



National Park Joint Response Visitor Management Plan 2021 & Litter Update

Agenda Item 9

National Park Authority Board Meeting
15th March 2021

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1. Purpose

1.1. The purpose of this paper and appendix is to provide Board members with an update on our collaborative work with partners to address the significant visitor management pressures in the National Park, and give them sight of the *Draft* Joint Response Visitor Management Plan for 2021. The paper also gives an update on our efforts to tackle litter within the National Park.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. Members are requested to:

- (i) note the contents of this paper and associated appendix 1 (Draft Joint Response Visitor Management Plan 2021).

3. Background

Joint Response Visitor Management Plan

3.1. Members will recall the Board paper from December 2020 which reported on the review of the 2020 season, which was so heavily impacted by COVID-19. The paper contained a commitment from the National Park Safe Recovery Action Group (NPSRAG) partners to create a Joint Response Visitor Management Plan in advance of the 2021 season to ensure a coordinated approach to tackling what is expected to be another highly challenging year with multiple, visitor related pressures experienced across the National Park.

Led by the National Park Authority, this plan has now been drafted and circulated to partners for final sign off.

- 3.2. Additionally the National Park Authority Communications Team have created a Joint Communications Plan on behalf of the partners for the 2021 season. The headlines from this plan can be found in section 5.1 of appendix 1.
- 3.3. Since the end of the 2020 visitor season all the partners have been preparing for 2021, learning from the experiences and lessons of last year and engaging with a wide variety of stakeholders to gather views and approaches to tackling the negative impacts.
- 3.4. All the partners involved continue to work together in a collaborative way, committing a significant increase in joint resources to help alleviate the pressures that we expect will be experienced again across the National Park when COVID-19 travel restrictions ease. This added investment includes additional staff on the ground; such as Rangers and Enforcement Officers, extending toilet opening hours and the period of campsite operation, increased litter picking and more on-call staff over weekends. Supported by the Scottish Government, the National Park Authority alone has allocated an additional £500k into specific COVID-19 measures, which includes visitor management activities.
- 3.5. Additionally many of the partners, including the National Park Authority have been actively engaged with the National Visitor Management Steering Group, chaired by VisitScotland. The National Park has many years of experience in tackling the significant pressures that come from high levels of seasonal visitors, and as partners we are in the vanguard of informing national level strategic developments in this area.
- 3.6. Despite current COVID-19 related travel restrictions still being in place, our staff are already out and about in the National Park patrolling and carrying out ongoing maintenance and cleansing tasks, in accordance with all required social distancing and hygiene protocols. The majority of our own and partner toilet facilities and car parks are open, but campsites and permit areas remain closed for now in line with current Scottish Government guidance. As restrictions ease we and other partners will begin the process of working towards a fuller re-opening as and when allowed.
- 3.7. The camping management byelaw period began as normal on the 1st March and will now be in force until the end of September. Our Rangers will engage with visitors camping within the Camping Management Zones during this period, to positively engage with them and if required manage any unauthorised camping or irresponsible behaviours. Additionally once reopened, our Campsite Wardens will be extending a warm welcome to campers at the Loch Chon and Loch Achray campsites.

Litter update

- 3.8. Following approval of the Litter Prevention Strategy by the Board in September 2020, we have progressed with review and preparation work on litter, with a

core focus on improved capacity and resilience to cope with the anticipated high visitor numbers over the coming season.

- 3.9. One of the delivery mechanisms for the strategy was pulling together a cross-stakeholder Litter Prevention Action Group. The majority of the partners are also represented on NPSRAG, so this smaller grouping looks at litter and waste issues more specifically, pulling in national experts such as Zero Waste Scotland and Keep Scotland Beautiful. At the first meeting of this group in late 2020, all partners reinforced the difficulty of the previous season, with the issues seen in the National Park reflecting the wider issues seen across Scotland. Local authority partners in particular were hit with serious challenges posed by COVID-19; including redeployment to other essential services and inability to multi-crew litter and waste vehicles, which continued to limit ability to prevent littering issues. Although these challenges will continue into 2021, members of the group are preparing for the season, using the three strands of the strategy: engagement, infrastructure and services, and enforcement. The following sections outline the priority actions that will be led by the National Park Authority on each of these strands.
- 3.10. Engagement: through the communications element of the draft National Park Joint Response Visitor Management Plan, we will share anti-littering messaging throughout the entire season, focusing on promoting the correct behaviour and utilising behaviour change techniques that featured as part of our 'Love it like a Local' project last season. In addition, through our involvement in the National Visitor Management Steering Group, we are helping shape the national litter prevention campaign and will leverage opportunities into the National Park wherever possible as a result of this. Alongside our public-focused communications and engagement, following our successful delivery of COVID-safe litter volunteering last year, we are creating a fuller calendar of volunteer opportunities to increase our ability to tackle litter and flytipping in the National Park. Once COVID restrictions are eased, we will deliver a rolling programme of National Park-wide volunteering, focused at sites that are not normally within our or our partner's patrols. We will also work with partners to support them to deliver litter volunteering across land they manage too.
- 3.11. Infrastructure and services: in order to increase our own resilience and capacity to cope with littering and flytipping in the coming season, we are investing in a pilot programme of an enhanced Environment Officer deployment (three new staff members will be recruited). These invaluable seasonal staff will provide comprehensive cover of both sites within the National Park Authority estate, and critically will also have dedicated capacity to assist with littering and flytipping issues across the wider National Park. This new team will support the work of our Land Operations team and the Ranger Service through a schedule of deep cleaning tasks and on a reactive 'hit squad' basis where required. They will have the ability to utilise large volume specialist waste vehicles and they will be trained to deal with more specialist issues such as dealing with toileting related waste. Alongside this significantly enhanced service, we will also continue to review the National Park's 'binrastructure'

(right bins in the right place), with partners where appropriate. This includes ongoing operational improvements associated with the smart bins funded through the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, increased bin uplift schedules at our most popular sites and evaluating options for new bins where required.

3.12. Enforcement: to bring together specialist partners across all aspects of enforcement, a new National Park [Partnership Against Rural Crime \(PARC\)](#) has now been established ahead of the 2021 season. A national priority for PARCs is flytipping and enforcement of the Environmental Protection Act, which is directly relevant to the issues faced in the National Park. We will enhance the work of the Litter Prevention Strategy through this dedicated enforcement group which includes national and local Police Scotland representatives and local authority enforcement officers. In the coming season, we will trial flytipping enforcement support for land managing partners, where we will specifically investigate selected flytipping incidences for evidence. Where possible, we will seek to turn any investigations into successful enforcement cases, with enforcement publicised to deter flytipping in the National Park.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1. Whilst we still await the final sign up to the Joint Response Visitor Management Plan from the remaining NPSRAG partners who have not already done so, work is currently continuing regardless. While COVID-restrictions are still in place, we and our partners are preparing for the main visitor season beginning, when lockdown restrictions are sufficiently eased to allow the return of what is expected to be high numbers of visitors to the National Park.
- 4.2. Our aspirations for the 2021 season on littering and flytipping are focused pragmatically on increasing capacity and resilience to cope with the anticipated high volume of visitors and waste, with supporting preventative communications and enforcement activities. We will continue to work with our Litter Prevention Action Group as a subgroup of the NPSRAG to prioritise litter and flytipping action, strengthening our position to collectively take forward future innovative preventative work.
- 4.3. Members are asked to note the contents of the attached draft Joint Response Visitor Management Plan and litter update.

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