

Mid-season stakeholder briefing on Visitor Management in the National Park

Notes from Q&A session
Thursday 22nd July 2021

1. Margaret McDonald, East Loch Lomond Community Trust

Q1: Requests that there is representation from Stirling Council to attend East Loch Lomond Community Trust Visitor Management Group meetings as the past couple of meetings they have submitted apologies. It would be much more useful to Stirling Council present as the meeting would be much more productive.

A: Kenny agreed that we do want full coverage there and want teams from local authorities for different discussions. There are pressures on staff at different organisations and we are certainly trying to get coverage. Stirling Council were present at recent meetings for Strathard and Trossachs and Callander and surrounds and we certainly hope they will be present at the next ELL meeting.

Q2: The Car Parks status updates have been really useful, initially there was a lag but it's now been addressed so that's great. Because East Loch Lomond is particularly busy at weekends as well as through the week it would be useful if hotspots car park updates were available on week days. People are using it more and more.

A: Joanne agreed that now it is summer holiday season the busy periods aren't just limited to weekends. Volunteers, rangers and partner staff are out on the ground through the week and we have agreed that they will continue to feed in information on the status of car parks for us to share on social media if things are looking really busy. For now we cannot provide the full 'Red, Amber, Green' service mid-week as we but don't necessarily get all the information for every car park that is listed on the website. Joanne will talk with Kenny, Matt and Rangers to map where we could potentially provide regular updates mid-week but we cannot make any guarantees. We do make clear that the service provided is at weekends only.

2. Donald McLaren, Balquhidder Resident.

Q1: It is very interesting the efforts you're making to communicate the message to get to reach people particularly through social media to explain responsible behavior and transport options. Have you analysed whether this 'outreach' is actually increasing the numbers of people becoming aware of the park and wanting to visit that otherwise wouldn't have done so? Is there a risk that we are encouraging more people than it is possible to cope with and funnelling them into some of the more delicate and sensitive parts of the country?

A: Simon explained that National Parks are created as special places for everyone to enjoy. As a National Park Authority our job is to encourage people to enjoy the area and the outdoors but to do so sustainably and responsibly. There are a variety of reasons why the National Park is busier than ever and it is a trend that is continuing to grow. Our job collectively is to try and find a balance that allows everyone to enjoy it in a responsible way so that we leave it in good hands for future generations. The honey pots around the park get the most amounts of pressure and require the most amount of management. We work to increase the resilience of the natural environment and the built environment to deal with rising visitor numbers but the long term strategic planning around visitor management needs to look at how trends continue to grow or change. It is not sustainable for the growth we are seeing in traffic volumes in certain areas to continue, we need to find different solutions for the future to be able to deal with this pressure.

A: The challenge is where we are. We get a huge number of visitors regardless because of our proximity to the large percentage of the population. One of the key parts of our visitor management approach is about encouraging people to plan ahead and to do that we need to reach out to them before they arrive. We will continue to review our approach and consider this specifically when reviewing the season.

3. Simon Miller, Luss Estates

Q1: One way that Argyll and Bute Council could help in Luss is to have traffic wardens to police the parking restrictions. Our understanding is that one of the wardens is on long term sick and the other one comes in at weekend in the mornings. If the traffic wardens are in Luss it would have a dramatic effect on the parking problems in the village. The absence of traffic wardens is a real problem. As no one from Argyll & Bute Council is on the call can this be picked up with them?

A: Kenny noted that he will follow this up with the Council. It is our understanding that Argyll and Bute Council have issued more parking notices in the last 18 months than we've ever seen before in Arrochar, Tarbet and Luss, however we are aware of their resourcing issues and we are trying to help them to find a way through that.

Q2: Presence of the Police or Rangers in a boat on the water is not having an impact on the antisocial behavior of jet skis around Luss. It would be better if someone is on land with binoculars and a video camera recording the registration number of the Jet Ski and then the National Park can rescind that person's licence for that Jet Ski.

A: Kenny said we have had 'on land' efforts happening and will update Simon to make sure he knows where this is happening and take on the suggestion and feedback.

Q3: Given the weather, a constant Police presence at Luss and Balloch is required from dawn until dusk.

A: Kenny answered that we all know how challenging it is to police the area and we are supporting Roddy, Andy and others in trying to navigate this.

Q4: If Rangers have the power to issue tickets for littering, how often does this happen? There seems to be an absence of consequences for people dropping litter as they know nothing dramatic will happen.

A: Simon explained that our Rangers have litter powers, however the key challenge is that using them requires corroboration. If someone drops litter and two people see it, only then we can do something. This means that they act as more of a deterrent. This issue has been flagged at the national level. The big issue for us is how you stop people bringing as much litter and waste in the first place.

