

The Highland Council Access Rangers

Annual Report 2022

Season Summary

In 2022, the Council employed 18 Access Rangers, patrolling large areas across the Highlands and 4 Visitor Site Wardens focussing on key visitor hotspots. There was a phased intake of staff from 1 April to 1 June with staff numbers increasing as areas became busier. Eleven of these posts, which started in June, were funded by the Better Places Fund administered by NatureScot. The seasonal employment ended on 30th October 2022.

Over the summer, there appeared to be an alternating pattern of a busy weekend followed by a quieter one. Key weekends were exceptionally busy, coinciding with bank holidays and schools breaking up and returning. The Glasgow Fair weekend had a very noticeable impact in Lochaber. The weather also acted as a key determining factor in visitor numbers.

This year there was a higher percentage of European registered vehicles, and an increased numbers of coach tours. Whilst the vast majority of visitors welcome the advice and information from the Access Rangers there still continues to be a high number of irresponsible and occasionally confrontational behaviours encountered.

Data was collected by the Access Rangers whilst patrolling on three days per week, the key points to note include:-

- The areas with the highest informal camping numbers and associated problems, particularly fires, litter and toileting, continue to be North-West Sutherland and Lochaber, with Loch Ness and South Skye not far behind. East Lochaber, Caithness and Loch Ness were far busier than last year. Forty-seven abandoned tents were found, most commonly in Loch Ness, East Lochaber and South-West Ross. Over 7,377 off-site tents were recorded this year compared with 8,639 last year. Whilst there is a decrease in the total number this is still far higher than was evident pre-pandemic.
- High recreational vehicle (RV) numbers were recorded in Lochaber and Skye and around the NC500. A total of 35,993 were recorded this year, compared to 25,000 last year. This figure includes roof-top tents as well as motorhomes and campervans
- Fire marks & damage are most commonly found around Loch Ness (480) and East Lochaber (685). Over 3300 fire marks were recorded Highland wide, slightly lower than 2021 (3463) with 93 fires put out by Rangers (183 in 2021) that may have posed a risk of spreading.
- The problem of blackwater toilet waste dumping was most often found in North Sutherland and Lochalsh. **Sixty two** incidents Highland wide have been recorded.
- Lochalsh continues to suffer from high levels of outdoor toileting issues. This contrasts with its lower camping numbers and so may often be due to people stopping to relieve themselves in laybys rather than overnighting.
- Parking issues appear most prevalent in North-West Sutherland and Skye, with most warning notices issued for inconsiderate or obstructive parking. Chanonry Point, in the Black Isle area, recorded a high figure as a Warden is on site who issues reminders for non payment of the parking fee. In total, 782 notices were issued Highland wide.

- The number of dogs seen not under control was highest in Inverness & Nairn, although that will likely include exercising on beaches. It is perhaps more of a concern in crofting areas in North Wester Ross and South Skye, if on common grazings.
- The Rangers collected nearly 2050 bags of litter to date, reported 219 waste/fly tipping issues and 62 incidents of motorhome waste dumping.
- To the end of October, the Rangers have engaged with 28,500 people mostly to inform them of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and facilities available.

The presence of the Access Rangers has had a significant impact in reducing the irresponsible or inconsiderate behaviour of many visitors and potential causes of distress to Highland communities and other visitors. With Access Rangers patrolling countryside sites, their presence increased compliance within Invitation to Pay car parks, increased responsible behaviour and the work that they carry out in removing litter and immediate repairs ensures ongoing visitor enjoyment of our countryside, increasing the likelihood of repeat visits and positive reviews to increase the economic benefit gained from tourism.

This summer some of the Access Rangers were filmed by TV company Purple Productions for a series on the North Coast 500, to be shown on Channel 4, in spring 2023.

The Seasonal Access Ranger Team Set-up & Operation

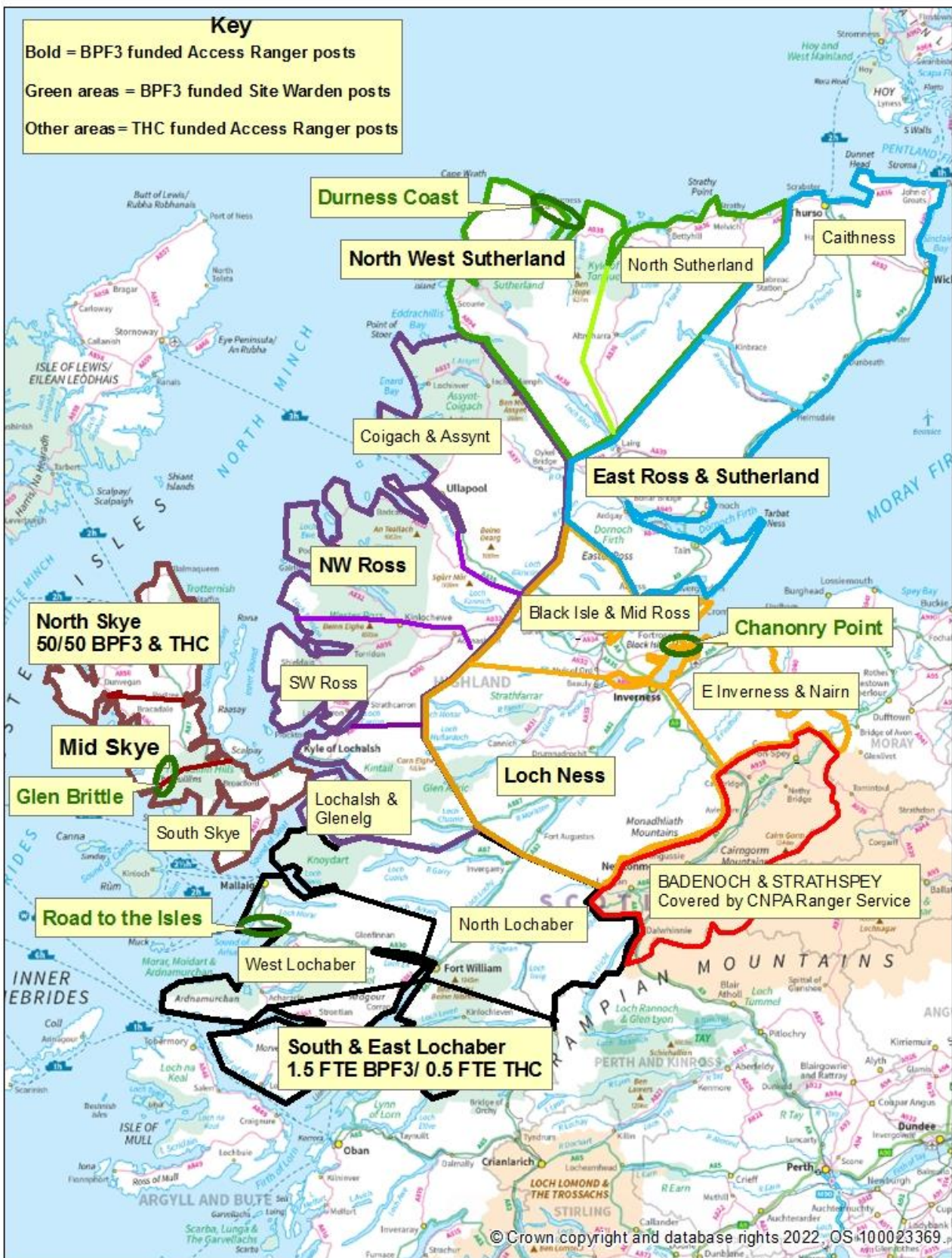
The Rangers job description was to;

