



From mountain to sea

Aberdeenshire Visitor Management Plan 2023

'To deliver a sustainable inclusive high-quality experience to visitors without being detrimental to Aberdeenshire's communities, businesses, land managers, and its natural and cultural heritage.'

V1.0 – 23 March 2023



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1 Background

Following the first Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, there was a rapid increase in visitor numbers to Aberdeenshire, especially to countryside and coastal sites. This was predominantly due to barriers to travel within the UK and overseas. As a result of a low positive case rate of Covid-19 in Aberdeenshire and the expansive amount of natural open space, in rural areas especially, it was viewed to be a popular destination by both visitors to the area and local residents who were keen to explore and enjoy Aberdeenshire's beautiful countryside, towns and villages. Visitors have included those coming from out with the area, including from Aberdeen City for day trips, weekend breaks and up to two-week holidays. Aberdeenshire residents have also been exploring other parts of the local authority area, including the natural open spaces and countryside immediately on their doorstep.

In addition to the challenge of the area experiencing higher visitor numbers, there was also the challenge of these new countryside users not being familiar with the behaviour expected of them by the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#).

To address the increased visitor number issues encountered within Aberdeenshire in 2020 a cross service working group was established to co-ordinate Aberdeenshire Council's response. This included representatives from the Planning & Economy; Environment & Sustainability; Property & Facilities; Roads & Infrastructure; and Customer & Digital Services; and Area Manager's Offices. These incorporate roles within the functions of the Ranger Service; Landscape Services; Waste Management; Environmental Planning; Outdoor Access; Protective Services and Economic Development. Representatives of this cross service working group also attend the Cairngorms National Park managing visitors working group. Similar challenges continued to be faced by communities and land managers in 2021 and 2022 with a detrimental impact on the natural and cultural heritage of Aberdeenshire if not managed in a sustainable way. As a result, the cross service working group was retained to ensure Aberdeenshire Council remained in the best position to pre-empt and respond to the issues encountered.

Aberdeenshire's rural hot spot sites continue to face increased pressure from visitors above pre-pandemic levels. This is as a result of an increased recognition of what Aberdeenshire's natural and built assets have to offer as a day trip, weekend break or extended holiday destination; along with a heightened appreciation of the benefits connecting with nature brings in improving people's mental health and going on holiday in a more sustainable and environmentally friendly manner. Therefore, it was established there was a continuing need to ensure Aberdeenshire Council continues to take a co-ordinated service delivery approach to visitor management through the cross service working group.

2 Purpose, Aim & Objectives

The Aberdeenshire Visitor Management Plan provides information on the natural and built assets which are utilised by residents and visitors on a recreational basis, and how Aberdeenshire Council looks to take a collaborative approach with partners, stakeholders, businesses and communities to manage the impact of the use of these assets in a sustainable manner. The plan covers all of Aberdeenshire including the

part situated within the Cairngorms National Park. The Cairngorms National Park has its own plan for managing visitors within the park itself which can be found [here](#).

The plan focuses on short term service delivery rather than medium to long term tourism infrastructure. Although there is recognition that new or improved tourism infrastructure is required across Aberdeenshire, this is a more long-term and strategic aim. Work is underway in this respect with the development of a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan (STIDP) for Aberdeenshire. The Aberdeenshire Visitor Management Plan is a key component in feeding into the STIDP in identifying strategic priorities and medium to long term local actions which will help ensure a long-term sustainable approach to visitor management which protects the natural and historic environment, respects communities, and enhances the experience of visitors. The Visitor Management Plan aligns with [Scotland's Visitor Management Strategy](#) and [Aberdeenshire Council's Plan 2022-27](#).

2.1 Aim

The main aim of the Aberdeenshire Visitor Management Plan 2023 is:

'To deliver a sustainable inclusive high-quality experience to visitors without being detrimental to Aberdeenshire's communities, businesses, land managers, and its natural and cultural heritage.'