4. Fergus Duncanson, RYA Scotland

Q1: After visiting Loch Earn last weekend, I've never seen the loch so busy yet so quiet. The problem is the rubbish, many of the stopping points have bins provided but many of the bins were overflowing. In many cases there were bags of rubbish tied up and parked beside the bins. The situation requires coordination of the Local Authorities to collect the rubbish at busy times, like the Glasgow Fair weekend we've just had.

A: Kenny explained that 'polite littering' is an issue because a bin of any scale is a signal of a serviced unit, so if people see a very small bin, even if it is only 100m from a large 'big belly bin', some people will still leave their rubbish beside the small unit rather than taking it home or putting it in a larger bin as they think they are still being responsible. The smaller bins tend to be managed by ourselves or other parties and the large bins are managed by local authorities, so collection and servicing is different. We are working very hard to make sure that that our approach to litter works and we are taking this forward with our partners.

Q2: The information you have given about the car park service is very interesting. The popular spots at Milarrochy, Loch Venachar and Loch Earn can be overwhelmed despite the expanded provision. There is a serious need to look at the use of a field somewhere between Balmaha and Drymen for provision of a shuttle bus to take people there.

A: Kenny said that this needs a longer term solution and is being explored as part of the East Loch Lomond Visitor Management Forum. In the short term though there is still the public health issue and the need to raise public confidence to share cars and use public transport like shuttle buses again. This is something that we have raised nationally, as this would help us to encourage things like car sharing which would help to reduce traffic pressures.

5. Stewart Gavigan, St Fillans Community Council

Q1: St Fillans community has had really good proactive meetings with the National Park, Perth and Kinross Council and Police Scotland with regards to that end of Loch Earn. Perth and Kinross have rubbish collections almost on a daily basis on the south side of the loch and it's really is keeping on top of things. The sign posts on the south side of the loch for parking have been brilliant although some are twisted and damaged by visitors. The one thing to query though is out of the 1,000 people spoken to about the Camping Byelaws, why only 26 cases been reported to the procurator fiscal? Does this figure include Police prosecutions?

A: Matt explained that the figures shared only capture those from our Rangers, not Police prosecutions. He explained that we take details when people have allegedly committed a byelaw offence. In the first instance Rangers will talk to them and most of the time the visitors will comply so there is no need to take things further, however their details are still recorded. Of those few cases that are escalated, sometimes they are not taken forward because there is a lack of evidence.

Q2: In St Fillans we are looking at a feasibility study for a new community hall. We have applied to Drummond Estate for some land. We would like to work closely with the National Park to see if they can get extra parking on that land and the possibility of toilet facilities to help ease pressures. Will the National Park help with this?

A: Matt explained that he has seen that the plans for the community hall and the Loch Earn working group is the perfect forum to discuss place-based matters like this with relevant agencies. In the next few weeks we want to relaunch that group so that the focus widens to cover broader visitor management issues and also take in the wider Balquhiddy and Strathyre areas.

Q4: With regards to Jet Skis, we have had 2 near misses in the bay area. Can someone from the National Park speak to the operators at the Drummond Hotel as we have worked hard on the Loch Earn code of conduct but it is not always being followed?

A: Matt confirmed that he will pick this up.

6. Katy Lamb, Kinlochard Village Hall

Q1: Who sits on the Strathard and Trossachs working group? Why has the Kinlochard Village Hall not been involved in it?

A: Kenny explained that the working group has only recently been set up and the first meeting was held last week to discuss and confirm the membership of the group. For now this includes community representatives from the local Community Councils and Community Development Trusts, landowners, public authorities and some key businesses. We know the village hall is a key player in the Kinlochard community and will definitely be brought into the group and we want you to be engaged in relevant discussions. While we want to ensure we that the group is as representative as possible, it covers a massive area so it needs to be a functional size in order to work productively.

Q3: I was surprised to hear Simon Jones say that the National Park is here for everyone. I thought that the chief reason for forming a National Park is to preserve the natural and built heritage that was there long before the park or the people?

A: Simon answered that there is an inherent tension in why National Parks were created but they exist for people to enjoy them and also to help protect these areas so that they can still be enjoyed for generations to come.

7. James Fraser, Friends of Loch Lomond & Sir Walter Scott Steamship Trust

Q1: There has been a huge amount of engagement at all levels which it great to see and a huge effort by the public agencies. The Friends of Loch Lomond have tried to step in to try and fill some of the gaps that public sector partners couldn't do. The big question is what does success look like for next season? We are into the planning stage and it is more on the infrastructure side.

A: Martin agreed that infrastructure is key and conversations would be ongoing about this offline. He then thanked all for attending and explained that if there are any more comments or questions following the briefing should be sent to feedback@lochlomond-trossachs.org. The notes and recording of this briefing will be made available and we will be organising an end of season later this year – mostly likely in November.