



Visitor Management 2020 Season Review

1. Executive Summary

- The COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdown had a major impact on visitor volume and behaviour and the management of associated pressures within the National Park in 2020.
- While visitor management is always a priority for the National Park Authority and its partners, the 2020 season and in particular the easing of lockdown restrictions at the beginning of the peak summer months brought new challenges and exacerbated existing pressures.
- The rise in staycations as restrictions on overseas travel remained in place meant new audiences came to enjoy the hospitality and recreation opportunities the National Park offers.
- Balancing the need to support responsible enjoyment of the outdoors to provide much-needed wellbeing benefits to those who had been locked down at home for an extended period, with the pressure and risks to parts of the National Park including small, rural communities and services was difficult.
- The main visitor management issues exacerbated this season were irresponsible parking, litter and flytipping, irresponsible camping, fire damage, irresponsible toileting and high volumes of traffic in rural locations.
- Close collaboration and engagement across a range of partners and stakeholders was vital in trying to manage these pressures.
- An extensive range of measures, significant additional resources and funding from all key public body partners were directed towards visitor management this season, often at short notice and at the expense of other priority areas of work.
- Landowners, businesses and communities within the National Park also had to undertake additional measures and costs in response to COVID-19 and visitor pressures.
- As lockdown restrictions began to ease at the end of May but a five mile travel restriction remained in place, the National Park experienced mass non-compliance with this restriction and large volumes of visitors at a time when staff deployment, services and facilities were not yet fully operational.
- COVID-19 and physical distancing guidelines added challenges to deployment and reopening of visitor facilities but were considered paramount for the safety of both staff, visitors and communities.

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- Camping proved increasingly popular with many enjoying campsites and camping permit areas responsibly once opened, but also lead to a significant rise in negative behaviours such as littering and abandoned camping equipment, irresponsible toileting and fire damage.
- Irresponsible parking and littering were persistent issues this season, particularly at popular day trip and hillwalking destinations.
- In light of the widespread pressures placed on society by the pandemic, discretion was exercised where appropriate by enforcement staff in relation to breaches of byelaws and regulations. Despite this, there was a significant increase in enforcement activity compared to previous years due to the scale of non-compliance.
- With similar pressures being experienced across other parts of Scotland, this season brought to light opportunities for closer partnership working, information sharing and trial measures that will be used to inform future visitor management planning both locally and nationally.
- Despite the challenges, the 2020 season brought new audiences to enjoy, appreciate and benefit from the National Park. Future visitor management plans will aim to strike a balance between welcoming and supporting these new audiences to visit responsibly with managing irresponsible behaviours and pressures caused by high volumes of visitors.

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2. Introduction & Context

Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park is one of the most scenic and popular visitor destinations in Scotland attracting millions of visitors each year. Its location close to the central belt means it is easily accessible to a large proportion of the country's population, providing a wide range of recreation opportunities for multiple audiences.

A key part of the National Park Authority's role, particularly in the spring and summer months, is balancing the need to support visitors to enjoy the area, with the protection of the environment and the needs of the people who live and work here.

The 2020 visitor season, usually considered to be 1st March to 30th September, presented significant new challenges in relation to COVID-19 and lockdown restrictions which began to lift at the peak of the summer visitor period.

The season began as normal with National Park campsites and camping permit areas opening on 1st March, along with recruitment of seasonal staff and the operation of the Camping Management Byelaws. However, the national lockdown introduced on 23rd March meant all seasonal operations and deployment had to be halted to comply with regulations on essential working.

When lockdown restrictions began to ease at the end of May, the National Park experienced mass non-compliance with the five mile travel restriction which was still in place. Further relaxation of restrictions in June and July meant deployment and operations could commence and by mid-July the majority of visitor facilities, including campsites and camping permit areas, had reopened and full deployment of Ranger patrols had begun.

Welcoming back visitors after lockdown and supporting them to enjoy the benefits of the National Park, particularly in terms of health and wellbeing, had to be carefully balanced with supporting Scottish Government guidance and managing risks to local communities and staff.