2.2 Objectives

The objectives of the Aberdeenshire Visitor Management Plan 2022 are:

- Provide a warm welcome to provide a high-quality visitor experience, that is inclusive of everyone, allowing everyone to enjoy the outdoors in a responsible, safe, environmentally friendly and sustainable manner.
 - Improve visitor behaviours through public awareness, engagement and messaging of national communications including the Scottish Outdoor Access Code to reduce conflict between visitors, residents, businesses and land managers.
 - Mitigate impacts on communities, businesses, land managers and Aberdeenshire's natural, historic and cultural heritage as a result of visitors to the area through sustainable management that supports low impact responsible enjoyment by users.
 - Encourage a collaborative approach between public and private sector organisations, and communities to ensure positive actions are undertaken to improve local places and visitor experiences to the benefit of everyone.
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3 Targeted Visitor Management Actions – 2023

Following a review of the visitor pressures encountered in 2022, the cross service working group identified the main priorities and actions to undertake in 2023. This is to improve visitor's experiences and behaviours; and to reduce the impact on communities, businesses, land managers, and the natural and cultural heritage of Aberdeenshire. This will help ensure Aberdeenshire Council's approach to visitor management is as environmentally friendly and sustainable as possible. The identified actions are as follows:

- Recruit Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers to support improved visitor experience and behaviours; and reduce the impact on communities, land managers and the natural and cultural heritage of Aberdeenshire (excluding Cairngorms National Park).
- Produce a summary guide on the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC), which will be shared with local communities, Councillors and council colleagues which outlines what is and is not considered responsible access under SOAC, and what Aberdeenshire Council can do in response to people not behaving in accordance with SOAC.
- Produce a public leaflet on what does and does not constitute wild camping as stated under SOAC.
- Install barbecue waste bins which have been purchased in locations which have been identified as problematic for disposal of single use barbecues and hot embers.
- Investigate the purchase and installation of appropriate visitor management infrastructure at sites to enhance the visitor experience and mitigate any resulting impacts on Aberdeenshire's natural and historic environment, e.g. barbecue stands, interpretation boards, benches, and picnic tables.
- To ensure adequate public toilet provision is provided across Aberdeenshire, especially at key hot spot locations; with action being taken to re-open and refurbish (where required) public toilets which have remained closed since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Undertake conservation and repair work at sites which have suffered damage from inappropriate barbecue and fire use to discourage future use of the site in this way.
- Undertake, where required, relevant traffic management actions to reduce the amount of unsafe and inappropriate parking at sites.

4 Hot Spots

4.1 Coast and Countryside Hot Spots

Based on data collection and evidence between 2020 and 2022, the key coast and countryside hot spot locations identified for 2023 within Aberdeenshire (excluding Cairngorms National Park) without visitor management staff in post are as follows:

Table 4.1 Key coast and countryside hot spot locations 2023

Site	Aberdeenshire Council Administrative Area	Visitor Management Issues
Aden Country Park, Mintlaw	Buchan	Litter
Balmedie Country Park, Balmedie	Formartine	Litter, inappropriate parking, barbecue/fire damage, camping, anti-social behaviour/damage.
New Aberdour Beach, New Aberdour	Banff & Buchan	Litter, inappropriate parking, human waste, camping.
Falls of Dess, Aboyne	Marr	Litter, human waste, inappropriate parking.
Gannochy (Blue Door), Edzell	Kincardine & Mearns	Inappropriate parking, barbecue/fire damage.
The Glebe, Drumoak	Kincardine & Mearns	Litter, inappropriate parking, barbecue/fire damage, anti-social behaviour, human waste, camping.
Loch of Skene, Dunecht	Garioch	Litter, inappropriate parking, barbecue/fire damage, anti-social behaviour, human waste, camping, wildlife disturbance.
Haddo Country Park, Methlick	Formartine	Litter
Potarch Green, Banchory	Marr	Litter, inappropriate parking, camping, anti-social behaviour, barbecue/fire damage, human waste.
Scotstown Beach, St Fergus	Buchan	dogs not under proper control, irresponsible parking, non-authorised use of motorised vehicles e.g. quad bikes.
Cairn o' Mount	Kincardine & Mearns	Toileting, litter, barbecue/fire damage.

