

## Summary

We are aware that the rise in numbers of people camping this summer has led to increased visitor pressures in many rural areas which have not had the facilities to deal with the influx. In some places these activities have led to cases of irresponsible or even criminal behaviour. In part this situation has come about as the culmination of the unprecedented events this year. However, we would also argue that this underlying context has exacerbated existing problems which have arisen due to the long term lack of investment in Scotland's visitor infrastructure and education activities. Over recent years, due to pressures on local authority budgets, we have seen closures of toilets and reductions in litter collections, ranger services and community wardens. Rural communities have been facing the brunt of the impact of these visitors while authorities have had to deal with the problems as they arose, rather than being able to consider the most effective long-term, strategic responses.

Yet it is important to remember that the vast majority of campers are behaving responsibly as part of their statutory access rights, enjoying the health benefits of getting close to nature while also supporting local economies, spending money in small businesses where this is possible. The rise in camping (and campervan) holidays in Scotland also brings a unique opportunity for rural businesses and communities to harness this interest and ensure that visitors get the best experience Scotland can offer, while also supporting the economy and not causing any damage to the environment.

We believe a strategic approach is needed at both a national and local level, bringing together local authorities, public agencies, businesses, communities and recreation bodies to start planning how best to address the issues which have arisen this summer while also helping to support sustainable tourism activities in future. This approach needs to focus on education on responsible behaviour, the enforcement of existing legislation and investment in visitor facilities and management.

## Challenges and opportunities arising from increased visitors to Scotland

Ramblers Scotland welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this debate. Camping in a responsible way is an activity which is done by right under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. As well as 'wild camping' enjoyed traditionally in remote areas, camping by the roadside is also legal as long as access rights apply on that land, the activity is carried out responsibly, and any vehicle is parked in a way which is not causing an offence under traffic legislation.

We have seen media reports of issues arising from increased visitor pressure this summer, which in some cases have also led to irresponsible – and at times criminal – behaviour, as outlined in the motion. We fully acknowledge the difficult situations faced by some rural communities who have had to deal with the impact of this behaviour. In part this situation has come about as the result of the unprecedented events earlier this year, with the relaxation of lockdown coinciding with a restricted opening of many campsites and other accommodation options. Many people have understandably avoided overseas holidays, while the cancellation of festivals and other events has left many people without an organised summer break. These exceptional circumstances have also led to people from more diverse backgrounds enjoying the outdoors and this is extremely welcome, but it creates an additional imperative to ensure that those who are new to the outdoors are supported to enjoy the experience responsibly.

We would also argue that the rise in numbers of people holidaying in Scotland has also brought about an exciting opportunity for the tourism sector which has itself been struggling due to the impact of the Coronavirus. To fully realise this opportunity in future years, it is more important than ever that there is a strategic approach taken at local and national level to address the wide range of issues which, we would argue, have mostly arisen as a result of long-term underinvestment in visitor infrastructure, especially in rural Scotland. We also believe that taking the time over the winter months to plan how to manage this influx of visitors in future years has the potential to create many new green jobs, whether in the construction of facilities, in small tourism businesses or in visitor management and education roles.

## A framework for finding solutions

While there are no simple solutions, we contributed to National Access Forum [guidance](#) on managing camping which remains relevant. A strategic response needs to include the following elements:

- **Enforcement of existing legislation** relating to dangerous fires, vandalism, irresponsible parking, littering and anti-social behaviour. We do not support the introduction of further legislation or permit schemes which would themselves need to be enforced and may also lead to displacement of problems into other areas.
- **Education on responsible behaviour** based on the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, through programmes delivered at school by ranger services and in outdoor education. For the general public, education can be done via social media campaigns, posters, leaflets and by targeting key groups in partnership with a range of recreation and community organisations. Special attention should be paid to identifying the less experienced access takers who seem to cause a disproportionate share of these issues, to understand who they are, what motivates them and how they can be influenced. These campaigns can be focussed on specific locations or issues, but it is crucial that they are followed up by visitor engagement as this one-to-one approach is valuable in helping to raise awareness of inadvertently irresponsible behaviour in a way which is more likely to lead to long term behaviour change and understanding.
- **Investment in visitor facilities and management measures, including staff.** These would include informal campsites, toilets, litter bins, car parks, campervan hook-ups and public transport hubs as well as ranger services. At a local level, communities can come together to plan where the most effective measures should be introduced, such as setting up small scale informal campervan or camping spaces with minimal facilities.

We made a [submission to the Petitions Committee](#) in 2019 as part of their consideration of a petition relating to camping issues and this sets out our more detailed thoughts on the various solutions which we believe can help to tackle the problems related to camping pressures. In addition, we would suggest that there are many good examples of visitor management abroad which could be studied and adapted for the Scottish context, as outlined on the [Walkhighlands](#) website this week.

## Economic benefits of investment

For many years we have been raising concerns that pressure on local authority budgets would lead to significant impacts on ranger services, access teams and outdoor education facilities as well as other facilities which are important for visitors, such as toilets, litter bins, path networks and car parks. And yet there is a huge economic benefit which arises from outdoor activities, which not only benefits health but also directly supports rural economies. VisitScotland has estimated the [value to the Scottish economy of walking tourism](#) alone at £1.26 billion per year. NatureScot's 2012 [Scottish Recreation Survey](#) estimated the value of expenditure during visits to the outdoors by Scottish residents at around £2.6 billion, while the Scottish Government's 2015 [marine recreation and tourism survey](#) estimated that marine tourism is worth £3.7 billion to the Scottish economy. We welcomed the introduction of the [Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund](#) but we believe this is not sufficient to deal with the scale of the problems which we have faced this summer, or to plan for future years.

## Conclusion

Scotland is renowned throughout the world for the beauty of our mountains, lochs, glens and coastline. Our much-prized access rights are also recognised as a firm foundation for supporting outdoor activities in a responsible way. We now have the opportunity to respond to the current Coronavirus crisis by planning ahead to next year with long overdue investment in our rural visitor infrastructure. This will create jobs, support local communities and ensure that everyone gets the most out of their camping experience in Scotland and respects the places they are visiting.

Ramblers Scotland is a membership organisation and charity with a grassroots network of 54 local groups who run 3,500 group walks a year, organised and led by 1,200 experienced volunteers. As the representative body for walkers in Scotland and a governing body of sport, we work to champion walking, protect and promote access rights and develop our path networks. We are part of the Ramblers, Britain's walking charity.

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