While a significant level of visitor management experience and interventions exist within the National Park, the sheer volume of visitors this season, including those either experiencing the area for the first time, required significant additional time, resources and funding to manage.

This report provides an overview of and insights into the wide range of visitor management work undertaken by the National Park Authority and its partners on the National Park Safe Recovery Action Group (NPSRAG), as well as a look ahead to planning for next season and beyond.

It covers the impact on and measures undertaken across the three strands of infrastructure and services, regulation and enforcement, information and engagement.

The NPSRAG is led by the National Park Authority and brings together partners from Police Scotland, Transport Scotland, Forestry and Land Scotland, Stirling Council, Argyll and Bute Council, West Dunbartonshire Council and Perth and Kinross Council.

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3. Infrastructure and Services

All partners on the NPSRAG had to implement additional measures to help manage visitor pressures across the National Park.

In terms of infrastructure and services these additional measures included:

- Increased litter collection/uplifts
- New/additional signage
- Introducing new parking restrictions/legislation
- Traffic management measures
- Hire and cleaning of temporary toilets
- Additional staff deployment/diverting staff time to focus on visitor pressures
- Implementing COVID-related safety measures to reopen/manage sites and facilities

3.1 Litter

Litter was a major issue as lockdown eased with popular locations hit with high volumes of waste before travel restrictions lifted, leaving a backlog to clear when staff were able to be safely redeployed. For example 100 bags of waste had to be uplifted from the Falls of Falloch alone.

Littering continued throughout the season due to the large volume of visitors. Between June and September, National Park Rangers recorded an 11% increase (159 bags) in the volume of litter they picked across the National Park compared to the same period the previous year. This equates to a total of 1,655 bags of litter picked.

July was the peak month overall for litter, with a 74% increase in the amount recorded by the Rangers compared to July 2019.

Once fully deployed in July, Ranger and Land Operations teams refocused their weekly workload to dedicate the days at the beginning of each week to site clean ups, at the expense of other areas of work. In August, a series of targeted clean ups at hotspot locations were carried out by staff and volunteers. These ran alongside a litter-focused communications campaign 'Love it Like A Local'.

As well as the National Park Authority, Forestry and Land Scotland, and local authority partners also had to implement additional litter collections and uplifts to cope with the volume of litter this season. For example, Forestry and Land Scotland undertook additional bin and skip collection for Ardentinn at a cost of approximately £1500. Stirling Council officers issued 7 Fixed Penalty Notices for littering over the season.

3.2 Parking and traffic management

Managing parking and traffic issues required extensive collaboration and a range of additional measures and enforcement activity.

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Initially National Park car parks remained closed in line with Scottish Government guidance while the five mile travel restriction was in place. However, many people disregarded these restrictions and visited popular places resulting in inappropriate parking along roadsides particularly in areas popular for hillwalking such as Ben Lomond at Rowardennan and Ben Vorlich at Loch Earn. Even once travel was allowed many of these issues persisted due to the sheer volume of visitors combined with the guidance to avoid car-sharing and public transport.

Dangerous parking lead to access problems for emergency and local bus services on a number of occasions. For example, the weekend of 25th/26th September saw two incidents of ambulances being blocked by parked cars at Rowardennan and Callander Craggs.

A number of parking and traffic management measures were introduced by Traffic Scotland and local authority partners:

- Falls of Falloch, A82 – Clearway and temporary speed restriction
- Loch Lubnaig, A84 – Clearway and temporary speed restriction
- Arrochar/Sucboth, A83 – Double Yellow Lines
- Bracklinn Falls, Callander – Clearway
- Ben A'an, A821 – Clearway
- South Loch Venachar – Clearway
- East Loch Lomond, B837 – Variable Messaging Signage (VMS) installed and road closures implemented when necessary.

A weekend car park status update service was also introduced from July to October to help manage traffic pressures. This is outlined further in Section 6.4

These measures had to be implemented quickly, with staff time and resources being diverted from other priority areas of work. For example, the estimated cost to Transport Scotland of the measures they introduced, including staff time and advertising, is around £35,000.