- Engage face-to-face with visitors to explain and encourage responsible behaviour following the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.
 - Monitor visitor use, impacts and incidents and reporting on a weekly basis.
 - Speak to informal campers to explain responsible access and leave no trace
 - Reduce the number of open fires by explaining the impacts which cause damage to vegetation and alarm to residents
 - Reduce the amount of litter by encouraging visitors to take home what they bring. Rangers will also collect litter when necessary and report large quantities.
 - Encourage responsible parking and prevent obstructive parking. Rangers will assist with parking enforcement if necessary with the issuing of Parking Warning Notices
 - Liaise with communities and landowners when issues arise, working together on solutions. Establish local volunteer rangers to assist in busy periods
 - Improve and maintain Highland council owned or managed countryside sites and work with land managers on other sites
 - Improve and maintain some of the most heavily used paths particularly to popular natural visitor attractions
- Seven Access Rangers were in post for 7 months (April to end Oct), 4 posts were appointed for 6 months (May to Oct) and 11 posts were recruited for 5 months (June to Oct). The latter 11 posts were funded by the Better Places Fund administered by Naturescot. A condition of the funding was a commencement date of 1st June and ceasing on 31st October 2022.



Deployment

The 18 Access Rangers and 4 Site Wardens covered the areas on the map below;



Ref: **Access Rangers & Site Wardens 2022**
 Date: _____


 The Highland Council
 Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Equipment for the team included a hired van with THC and Ranger magnetic logos, THC and Ranger branded uniform, a mobile phone and in some cases a laptop. Each ranger was given a tool bag of hand tools, plus several other tools to undertake basic maintenance on visitor sites or paths especially where public safety was a concern.

Training was primarily a two day induction course on the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and devised Standard Operating Procedures for many of the main issues, delivered by experienced Access, Parking and Waste Officers. It also included sessions with Police Scotland and Scottish Fire & Rescue Service. A further session on tool training was given when those were issued. The training was supplemented by webinar training arranged by Naturescot.

Some individual Rangers had opportunities for Outdoor First Aid and Sea Mammal Stranding Courses

Supervisory Management of the Ranger team was undertaken by two Senior Rangers with reference to the Outdoor Access Manager. Other assistance was given by the three Access Officers and the Facilities Officer.

The Rangers worked five days per week which include weekends, having two days off mid-week. They patrolled on 3 days per week, recording the figures for those days. This was always on a Saturday & Sunday, and usually a Friday but this may be different if local knowledge considered another day more appropriate. Over the course of the summer they spoke to over 28,500 people. They were most vigilant in engaging with people conducting irresponsible behaviour but often advised on actions to leave no trace. They would also provide a welcome face for general information on the area or nearby facilities. As a conversation starter, handing out a guidance leaflet for responsible campers or motorhome users was especially useful. During these patrols they recorded numbers for site monitoring reports specifically on camping, vehicles and any remains of camping activities. Whilst on patrol they may clear a dirty site, note it for further work or report it to another Council or agency service. On the two other working days, the rangers made community or land manager contacts, worked on popular sites, arranged volunteer workdays or carried out core path inspections.

Visitor Engagement, Site Monitoring & Reporting

The site monitoring reports had to be completed weekly and submitted to the Senior Rangers every Monday. A collated continuous summary of these has been attached to this report. The data collected in this continuous recording over the six month period has been used to create graphs & charts showing the distribution of specific types of visitor and a number of issues. This information will be made available to various services and can aid identification of areas to target service or infrastructure improvements. These figures are representative and can be comparable between areas and years but cannot show the absolute numbers.