Millshore & Cullykhan Beaches, Pennan	Banff & Buchan	Toileting, human waste, camping, anti-social behaviour, barbecue/fire damage.
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A full list of the coast and countryside hot spot locations within Aberdeenshire including the Cairngorms National Park and those which have visitor management staff in place can be found within [Appendix 1](#). The list shown within Table 3.1 is fluid with sites listed within Appendix 1 being added to and taken out of this table throughout the season. This is dependent on the visitor pressures reported and identified through the Council's cross service working group, partners, communities, businesses, and land managers.

4.2 Town and Village Hot Spots

Based on data collection and evidence between 2020 and 2022, the key town and village hot spot locations identified for 2023 within Aberdeenshire (excluding Cairngorms National Park) without visitor management staff in post are as follows:

Table 4.2 Key town and village hot spot locations 2023

Site	Aberdeenshire Council Administrative Area	Visitor Management Issues
Catterline	Kincardine & Mearns	Inappropriate parking, litter, human waste.
Cruden Bay & Port Erroll	Buchan	Inappropriate parking, irresponsible camping, fire damage, toileting and littering.
Newburgh (Beach)	Formartine	Irresponsible parking, wildlife disturbance.
Sandend	Banff & Buchan	Inappropriate parking, irresponsible camping, tents and campervans, toileting, litter.
Stonehaven (Beach & Harbour)	Kincardine & Mearns	Inappropriate parking, litter, anti-social behaviour.

A full list of the town and village hot spot locations within Aberdeenshire including the Cairngorms National Park can be found within [Appendix 2](#). The list shown within

Table 3.2 is fluid with sites listed within Appendix 2 being added to and taken out of this table throughout the season. This is dependent on the visitor pressures reported and identified through the Council's cross service working group, partners, communities, businesses, and land managers.

5 Aberdeenshire Council Car Parks & Toilets

5.1 Car Parks

Details in relation to Aberdeenshire Council's public car parks including capacities and charges can be found [here](#).

5.2 Public Toilets

Details in relation to Aberdeenshire Council's public toilets including opening times and a location map can be found [here](#).

Details in relation to public toilets within the Cairngorms National Park, including Aberdeenshire, can be found [here](#).

6 Outdoor Access

6.1 Ranger Services

6.1.1 Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service

Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service employ 6 full-time equivalent (FTE) Rangers across Aberdeenshire to help residents and visitors discover and enjoy Aberdeenshire's rich natural and cultural heritage.

In common with other Ranger Services in Scotland, the Ranger Service have 3 main aims that include:

- providing a warm welcome and provide support to help people enjoy the outdoors
- increasing awareness, understanding, care and responsible use of the natural and cultural heritage
- supporting the sustainable management and use of the outdoors to meet a range of objectives.

Further details in relation to the Aberdeenshire Ranger Service can be found on the [website](#) or by contacting ranger.service@aberdeenshire.gov.uk.

Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service is in the process of submitting funding applications to [NatureScot's Better Places Green Recovery Fund](#) and the Buchan and Formartine Area Committees Coastal Community Funds while also undertaking a concurrent recruitment process (will only be completed if successful with funding) to appoint 2.6 FTE Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers between 24 April 2023 and 31 October 2023.

6.1.2 Cairngorms National Park Ranger Service

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has its own Ranger Service, consisting of 4 permanent rangers, 10 seasonal rangers and 4 trainee rangers. Their ranger service works in partnership with the 13 site based rangers and communities across the park to provide a warm welcome and support to everyone so they can enjoy the outdoors in a responsible and safe manner. This helps everyone care for the park and protect it for future generations.

Further details in relation to the Cairngorms National Park Ranger Service can be found on the [website](#) or by contacting rangers@cairngorms.co.uk.

6.2 Outdoor Access Officers

6.2.1 Aberdeenshire Council

Aberdeenshire Council is the Access Authority for all of Aberdeenshire except for the area within the Cairngorms National Park. Two FTE Access Officers are employed to uphold the Council's duties and responsibilities under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. Access Officers provide advice and support to landowners, members of the community, fellow council officers and external bodies in relation to the statutory right of responsible access.