These measures were successful in helping to alleviate parking and traffic pressures, but not in preventing them altogether. The sheer volume of visitors and the capacity of existing infrastructure and services meant these issues persisted throughout the season. Permanent implementation of some of these temporary measures is being explored while other sustainable, longer term, solutions are also being investigated.

3.3 Toilets and visitor centres

The provision of public toilet facilities was considered a priority as visitors returned. Due to COVID-19 prevention measures such as increased cleaning and physical distancing, careful consideration had to be taken on how to safely operate toilet facilities to protect staff and visitors.

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Detailed safety assessments showed that some toilet facilities could not be operated within the guidelines at the time. Instead, temporary additional portable toilet provision was hired for Luss, Balmaha, Rowardennan and Tarbet at significant extra cost. The overall investment by the National Park Authority in the hire of temporary toilets and extra cleaning required across the season was £89,000 (£66,000 for toilet hire and £23,000 for additional cleaning).

Forestry and Land Scotland also estimate they invested up to £15,000 on COVID-related cleaning costs for public toilets on their sites within the National Park.

The National Park's main visitor centre at Balmaha remained closed throughout the season opening to provide only public toilet facilities from the end of October.

Forestry and Land Scotland opened the Lodge Visitor Centre in Aberfoyle and Sallochycampsite on East Loch Lomond in July with restrictions on visitor numbers and additional safety measures in place.

3.4 Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway

The most complex site for the National Park Authority to reopen safely was the Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway in order to facilitate the launching and retrieving of multiple motorised craft on Loch Lomond.

As lockdown restrictions lifted, but with travel restrictions still in place, the Authority faced increasing pressure to reopen from loch users. However, putting in place procedures to ensure the safety of staff and visitors was the priority due to the nature of the site and volume of users in a limited space.

Stakeholder engagement and clear communications helped ease pressure and significant changes were made to the operation of the site, including extra staffing and infrastructure, before it reopened on 6th July.

Additional costs for operating the site, including extra staff and infrastructure came to approximately £30,000.

3.5 Camping

National Park camping permit areas and campsites opened as normal on 1st March 2020 in line with the seasonal Camping Management Byelaws. However, due to lockdown they closed from mid-March until hospitality and tourism restrictions lifted in mid-July.

From early June, while the travel restriction was still in place, the National Park saw significant numbers of people failing to comply and camping sprang up in many popular areas and with it negative impacts such as littering, fire damage and irresponsible toileting.

While the byelaws were legally in effect at this time, the National Park Ranger Service could not be fully deployed until restrictions on essential working changed. Close partnership working with Police Scotland and information gathering from communities, land owners and partners was key at this time.

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Due to overseas travel being limited, the National Park, like many areas of Scotland and the UK, saw many people choosing staycations, including camping and motorhomes, as an alternative and visitor numbers increased notably.

Despite the later opening in mid-July, there was an overall increase of 31% in the number of people using the National Park's camping booking system and a 44% increase in the number of nights booked between July and September compared to the same period last year. August saw a 50% increase in permit area bookings compared to 2019.

Of the 76 days from 17th July to 30th September there were 18 nights when permit areas were at over 95% capacity. When looking at these increases, it is also worth noting that the previous season in 2019 had been the busiest so far in the three years of operation of the Camping Management Byelaws.

This does not appear to have had a negative impact on people's experience with consistently high rates of satisfaction via feedback surveys. 92% of respondents said they were very or quite likely to recommend camping in a permit area.

In order to comply with safety guidelines and social distancing, capacity was reduced at the National Park Authority's Loch Chon and Loch Achray campsites, increasing again slightly in August.

Inchcailloch campsite remained closed due to the privately operated ferry from Balmaha being unavailable and logistical challenges around getting staff on site for regular toilet cleaning.

The campsites remained open for a further three weeks at the end of this season, to provide more managed camping opportunities in the National Park, particularly for families, over the October half term holidays.