1. Access Ranger Patrols & Sites

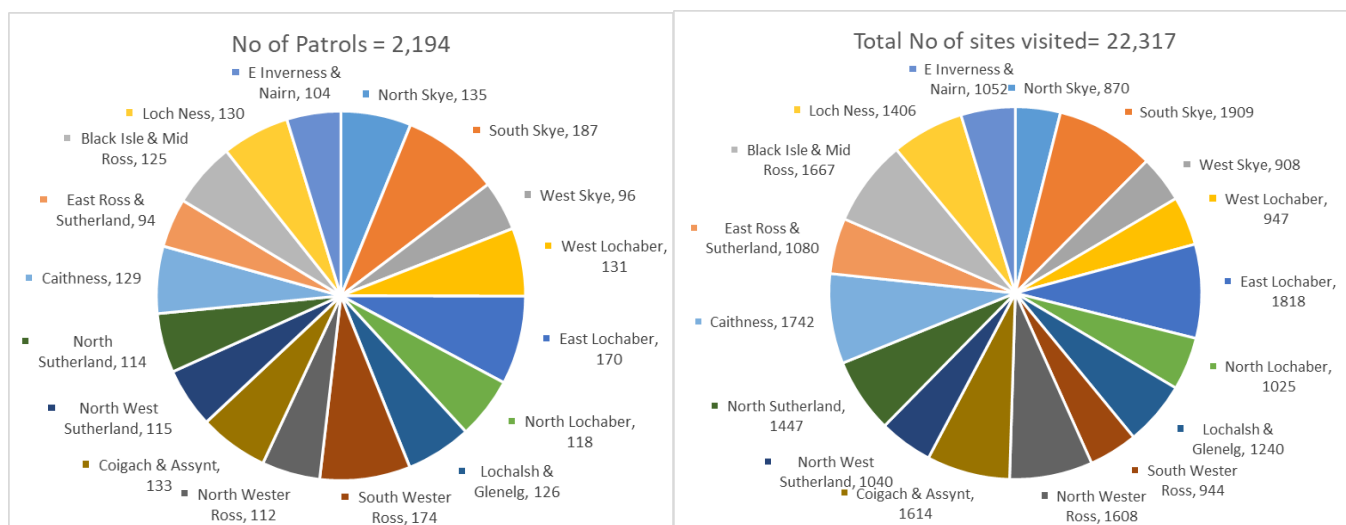
The Access ranger patrol areas that were decided upon in 2021 worked well and were retained in 2022 with some minor adaptations in Skye and Lochaber. A West Skye patrol area was created from the start of July, to better reflect the data collected by the three Skye rangers and the Glen Brittle Warden. West Lochaber was divided, north and south for patrols but then were added together, with Warden figures, for data recording purposes.

It was also accepted that keeping the same patrol areas would provide continuity in the collection of the data. These areas took into consideration, known popular locations, reports of issues from the past 2 seasons and where existing Rangers from other organisations covered. The involvement of specific destination groups; Glencoe & Glen Etive Community Trust, Skye Connect, Wester Ross Biosphere, Visit Inverness/Loch Ness (VILN) & Applecross Trust also ensured a focus in those areas. The final deciding factor on patrol areas was the location of successful candidates. Temporary accommodation in much of the Highlands is extremely difficult to find, four appointed candidates had to withdraw as local accommodation could not be found. There is certainly an advantage to being able to find suitable candidates that live locally.

The Highland Council area (not including the Cairngorm National Park Authority area, which operates its own Ranger service) was divided into 17 patrol areas. Most were patrolled by a single ranger but some did have cover by two rangers or an additional Warden. The size of these patrol areas varies from 900 to 1700 sq Km but average 1400 square kilometers. However, much of this area is only accessible on foot, cycle or horse under access rights. The vast majority of people accessing remote land know the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and are experienced with 'leave no trace' principles. It is the land close to the roadside, within a 1km of a public road, that is under most pressure from people unfamiliar with the access code. It is these roadside areas, and in particular popular visitor sites that the Access Rangers pay most attention and record their observations.

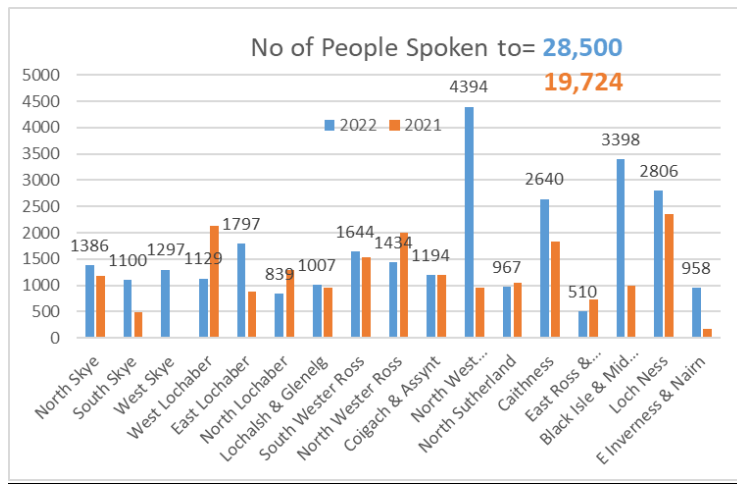
The number of patrols was more evenly divided throughout the Highlands this year with a larger team whereas in 2021 some areas only had sparse coverage.

The number of sites in a patrol area can vary due to size, attractions and popularity. The chart below shows their distribution. Areas with fewer sites can allow the ranger more time on a site to talk to people or carry out maintenance.



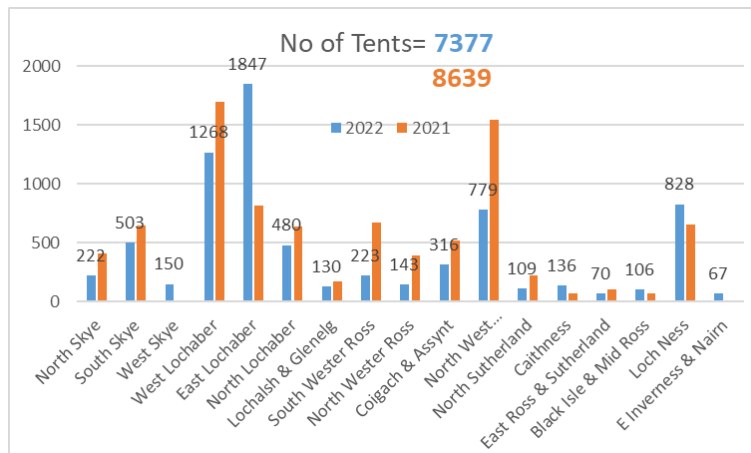
2. Visitor Engagement

The Access Ranger role is primarily to engage and educate people on the Scottish Outdoor Access Code but they will also welcome people with advice and information about the countryside, landscape and the area they are visiting. This year the Rangers were able to engage with almost 10,000 more people, a 30% increase on 2021 (graph below). This was helped by a larger team and significantly so, with the Visitor Site Wardens in Durness and Chanorny Point.



