at a time when the majority of staff were heavily restricted by working from home and when many visitor facilities were closed;
- The scale of the additional costs borne by the public bodies in the Park have not been captured in detail at this point, but are estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands of pounds;
- Negative impacts were also acutely felt by some local communities and land managers living close to areas where traffic issues and irresponsible behaviours from some visitors created considerable frustrations over a sustained period;
- Despite considerable levels of discretion being shown to visitors by officers from the partners responsible for the enforcement of byelaws and regulations, there was a significant increase in enforcement action taken due to an increase in non-compliance or illegal activities.

### 5. Preparing for the 2021 Season

5.1 Over the winter months our own and partner staff are focused on actions that together aim to help reduce the acute visitor pressures experienced this year and to look for opportunities and efficiencies in improving service and the visitor experience for all. This work is focused around the three themes of:

- Information & Engagement;
- Infrastructure and Services;

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- Enforcement & Regulation.

The different actions comprising these themes will be captured in a Joint Visitor Management Response Plan to be agreed by all the partners.

- 5.2 **Information & Engagement:** several strands of work are underway to date including the updating of our webpages to have stronger messaging around responsible fire-lighting, ongoing stakeholder meetings with the local communities most affected and exploring digital solutions to monitoring traffic volumes. Monthly operational meetings between NPSRAG partners to coordinate work and efforts will continue and a National Park Visitor Management Communications Plan will also be developed ahead of next season.
- 5.3 **Infrastructure and Services:** to date includes discussions with Stirling Council regarding trialling remote solutions to the monitoring of car parks and installation of new signage. Additionally scoping conversations have been held with partners regarding expanding toilet capacity and the concept of increasing temporary car park capacity at traffic congestion hotspots, such as Kinlochard. A potential extension of Forestry and Land Scotland's ['Stay the Night'](#) campervan stopover scheme is being discussed and plans are also underway for expanding the Ben A'an car park which is a particular traffic hotspot. Discussions have been held with a tour bus operator regarding the feasibility of creating additional public transport capacity in the Trossachs and East Loch Lomond areas.
- 5.4 **Enforcement & Regulation:** recruitment will start shortly for next year's seasonal staff intake, with virtually delivered training modules planned. Discussions with Police Scotland colleagues are on-going regarding the creation of a new National Park, Partnership Against Rural Crime and work with Transport Scotland and Local Authorities is progressing how temporary road clearway orders at key traffic parking hotspots, such as at South Loch Venachar and Bracklinn Falls, may be made permanent.
- 5.5 Members will see that there is a wide variety of work underway to progress key actions following on from this season, and ahead of next year. In terms of the National Park Authorities focus we want to target capital budget over the winter and early spring primarily into projects that target the particular pressures of traffic management, littering and toileting, but these can only be fully achieved if we work in collaboration with partners. Opportunities will also be explored for investigating novel methods of engaging with local businesses and communities in this regard.
- 5.6 Members should also be aware that there is a note of caution about the feasibility of delivering against all these areas of work, as many are complex with long lead-in times and cannot be fixed or created in a few short months, during partial lockdown.

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Additionally early indications are that partner resources will be stretched even further next financial year which means there are uncertainties regarding the seasonal operation for 2021. Further uncertainty also comes from the fact that the Scottish Government budget announcement will not be until the end of January 2021, only a month before the beginning of some seasonal operations. For these reasons ongoing dialogue with local stakeholders will be key to ensure that expectation levels about tackling large-scale and wide ranging visitor related pressures are realistic and clear to all parties.

### 6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Following a short period of reflection and analysis on the experiences and impacts of this year's COVID-19 season, work immediately began on preparing for the 2021 season, and this work is ongoing by all NPSRAG partners. Members are asked to note the contents of the 2020 Season Review and the joint visitor management work programme for the winter.

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