Reopening of the camping permit areas and campsites undoubtedly helped to support some responsible camping behaviour and manage issues. However, problems persisted in some areas including South Loch Venachar, St Fillan's and Loch Earn. This required additional resources to be redirected to focus on these areas at peak times with additional patrolling from National Park Rangers and Police officers.

4. Regulation and Enforcement

Regulation and enforcement in relation to visitor management issues was primarily led by Police Scotland, the National Park Ranger Service and local authorities.

Along with the Police, National Park Rangers have powers to enforce Camping Management Byelaws, Loch Lomond Byelaws and Environmental Protection Act 1990. Local authorities have responsibility for parking enforcement.

To cope with the increased demand, partners deployed additional staff on the ground and increased face to face engagement with the public.

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While many enjoyed the National Park responsibly, the huge increase in visitors did lead to a significant rise in the amount of enforcement activity. Where appropriate, enforcement staff exercised discretion mindful of the impact lockdown had had on people.

4.1 Ranger Service

Lockdown coincided with the recruitment of seasonal Rangers which meant that training for new and returning staff had to be delivered remotely and without time to build up experience on the ground in the quieter spring months. The majority of permanent Ranger staff were also furloughed for a short period while on the ground non-essential working was restricted. At this time, a skeleton Ranger Service focused on intelligence gathering, partnership working with Police Scotland and planning for the safe reopening of facilities and patrolling.

Full deployment only became possible as the peak summer period began. Ranger Service priorities were patrolling of Camping Management Zones, byelaw enforcement, public engagement, site inspections and litter picking. Close partnership working and joint patrolling with Police Scotland continued.

Between 6th July and 30th September 364 patrols were carried out by a service of 32 Ranger staff, which was a lower patrolling and staffing number from previous years due to budget constraints.

Despite a reduction in staff resource and patrolling, 481 people's names were taken by Rangers in relation to the Camping Management Byelaws, a 55% increase on a similar time period in 2019. Four cases were reported by the National Park Authority to the Procurator Fiscal.

In response to community feedback and discussions, patrols were targeted to hotspot areas experiencing issues relating to camping at St Fillans and South Loch Venachar. While these targeted patrols helped to manage these issues, this required taking patrols away from other areas at times when staff resourcing was low.

While the National Park did see an increase in the volume of litter this season, few Fixed Penalty Notices were given for litter or fly-tipping, with Stirling Council officers issuing 7 Fixed Penalty Notices for littering over the season.

The challenge with this type of enforcement is that littering has to be witnessed by more than one member of staff for the legislation to be enforced. Ranger patrols by their nature move around to cover large areas with the aim of engaging with as many visitors as possible, providing advice and information to prevent negative behaviours such as littering. In contrast local authority enforcement officers are focused primarily on direct enforcement as a priority. Further consideration of this constraint will be undertaken with partners ahead of next season.

4.2 Police Scotland

During the lockdown period, while other enforcement staff could not be deployed, Police Scotland dedicated increased staff resources to the National Park area. As lockdown eased and visitor numbers continued to rise, additional resources, including the use of special constables, were brought in to address pressures in hotspot areas.

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Police Scotland recorded significant increases in both the number of byelaw infringements and levels of public nuisance incidents within the National Park compared to previous years.

Camping Byelaw offences in particular saw a notable increase to 151 recorded by Police between April to October 2020. This is compared to four in 2019 and 11 in 2018.

This coincides with an increase of almost 700 public nuisance related incidents, from 127 in 2019 to 803 in 2020. These incidents related to general antisocial behaviour, breaches of local and national COVID-19 guidelines such as group gatherings as well as a significant number of complaints around parking at or near key National Park locations.

Alcohol related offences also increased, with 52 drinking in public offences recorded in comparison to only 10 the previous year as well as an increase in road traffic offences, specifically neglect of traffic directions. Repeat areas identified included Loch Venachar, Loch Lubnaig, Loch Voil, Balloch, Luss and Callander.