4. Number of Tents

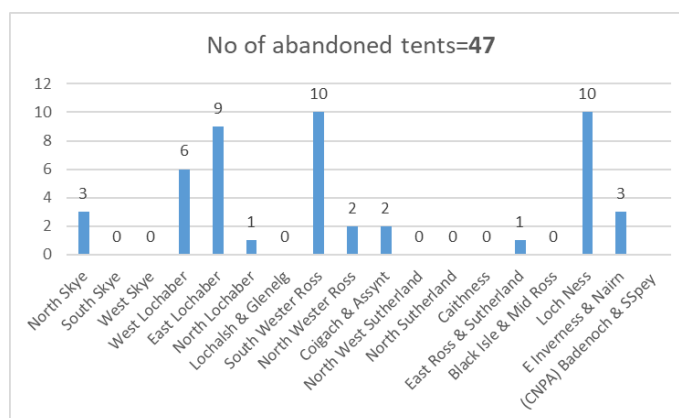
These are the number of tents observed camping off a formal campsite. They are most often by the roadside or in close vicinity to a vehicle, and perhaps not truly wild camping. The Access Rangers will engage with the people seen to ensure that they are aware of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and show consideration for both the environment and people living or working locally.



These figures show a change from 2021 with a roughly 15% decrease in the number of tents seen but still a relatively high figure, and considerably higher than anecdotal pre-covid numbers. There also appears to be a change in the distribution with last years hotspots of Arisaig, Durness, Assynt and Applecross showing decreases but an increase in Glen Etive, Loch Ness and other east coast areas (graph above).



There were also a number of abandoned tents and equipment discovered, left to litter the landscape. Although, this data was not collected in 2021, a procedure for this was developed and continued this year. Involving placing a laminated notice on the tent when observed untouched for 2 days and then removed if still seen after 5 days. The removal process is done carefully, photographing everything and packed in bags. It is then stored for at least 2 weeks before either given to charities, if in good order, or binned if not.



Cumulative camping is a particular problem in some popular locations even when some individuals are following Scottish Outdoor Access Code guidance. As soon as one group leaves the space is occupied by another group. The vegetation has no time to recover, degrades and eventually bare earth or sand appears.

This year we trialled creating small camping exclusion areas on two beaches, Traigh at Arisaig and Ceannabeinne at Durness. Whilst the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code are vague on this, there is scope within sections 3.45 & 3.47 that highlight damage to habitats with repeated recreational activities. The areas showing most degradation were identified, after consulting with the landowner and the Local Access Forum. In July, signs were erected at access points explaining the excluded areas and why we had taken this action. The areas, approx. 10m diameter were either roped off, with a single line of blue rope or surrounded by green barrier mesh. Both methods were chosen specifically so as to be visually subtle in the surroundings. Smaller signs stating 'Please Keep Out- Habitat Restoration In Progress' were attached to the rope or mesh. The Rangers were able to check on these areas on each patrol. They discovered that no visitors camped in these areas and they were respected. Occasionally campers were found right up to the rope/mesh or they were used as drying lines. The ropes and mesh was taken down at the end of October. They will be reinstated next April, thus for a longer period and we will assess if the area size or number should be increased. We will also consider if other locations also should have excluded areas.



Camping Exclusion Areas at Ceannabeinne in yellow (photo-left).

This machair grassland habitat is becoming eroded due to heavy and constant use by campers. The grass sward is worn down and fire sites burn off the vegetation. (photo below left)

The excluded area has begun to show signs of recovery (photo below- right)



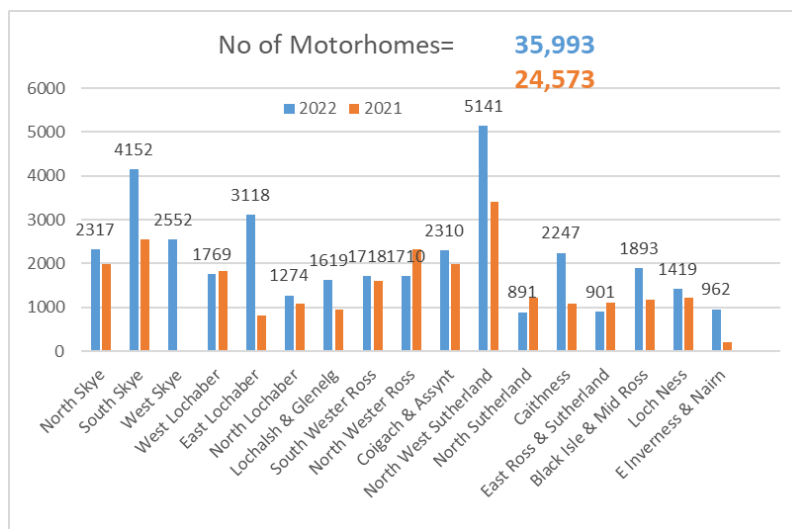
Recommendations from Access Ranger De-briefing

- Clearer & precise definition of ‘wild camping’ in Scottish Outdoor Access Code. E.g have a minimum distance from road, building etc, specific min or max tent size, maximum number of tents per site.
 - Continue and expand camping exclusion areas
 - Promote ‘Leave No Trace’ message
 - Areas that most need attention are:
Ceannabeine, Traigh, Toigal, Ardvreck, Glen Etive, Glen Brittle, Glenelg, Duntelchaig, Dalcrag, Loch Tarff, Clunes, Loch Arkaig, Duncansby Head
5. Number of Recreational Vehicles (RVs)