Access Officers have statutory powers to assist them in carrying out their duties and may occasionally need to exercise these to resolve difficult situations. However, most of their work involves negotiation and advising the public in order to ensure that the right of responsible access is upheld.

You can request information and advice from our Officers in relation to access rights and responsibilities by viewing the [website](#) or by emailing outdoor.access@aberdeenshire.gov.uk.

6.2.2 Cairngorms National Park Authority

The Cairngorms National Park Authority is the Access Authority for the Cairngorms National Park, and has the responsibility of upholding access rights as set out in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. The Cairngorm National Park's goal is to encourage responsible sharing of outdoor space between different users whilst reducing the impact on its protected species and habitats. You can request information and advice from the Park's Officers in relation to access rights and responsibilities by emailing outdooraccess@cairngorms.co.uk.

6.3 Access Forums

6.3.1 Aberdeenshire Local Outdoor Access Forum (ALOAF)

ALOAF covers the area of Aberdeenshire apart from the Cairngorms National Park. ALOAF provides advice to the Local Authority on matters relating to the exercising of access rights, delineation of rights of way and core paths. They are also able to offer assistance and mediation to all parties in any dispute about access rights.

ALOAF members are independent of Aberdeenshire Council and represent a broad range of experience from four fields of countryside interest: recreational use; land management; community use; and agency and/or organisations.

Examples of the topics addressed by the Forum include: integration of access with other land management interests and with residential privacy; the operation of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code; input into the Aberdeenshire Core Paths Plan development; promotion of responsible non-motorised access; and shared-use of paths by different modes of non-motorised travel.

You can request information and advice from the ALOAF Chair by emailing aloaf@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

6.3.2 *Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum*

The Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum is the statutory body that advises the Park Authority and others on matters relating to outdoor access. The Forum is made up of individuals representing land management, community interests, recreational users, and public agencies. Further information in relation to the Forum, including contact details can be found [here](#).

6.4 Paths

6.4.1 *Aberdeenshire*

Details in relation to paths in Aberdeenshire, including updates on current path closures and project works; and the Aberdeenshire Core Paths Plan can be found [here](#).

6.4.2 *Cairngorms National Park*

Details in relation to paths in the Cairngorms National Park can be found [here](#) along with the [Cairngorms National Park Core Paths Plan](#).

7 Key Contacts & Partners

Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service ranger.service@aberdeenshire.gov.uk; [Ranger Service - Aberdeenshire Council](#) and the council's

Aberdeenshire Outdoor Access Officers - outdoor.access@aberdeenshire.gov.uk; [Outdoor Access - Aberdeenshire Council](#).

Aberdeenshire Local Outdoor Access Forum - [Local Outdoor Access Forum - Aberdeenshire Council](#)

Cairngorms National Park Authority - [Home - Cairngorms National Park Authority](#)

Coastguard - [Maritime and Coastguard Agency - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

NatureScot - [NatureScot](#)

NFU Scotland - [NFU Scotland | National Farmers Union, Scotland](#)

Police Scotland - [Police Scotland - Police Scotland](#)

Scottish Fire & Rescue Service - [Scottish Fire & Rescue Service \(firescotland.gov.uk\)](https://www.firescotland.gov.uk)

Scottish Land and Estates - [Helping Rural Scotland Thrive | Scottish Land & Estates \(scottishlandandestates.co.uk\)](https://www.scottishlandandestates.co.uk)

VisitAberdeenshire – Visitor: [Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Visitor Guide - VisitAberdeenshire \(visitabdn.com\)](https://www.visitabdn.com) **Industry:** [VisitAberdeenshire's website for local tourism businesses \(visitabdn.com\)](https://www.visitabdn.com)

VisitScotland – Visitor: [VisitScotland - Scotland's National Tourist Organisation](https://www.visitScotland.org) **Industry:** [The Corporate site for Scotland's National Tourism Organisation - VisitScotland.org](https://www.visitScotland.org)

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