The increase in offences and incidents reflects both the huge number of visitors, particularly campers, as well as the additional resources and enforcement implemented. Anecdotally many staff involved in enforcement over the season reported that despite the discretion exercised, non-compliant and challenging behaviours from visitors felt more widespread this year, perhaps as a result of the lockdown 'pressure cooker' effect.

4.3 Parking enforcement

The large increase in visitors, combined with national guidance on limiting use of public transport and car-sharing, lead to major parking and traffic pressures in several popular locations. As well as Police Scotland enforcement on traffic offences, all four local authorities and Transport Scotland implemented additional measures and resources to address traffic and parking pressures.

This led to increased parking enforcement, particularly around Luss, Arrochar, East Loch Lomond, Callander and Ben A'an. For example, Argyll and Bute Council issued 86 penalties in one weekend in July at Luss and Arrochar while Stirling Council issued 61 parking penalties at Rowardennan in one day on Saturday 15th August.

A total of 400 Fixed Penalty Notices for parking were issued by Argyll and Bute Council enforcement staff in Luss alone over the course of the season. In total Stirling Council enforcement staff issued 828 Fixed Penalty Notices with 550 Parking Charge Notices also issued through contractors.

5. Information and Engagement

Information and engagement is always a key strand of visitor management.

In addition to the usual seasonal communications and engagement, there was an enormous amount of information to convey to multiple audiences this season. All NPSRAG partners noted a significant amount of additional communications and awareness-raising compared to previous seasons. Managing this volume and breadth of communication while most staff were working from home added a further challenge.

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As well as providing information, engagement locally and nationally with key stakeholder groups was vital in order to share intelligence and experiences and develop targeted responses. This closer collaboration and engagement is one of the most positive outcomes of this season and will be built upon for next year and beyond.

5.1 Stakeholder engagement

Information and intelligence sharing between partners, through weekly online meetings and several smaller, issue-focused discussions, was invaluable in responding to visitor management problems as they emerged.

The National Park Authority invested a considerable amount of staff time in communications with stakeholders via regular digital updates, virtual meetings, where possible site visits or the new feedback inbox established to gather intelligence and ideas.

Increased engagement with communities of both place and of interest was hugely important and mutually beneficial. Using digital technology to facilitate these meetings made it easier to get the right people around the (virtual) table, even at short notice when issues arose.

National Park Authority and partner representatives also attended a number of local community virtual meetings to provide updates and answer questions. Localised discussions informed targeted responses in areas where bespoke support was needed.

Whilst the nature of the pandemic and the unprecedented rise in visitor numbers meant many of the pressures experienced were not able to be fully resolved within the 2020 season, proactive engagement allowed for issues to be openly discussed and expectations to be managed on what measures could be implemented in the short term.

Experience gained this season will inform the direction of future visitor management planning and stakeholder engagement.

5.2 Campaigns

As well as supporting Scottish Government campaigns, the National Park Authority lead a 'Respect your Park: Moving out of lockdown safely together' campaign. This had the dual aim of sharing information on our partnership work to keep people safe and manage pressures, and to encourage responsible behaviour and inspire respect for the National Park's places and people.

This campaign was supported by all NPSRAG partners online and design materials were shared for partners and stakeholders to use where appropriate.

As part of this campaign, a 'Think, Check, Plan' message was developed to encourage people to take time to consider their actions and plan their visit before heading to the National Park by directing them to the wealth of information on the National Park's website.

Further into the season, in response to the volume of litter across the National Park, a ['Love it Like a Local'](#) campaign was also developed in collaboration with community representatives, staff and

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partners. The approach of the campaign was to highlight the real impact of litter on the people who live and work in the National Park.

5.3 Online communications

A new [Coronavirus section of the National Park website](#) was created with information for visitors, businesses, landowners and people interested in the work of the National Park Authority. These pages were viewed 142,000 times across the season.

Social media channels and a record number of news releases and media appearances helped to get these important messages out. By the end of September, 5.5m people had been reached via Facebook, and 5m via Twitter – both surpassing that for the full year 2019.