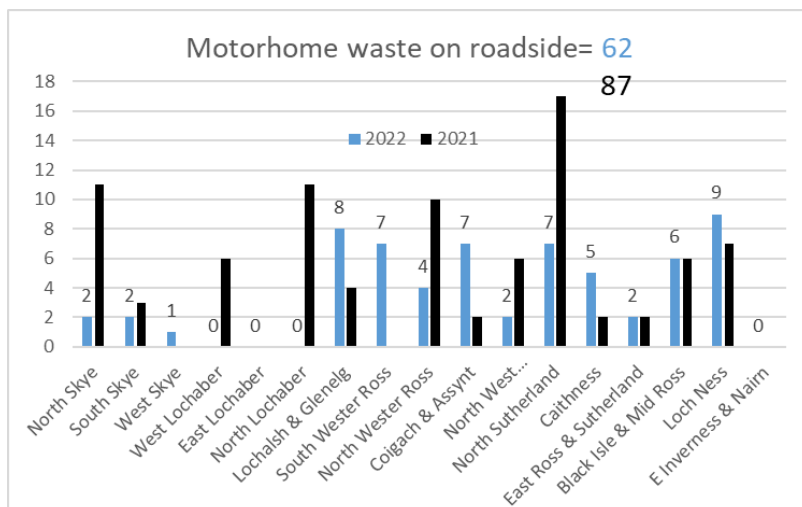
These are the numbers of motorhomes, campervans and roof-top tents observed parked up, mostly overnight but some may be in daytime car parks. There is no distinction made between types of vehicle other than they are all ‘adapted for sleeping purposes’. The inclusion of roof-top tents was necessary as this was an increasing phenomenon this year. Being on a vehicle, they do not have access rights and so are more akin to motorhomes although overnight parking without ‘encamping’ is unlikely in this type of vehicle, and thus is an offence in section 129 of the Roads(Scotland) Act 1984, but difficult to enforce. There is also resistance by these owners to be referred to as motorhomes.



There has been a huge increase in visiting RVs in the Highland area, almost a 33% rise. The main hotspots remain Durness area and Isle of Skye but there were big increases in East Lochaber, Caithness and Black Isle & Mid Ross. Some areas did show small declines (graph below).



Incidents of motorhome black waste dumping were slightly reduced this year but it is still a problem that causes great concern. Being a mixture of chemicals and human waste it can cause great harm in water courses and to vegetation, and distress to anyone, or their pet, that steps in it. Currently the Council do not have an effective method of clearing these spills.



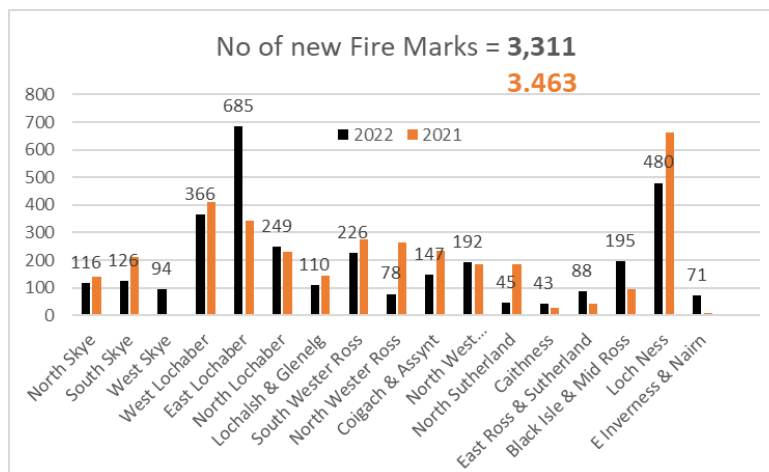
This season 12 council car parks were trialled to permit overnight parking for motorhomes for a £10 fee. The vehicles must be in designated bays and be self contained.

Recommendations from Access Ranger De-briefing

- Increase number of motorhome aires and waste disposal points, especially in areas listed below.
- Leaflets were extremely well received and a good conversation starter.
- Provide clear information online as well as continue with leaflets
- Work with hire companies to ensure bookings, waste disposal and parking areas are understood
- Check other online sites give correct information e.g On SOAC, overnight parking laws etc
- Areas that most need attention are:
Ceannabeine, Oldshoremore, Balnakiel, Strathy, Guinard, Redpoint, Torridon, Traigh, Toigal, Ardvreck, Achmelvich, Glen Brittle, Duncansby Head.

6.Visitor Behaviours

Associated with tent camping, and to some extent RVs, are a number of activities that may cause concern to communities or land managers. These are fires, outdoor toileting and litter.



Camp fires are often seen by many as an essential accompaniment to camping. However, many people do not consider the risks and damage that they can cause. There is potential to spark a wildfire in prolonged dry periods and especially in woodlands or on peaty ground. Even in other areas damage to the ground or vegetation used to fuel the fire can take years to recover. There is existing legislation aimed to prevent fires close to roads or buildings but it is very difficult to enforce. The evidence of previous fires in an area often encourages others to light their own. The Rangers do discourage fires unless it is raised off the ground and it is likely to leave no trace.



Disposable barbeques are counted here too as they scorch the ground and are often left behind as they remain hot for a long time. If buried in sand have been known to burn feet. On occasion these are placed in bins, whilst still hot and may cause bin fires (photo below- right).



Rangers placed advisory No Fires signs, endorsed by The Highland Fire & Rescue Service, which were successful in reducing fires in some locations, but not in others, where signs were removed or even burnt. The numbers of fire marks seen this year is similar to last year.

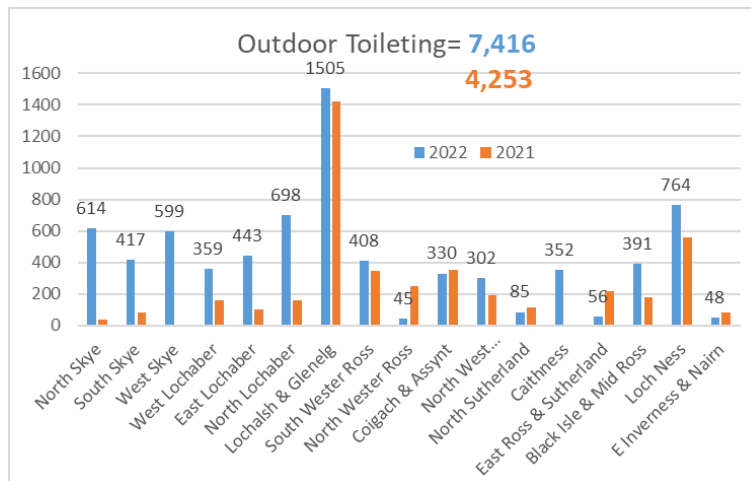


Most fire sites were removed to discourage further use, however there is debate about retaining some fire sites to minimise new ones being created. A method used by Rangers near beaches was to cover fire sites with sand once the debris was removed. This made the site less unsightly, and was often where any new fires were lit reducing any new damage to the grassland. The sand could also promote vegetation re-growth. Other methods of restoring fire sites were tried, covering with seaweed, covering with turf, staking hazard tape around site, jute matting. All these methods worked to some degree and encouraged vegetation regrowth but it was variable as to whether visitors left them undisturbed. No method was completely successful in deterring further fires.



