

NATIONAL ACCESS FORUM – INFORMAL CAMPING WORKING GROUP

Notes from the meeting on Wednesday 11 December 2019

Present: David Henderson Howat, Janice Winning, Davie Black, Danny Carden, Alan Dron, Adam Streeter Smith, Mark Wrightham, Nick Cole, Emma Steel, Matt Buckland.

Apologies: Phil Whitfield, Kenny Auld, David Clyne, Helen Todd, Jason Rust, Angus Duncan.

Welcome & Updates

The group discussed the current Parliamentary petition (PE1751) proposing legislation to enable local authorities to create 'no wild camping zones' and the evidence already supplied by Ramblers Scotland, and Mountaineering Scotland. There was agreement that the solutions sought in the petition to anti-social camping were not an appropriate or effective way of dealing with the problems. The petition and recent media reports conflate a number of issues regarding informal camping that the group were keen to clarify. Mountain Training Scotland wish to participate in evidence to the Parliamentary Committee and this was encouraged by the group.

Feedback from the recent meeting with the Scottish Camping and Caravan Forum highlighted the motorhome and campervan industries' concerns over problems from roadside parking, not using official sites, and damage to the reputation of responsible users. CAMPA have recently updated their guidance on informal camping and the industry as a whole are keen to promote responsible camping messages. This has the support of Scottish Government and VisitScotland who were also present at the SCCF meeting.

Other organisations are also looking at solutions; a recent meeting of local authority tourism and economic development officers had stressed the importance of local management in providing solutions for some of the problems. Forestry and Land Scotland are planning to trial some low cost, light touch facilities for campervans and will share the information in due course. From their experience, the issues around car camping are more complex requiring changes in behaviours, clearer messages and working collectively to help make progress in tackling the issues. Promoting existing facilities (toilets, waste disposal sites and permissible overnight parking areas) is being looked at by SEPA and Scottish Water and the National Parks.

Developing Targeted Messages

The group noted the previous action by NAF and SNH to address camping issues as outlined in the SNH discussion paper (Dec 2019). The current SNH activity to promote responsible tent based camping and work with CAMPA to improve guidance for campervan and motor home users as well as the NAF guidance 'Managing Informal Camping' was also highlighted to the working group. Discussion focused on the following three questions and recommendations made as follows;

1) What more could be done to promote SOAC messages?

- Use a SPARC type campaign

A campaign along the lines of the SPARC campaign for reducing livestock worrying could be adopted with short understandable messages for informal campers and for landowners.

- Target different user groups

Messages should be targeted at different user groups and more creatively. Examples were given of Facebook ads and discussions on social media groups to positively influence

certain audiences. Use of youth committees or risk groups can help define effective messages for different groups

- Use point of sale

Need to promote behavioural change of audiences new to camping, i.e. to promote responsible actions when they are purchasing equipment. e.g. Decathlon etc.

- Use of local media

Local press were thought to be more aware of the outcome being sought and able to help promote local management solutions rather than the national press.

- Messages should be punchier and harder hitting.

Whilst this might suit some audiences there was evidence that harder hitting messages had previously backfired causing offence to the responsible majority.

- Use positive messages that nudge people in the right direction.

There was strong support for positive messages that encouraged people to do the right thing,

2) What are the key messages?

A number of key messages were proposed in the discussion paper e.g. take away all litter, remove all trace of the visit, don't cause pollution, park vehicles appropriately, respect others. There was general agreement with these. Other suggestions included;

- appealing to the developing 'outdoor/environmental ethic' i.e. 'going lightly', treading lightly, leave no trace etc
- care for your countryside
- simple messages that promote respect and consideration
- messages about fires and environmental impacts especially in woodland
- messages about litter and toileting
- messages about avoiding cumulative impact, ie move on if it is busy

3) What else is needed?

- local solutions

There was full agreement about the need for local management solutions and partnerships between the landowners and others to help solve problems. An example given was "Ask Perth" and possibilities of helping to identify alternatives.

- Signposting/promoting existing facilities

Examples were given where existing toilet facilities are not promoted and are difficult to find.

- More evidence and monitoring

There was general support for local evidence gathering that could be used to inform local management solutions. The resource implications of this were recognised but in some situations community monitoring or ranger involvement might be possible.

- Signposting alternatives

In some cases there is scope to better signpost alternatives to help reduce cumulative impact at honeypot sites.

- Creating new facilities

Additional resources to create new low key facilities are still required, e.g. French-style aires and very informal camping provision/ semi wild camping provision.

Future action

In conclusion, it was agreed that a number of actions could be taken forward by the Forum to help define what was responsible informal camping and help promote this to various audiences. A draft list of key messages (see Annex) would be circulated and agreed by the working group. These would be presented to the full National Access Forum in January 2020, and sent to SG Tourism officials. The messages would then be a resource for the different organisations concerned about irresponsible camping to use, proactively and reactively, according to needs and local circumstances, and in future campaigns. Thus a collaborative and creative approach to targeting various audiences would be trialled. Overall there was strong support to work together and share information around this topic.

ANNEX

CAMPING

Informal camping, away from official campsites, provides a great way for people to enjoy Scotland's outdoors.

This can take a number of forms, including wild camping in remote places and camping close to parked vehicles.

However, it must be carried out responsibly, in particular to protect the environment. This means:

- Taking away all litter and removing all trace of your visit,
- Making sure there is no pollution (e.g. from human waste) or environmental damage (e.g. from fires – use a stove if possible)
- Parking any vehicles safely, not blocking roads or entrances and trying not to damage the verge
- Respecting other campers and avoiding overcrowding
- Being considerate to land managers. Do not camp in enclosed fields of crops or where there are farm animals.
- Remembering that access rights are not an excuse for anti-social or illegal behaviour.

Access authorities, public agencies and land managers can help people to camp responsibly by:

- Providing guidance about responsible camping
- Providing information about facilities such as toilets and litter disposal points
- Providing information on alternative places to camp
- Working together at local level to develop additional facilities where there is heavy pressure.