Support from partners to ensure content got to as wide an audience as possible was invaluable, particularly for time-critical updates such as road closures or parking issues, when support from a partner like Transport Scotland's Traffic Scotland service made a real difference. Likewise, partners sharing the work of their teams helped people know what to expect and helped reassure communities that partners were out on the ground. These posts also highlighted that partners were working together to make people's visits as safe and enjoyable as possible.

Website sections on camping, hillwalking and other activities proved consistently popular as lockdown restrictions eased, meaning these pages also had to be kept up to date with current information and advice.

With international travel limited, visits to the website from people in the UK increased from 77% to 93% of all website users. Whilst the majority of visits were from Scotland, our website saw significant increases in visits from the north of England and London, fitting with the growth in the staycation market in 2020.

5.4 Car Park monitoring and update service

Whilst not part of our original plans for 2020, based on learning from colleagues in the Lake District National Park, from July to October a service to provide live car park status updates was trialled at weekends. The aim was to support visitors to make informed decisions about where to go and to help ease pressures on popular areas.

Volunteers carried out monitoring patrols of routes covering key car parks with supplementary information provided by National Park and partner staff on the ground.

A red, amber, green, status was allocated to each car park depending on how full they were, which was then added to [the car parks and facilities webpage](#). Social media posts were used to share the latest information and signpost to the page for details.

Car park and traffic status updates were widely shared by partners, in particular via Traffic Scotland, which helped information reach a much broader audience in real time.

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Over the course of the season the car parks status page was viewed 40,000 times and updates on social media about the service reached a combined audience of 912,000+ people across our social media channels.

While the updates reached a wide audience and received positive feedback, car parks continued to fill up at hotspots and irresponsible parking persisted throughout the season, including the October holiday period. The approach was also resource intensive. As part of the 2021 season planning we will learn from this experience and look for ways to make it more sustainable, including the potential to use Internet of Things (IoT) technology for remote monitoring.

5.5 Media and PR

The National Park Authority issued a total of ten press releases over the course of the season relating to visitor management, which prompted good coverage of important issues. These were issued at key milestones either in terms of changes to national guidance or ahead of facilities reopening.

Multiple broadcast interviews were recorded for radio and TV, primarily with the National Park Authority's Chief Executive, to explain our advice and approach to visitor management and to highlight irresponsible behaviours. Media enquiries and requests were used as a further opportunity to highlight important messages and advice on responsible behaviour.

6. Looking Ahead

While this season presented new and increased challenges, it also provided opportunities to try new approaches, adapt and learn, and work in closer collaboration locally and nationally.

The circumstances in relation to COVID-19 and lockdown meant partners had to adapt quickly with a range of additional measures and interventions implemented at short notice. The broad range of actions undertaken undoubtedly helped to manage visitor pressures and behaviours this season, and any lessons learnt from management interventions are being discussed by partners as part of planning for next year.

However, with some level of restrictions and the growth in staycations expected to continue for some time to come, visitor pressures will also undoubtedly continue. Whilst a suite of measures to address these are being prioritised for 2021, it is important that work is undertaken to develop longer-term, sustainable solutions. It will not be possible to resolve all issues at once and a targeted, trial approach will be used to address specific issues in hotspot locations.

These measures will include:

- Continuation of the NPSRAG, with monthly meetings over the winter.
- Development of a Joint Visitor Management Response Plan.
- Development of a National Park Visitor Management Communications Plan for 2021.
- Engagement with key stakeholder groups over the winter on visitor management issues and future planning.
- Contribution to national visitor management discussions and partnership working.
- Continue the collaborative approach to patrolling and enforcement.

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- Working with Transport Scotland and local authority to review effectiveness and sustainability of traffic management measures and, where appropriate, make interventions permanent.
- Exploring opportunities for digital technology and platforms to support visitor management, such as car park updates and sustainable journey planning.
- Investigating sustainable parking and travel options such as the feasibility of pop-up car parks and park-and-ride bus services in key locations.
- Explore options and opportunities for infrastructure to support visitors, such as the provision of additional toilet facilities.

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