Recommendations from Access Ranger De-briefing

- Promote 'Leave No Trace' message
- Permanent signs required in worst locations
- Better understanding with Police & Fire Service when called out
- Better promotion of No Fire message nationwide. Target 'bushcraft' courses and popular imagery
- Lobby local shops and/or supermarkets not to sell disposable BBQs



Outdoor toileting is often found in association with campsites but also on roadsides, in laybys. There is a considerable increase in this in 2022 particularly in Skye and Lochaber. This may partly be due to clarification on recording to this years team.

Lochalsh shows a particular problem area in both years. There are relatively low camping numbers here and so may often be due to people stopping to relieve themselves in laybys rather than overnighting. The trunk road through this area is frequented by many commercial vehicles and coaches as well as visitors. Suitability of toilet facilities should be reviewed in this area and elsewhere. Areas where this should be considered are mentioned in Appendix 1.

The Rangers did their best to discourage this by placing signs notifying the nearest public toilets. This years signs were printed and thus more 'official' and included a QR of a public toilet map.

In areas where there was overuse and rocky ground, encouraging people to bag & bin their poo. '#Bag It and Bin It' was a promoted Highland Council campaign on social media and with signs and posters around the area.

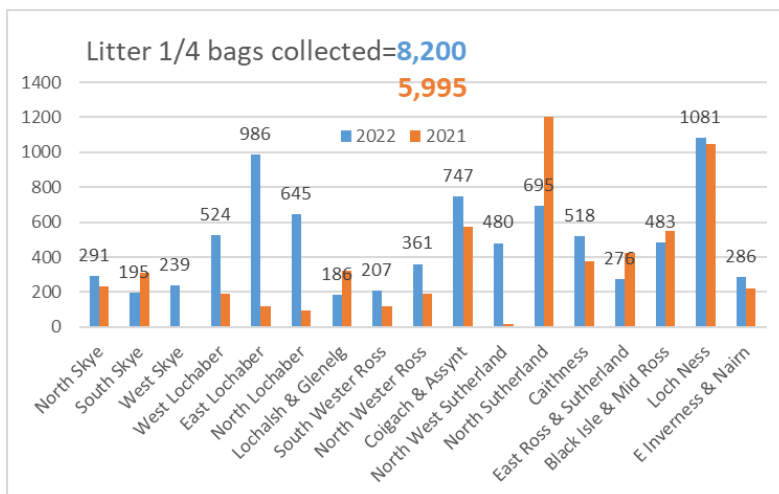


Recommendations from Access Ranger De-briefing

- Encourage more comfort scheme sites in worst areas, e.g Lochalsh. Discuss with Amenities team
- Need to find a way to install temporary or low cost public toilets in some remote locations, e.g. Ceannabeinne, Camusdarroch, Duntelchaig
- Continue with 'Nearest Toilet' signage, with map QR code

Litter is collected by the Access Rangers at popular countryside sites around the Highland area. This is usually litter beyond the road verge that otherwise would not be collected the Waste team. However, sometimes the rangers will collect overflow rubbish outwith bins that may be spread by animals or wind.

The data shows a sizeable increase in the amount collected over last year. It is noticeably so in Lochaber where there was not a Seasonal Waste Operative this year. Over 2000 full bin bags were collected, being 500 more than 2021.



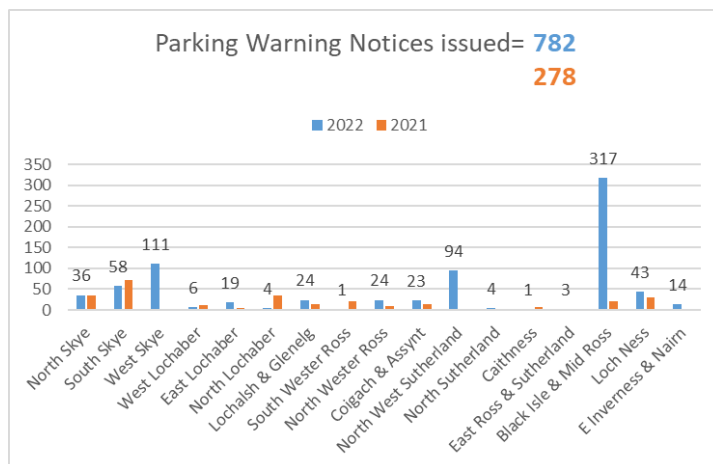
Recommendations from Access Ranger De-briefing

- Promote 'Leave No Trace' message
- Some locations require more bins whilst others should have bins removed, discuss with Waste Team.
- Large lockable bins required for Ranger use when some distance from Recycling Centres e.g Drumnadrochit
- Worked well with Waste Operatives, need to continue increased frequency of collections.

7. Other Council Services

Parking

As well as additional litter collection, the Access Rangers undertake a few activities that assist other Council services. One of these is parking, where the Rangers issue Parking Warning Notices provided by Parking Services, to advise that someone is illegally parked and that they should move or may risk receiving a penalty charge. This often has the desired effect and discourages others from similar parking. The areas with highest figures coincide with Visitor Site Wardens at Chanonry Point, Durness and Glen Brittle. At Chanonry Point the Notices are often for failure to buy a ticket, which other people see attached to windscreens and then buy a ticket. Thus the Warden makes a significant impact on the income generated without having to issue Penalty Charge Notices.



In addition 12 car parks were installed with parking meters inviting payment for day use. Whilst a voluntary payment it was seen that the rangers presence increased compliance, either as the site was well maintained, users felt a service was being provided or they thought they may risk getting a fine. There are a number of other car parks where this model could be appropriate, these are mentioned in **Appendix 1**.

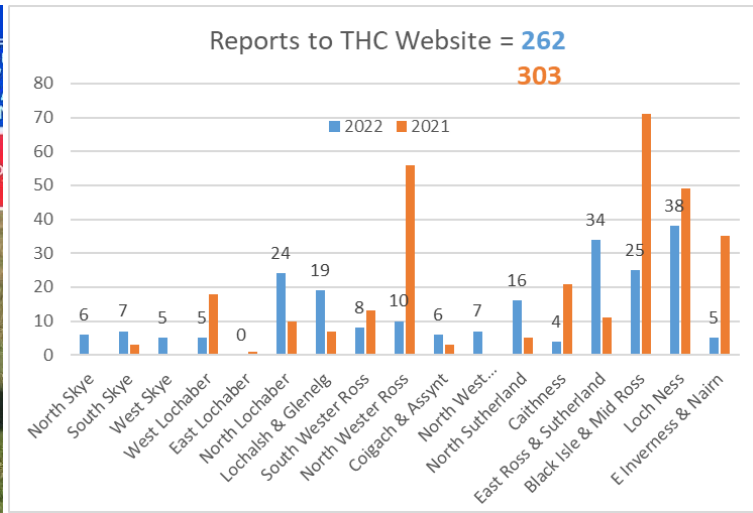


Recommendations from Access Ranger De-briefing

- ‘Invitation to pay’ sites mostly good but more needed. List of 22 provided to Parking Services.
- Some ITP car parks need improving, resurfacing or marking e.g Duncansby, Bonar Bridge, Gruinard
- Some areas need clearway orders and/or No Parking areas before next Easter especially if close to pay car parks e.g Arisaig, Glen Brittle, Glen Etive, Smoo, Gruinard, Ceannabeinne, Claigan/Coral Beach, Rosemarkie, Balnakiel, Plockton
- Some sites require increased car parks e.g. Mellon Udrigle, Stac Pollidh, Dores, Duntelchaig, Whaligoe, Duncansby Head, Dunnet Head.
- Explore Park & Ride/Walk possibilities at: Arisaig, Glen Brittle, Claigan, Storr, Fairy Glen, Plockton.

The Rangers will often make reports on the The Highland Council’s website ‘Report a Problem’ to advise other services of something that requires attention. This most frequently will be Waste for full/overflowing bins, Environmental Health for fly-tipping or Roads for issues seen.





These figures and charts give an initial picture of the issues and their distribution around the Highland Council area in 2022 and how that compares to 2021.

De-briefing

Monthly progress reports were submitted to highlight the busiest hotspot sites and groups worked with. At the end of season, a collated hot spot recording form was requested along with site improvement report. These can be used to justify the allocation of resources and as supporting evidence for any future funding bids.

These were not received in time from every Ranger. However, this was partly anticipated and a De-briefing workshop was held on the last Friday of the contract to gather the thoughts of the Rangers on service improvement, working with others and site management suggestions outlined in **Appendix 1**.



The Ranger De-briefing Workshop

Working With Others

The Rangers were provided with contact numbers for appropriate Council staff, i.e Access officers, Parking enforcement, Waste operatives, Dog Wardens, Roads and Amenity Services. They also had contacts for local Police, Fire Service and other organisation's Ranger services. Contact details for community representatives and land managers were also given and they were encouraged to make more.

During the season the Access Rangers worked hard to co-ordinate their patrols with other organisation Rangers and to inform Services and Police about any relevant incidents. They contacted most of the community councils or trusts in their areas (approx. 62), gaining information and building trust. Some volunteer workdays were arranged with these groups including path works on Skye and Wester Ross, vegetation clearance in Nairn and beach cleans in Dornie, Glen Brittle and Ullapool.



Many land managers were contacted and discussions were had regarding managing visitors on their sites to co-ordinate any actions and provide assistance. The Access Rangers created Whats App groups with Forestry & Land Scotland, NatureScot and National Trust for Scotland rangers in specific areas. This greatly improved co-operation and co-ordinated their patrols.

The OAM was involved in weekly Visitor Management Operations groups in North and South Highland, reporting and co-ordinating actions with other Council services, emergency services and land managers. After establishing a Highland Ranger Managers Group in 2021 this continued through 2022 on a more infrequent basis. There was also regular contact with the other ranger partners within the council area. The OAM also attended the monthly national Visitor Management Strategy Co-ordination Group and the VM Operational sub group. He submitted fortnightly RAG reports to the national Visitor Management Strategy Group for the North Coast 500 and Arisaig/Morar areas.



Site Improvement Works & Maintenance

The Rangers were able to undertake a number of tasks that improved popular visitor sites. Some of this was maintenance works whilst other work was to reduce damage caused by vehicles or people. Where possible contact was made with local groups and involved volunteers. These projects were done at Poolewe, Gairloch, Glenbrittle, Mallaig, Dingwall, Chanony Point, Dornie, Gruinard, Thurso, Dores and Durness.

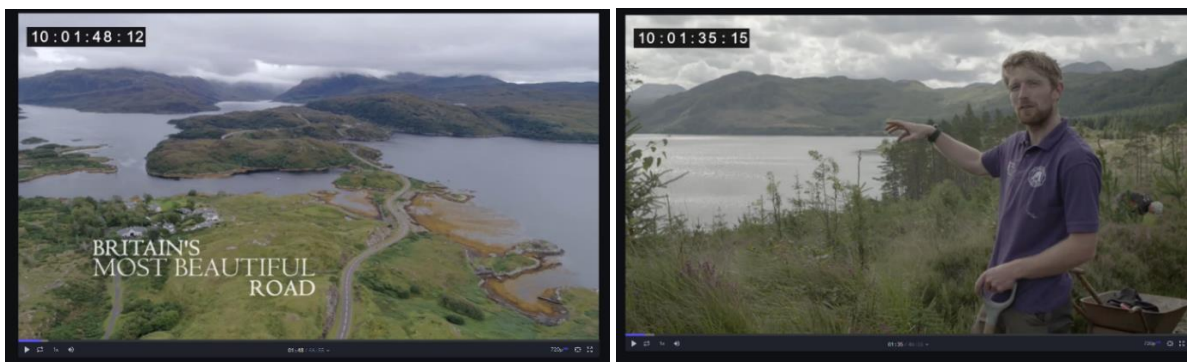


Communications

An ideal way on reporting and contact for the public has still not been established. However, the generic email address continued and was often used to inform the Ranger team of incidents or for general queries was set up as a stop-gap but remained the main way for people to report or contact the Rangers. Some rangers having worked with the Council over winter were in place at Easter and on the IT system, others took some time to be set up and these messages had to be forwarded by the OAM or Access Officers. Eventually the Rangers received Council email addresses and were able to make direct contact. There were similar delays in issueing of phones.

A Facebook account for the Ranger team was also set up. This became a good way to issue information & advice and show the work of the Rangers. The page had achieved 5000 followers by July. The maximum reach by a single post was 135,494 people with 9 others reaching over 10,000. Some posts caused some controversy but when further explanation was given overwhelming support was achieved. During the season a number of press releases were issued to give updates on the teams progress and this was reported in the Inverness Courier, Ross-shire Journal and other local papers.

During July and August a Purple Productions TV crew filmed some of the Ranger activity to be included within a Channel 4 documentary on the North Coast 500. This was agreed to on condition of highlighting responsible behaviour along with the challenges.



Support and Moving Forward

The Access Ranger team has received numerous compliments and messages of support from local residents and visitors. This has been directly by word of mouth, email and Facebook posts. This support has also been recognised by Highland Council Ward Members, particularly after The OAM and Rangers gave a series of presentations to almost all the Ward areas within The Highland Council.

Reports and updates of the Rangers actions and progress was made to several Highland Council Committees, notably the Infrastructure & Economy Committee and Area Committees who unanimously commended the Ranger team on the difference they were making to our local communities and countryside.

This years team of 22 Access Ranger & Site Warden staff have been able to make an even greater difference to visitor management within the Highlands. Total visitor numbers appear to be almost 33% higher than in 2021 and they were able to speak to twice as many visitors and co-operate with many more local organisations. The phasing in of the team over three months also appeared to be successful with an earlier presence but not being over staffed in quieter periods. However having to recruit the majority of the team every spring is time and resource consuming on the Access team, particularly the Outdoor Access Manager. It can mean a loss of continuity and experience after each season and having to equip, train and set-up new staff into the Council's IT and payroll systems each year can lead to delays in operation. The ability to retain five Rangers over winter in 2021/22 was a great advantage and enabled those staff to be ready for the Easter holidays. This year we are trying a different method by retaining 8 Rangers part-time over winter, this allows a slightly larger team to remain within the Council's systems and be fully equipped, ready to return to full time work in April 2023.

Unfortunately, there is great uncertainty about allocations of the Council budget for 2023/24 and at the present time it is unknown if the Access Ranger team will be recruited and available for the summer season.

As some of the Council's visitor management funding for 2022/23 allocated to Rangers remains, we have been able to employ 8 Rangers, on a part-time basis for a further 5 months over the winter season. Three Rangers will produce and begin to implement a number of Location Action Plans for Assynt, Applecross & Lochcarron and Chanonry Point. All the Rangers will carry out site improvements on a number of heavily visited sites and core paths such as Duntelchaig, Foyers, Gruinard, Melvich, Ardvreck, Applecross, Chanonry Point and signposting around Skye. They will continue working and liaising with communities and land managers to improve visitor sites in preparation for future years.

APPENDIX 1

Issues of Concern in Highland Areas

Caithness

- Car Parks at Duncansby Head, Whaligoe Steps
- Parking on access road to Dunnet Head.
- Parking at Red Point/ Drumhollister. Dangerous roadside parking, current fencing not improved issue.
- Path upgrade required at Duncansby Head
- No toilets at/near Whaligoe and Ousdale Broch
- A99 traffic management near Whaligoe

Sutherland & Easter Ross

- Car parks at Ceannabeinne, Balnakiel, Oldshoremore, Bonar bridge, Melvich beach, Ardvreck, Inchnadamph, Tarbetness, Portmahomack beach- all candidates for ITP.
- Coach parking and extension at Smoo Cave.
- Improvements to car park surfacing and picnic sites at Oldshoremore, Bonar Bridge, Tarbet Ness
- Toilets required at/near Caennabeinne.
- Path improvements at Caennabeinne, Bonar Bridge
- Motorhome waste disposal needed in Durness area.

Wester Ross & Lochalsh

- Car Parks at Achnahaird, Mellon Udrigle, Gairloch Beach, Redpointc, Applecross, Lochacarron, Torridon- all candidates for ITP.
- Parking areas need improvement at Wailing Widow Falls, Achmelvich, Achnahaird, Bone Caves, Stac Pollaidh, Gairloch Harbour, Kintail
- Path improvements at Wailing Widow Falls
- Toileting issues along A87 Kintail and A890.

Isle of Skye

- Car parks at Lealt, Glen Brittle, Coral Beach, Kilt Rock, Elgol, Duntruim- all candidates for ITP
- Parking areas at Neist Point, Elgol, Staffin slipway, Duntruim, Fairy Glen, and Sleat need improvement or signing.
- Ferry terminal parking capacity issues at Uig and Sconser
- Road improvements needed in Glen Brittle on approach to Fairy Pools and road end.
- Public toilets needed north of Staffin, Coral Beach, Neist Point.

Lochaber

- Car Parks at Ballachulish peninsula, Laggan Locks, Traigh, Camusdarroch, Glen Etive- candidates for ITP
- Parking improvement needed at Cuil Bay and Kintail
- Public toilets at Ballachulish need improvement. Also issues in Glen Garry and Tougal (opening)
- Bins and waste issues at Glen Garry, Loch Lochy and Camusdarroch.
- Path improvements needed at Tougal.
- Shuttle bus services would be advantageous at Glen Etive, Glen Nevis, Aridaig/Morar

Inner Moray Firth

- Car parks at Silverbridge, South Souter – candidates for ITP
- Parking improvement needed at Nairn (signs), Chanonry Point (signs, height barrier), Rosemarkie, Dores, Newhall Point, Jemimaville, Lochindorb (height barrier)
- Bins & waste issues at Secret Beach, Dores, Alturlie.