
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

22 February 2022

Cabinet

Title: North Ayrshire Visitor Management Plan 2022

Purpose: This report proposes approval of a Visitor Management Plan for 2022 to support a range of actions to manage the expected increase in domestic tourism.

Recommendation: It is recommended that Cabinet approves the draft North Ayrshire Visitor Management Plan for 2022 (attached as Appendix 1)

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks approval of the draft North Ayrshire Visitor Management Plan for 2022 (Appendix 1). The Plan sets out a strategic approach to managing the impact of tourism within North Ayrshire in 2022, based on identifying key issues that arose during the 2021 peak season for domestic tourism, key challenges in managing the impact of visitors to North Ayrshire and establishing priorities and actions for managing the impact of visitors during 2022.

2. Background

- 2.1 The visitor economy is an important sector of North Ayrshire's economy. In 2019, there were 3.2m visitor days with an economic impact of £211.8m, supporting 3,770 full time jobs. The impact of tourism is not only economic, however, and there are a range of impacts on our communities and our environment and place and infrastructure assets. Optimising North Ayrshire's visitor experience whilst minimising adverse impacts of increased visitor flows will assist to support the economic impact of tourism and maximises the environmental and social benefits visitors can bring.
- 2.2 It is important to note that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a big impact on the numbers and types of visitors coming to North Ayrshire, and consequently on our communities and facilities. It is predicted that the short-term increase in domestic tourism arising from the pandemic will remain throughout 2022. This context presents an opportunity to review the provision of visitor services to respond to these new demands in a way that will bring lasting economic benefits through a visitor management plan and manages the impact on communities.
- 2.3 Appendix 1 to this report presents the first Visitor Management Plan for North Ayrshire. The Plan outlines priorities and proposals to facilitate and support an expected increased level of tourism and visitors to North Ayrshire, relative to pre-pandemic levels.

- 2.4 The process of preparing the plan included evidence gathering, stakeholder engagement, best practice benchmarking, identifying actions already implemented as well as future actions, developing Visitor Management Plan priorities – and assessing proposed actions against the known issues and priorities. The process has been overseen by a member/officer forum to guide development.
- 2.5 Research and engagement throughout the development process has confirmed anecdotal evidence of the impact of the increase in domestic tourism over 2021. This has been particularly notable at prominent destinations (Largs, Irvine, Arran and Cumbrae). Key impacts identified relate to litter, parking, impact of motorhome visitors and public toilet provision. Some prominent issues arose were particularly related to ‘hotspots’ – such as ferry queuing at Largs.
- 2.6 As a result of the process undertaken the Visitor Management Plan identifies the following priorities for 2022: -
- Improve the visitor experience that North Ayrshire provides, whilst mitigating adverse impacts on communities through identified and coordinated strategic set of actions
 - Development and implementation of a Visitor Management Plan
 - Prioritise actions in relation to:
 - Public realm services
 - Transport infrastructure
 - Communication and promotion of responsible tourism
 - Create a framework to build on this plan for future action
 - Establish monitoring and feedback to evaluate success and identify need for future action
- 2.7 The Visitor Management Plan sets out a comprehensive list of actions for 2022. This has been assessed against the priorities set out above. Overall, the proposed actions for 2022 are comprehensive and cover the key priority areas identified in the evidence gathering supported by committed budgets. Subject to approval of the Plan, it is intended to work to present the impact of the Plan at a localities level.
- 2.8 Notwithstanding the actions proposed, it should be noted that some key areas identified require longer term solutions for a range of reasons, including to reflect emerging strategic priorities locally and regionally and related partner responsibilities; and that some actions areas require more comprehensive analysis to identify the best value interventions. As such, it is envisaged that through monitoring and development of an annual update to the Visitor Management Plan, appropriate action can be delivered beyond 2022, including working proactively to identify a range of additional funding sources to deliver appropriate interventions.
- 2.9 It is recommended that the Visitor Management Plan for 2022 is approved to support coordinated action to support the increase in visitor numbers to North Ayrshire, while managing the impact on communities and place-based infrastructure. The plan has been developed with reference to national best practice standards and proposes a package of action that exceeds £1.5m in financial resource.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approves the draft North Ayrshire Visitor Management Plan for 2022 (attached as Appendix 1)

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

- 4.1 The financial impact of the proposals is met from a range of existing service budgets and external funding. No additional budget pressures have been created from the Visitor Management Plan. It should be noted that although not all measures can be fully attributed a cost, it should be noted that the range of actions included in the Visitor Management Plan exceed £1.5m; and this represents significant resource deployment to positively managing the impact of visitors.

Human Resources

- 4.2 No direct implication.

Legal

- 4.3 No direct implication.

Equality/Socio-economic

- 4.4 It is predicted that the impact of the Plan will have generally positive equality and social impacts.

Environmental and Sustainability

- 4.5 The proposals will have a positive impact on environmental resources.

Key Priorities

- 4.6 The proposals support the delivery of Council Plan priorities – in particular, “North Ayrshire has an inclusive, growing and enterprising economy” and “North Ayrshire is a vibrant, welcoming and attractive environment”.

Community Wealth Building

- 4.7 The proposals in the Visitor Management Plan support the delivery of the Council’s Community Wealth Building strategy.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The content of the report has been developed and informed by engagement with members, officers and businesses.

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North Ayrshire Council
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

Visitor Management Plan 2022

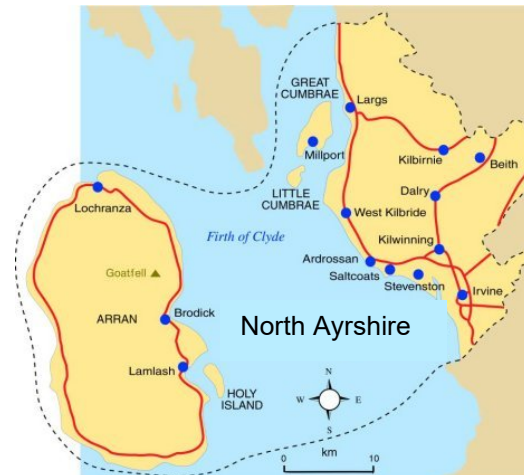


1. Introduction

Visitors are an important part of North Ayrshire's economy. In 2019, there were 3.2m visitor days with an economic impact of £211.8m, supporting 3,770 full time jobs.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a big impact on the numbers and types of visitors coming to North Ayrshire, and consequently on our communities and facilities. This is an opportunity to review the provision of visitor services to respond to these new demands in a way that will bring lasting economic benefits.

This plan sets out our objectives, the challenges we are responding to, actions taken in the earlier stages of the pandemic and our priorities and proposed actions for 2022. These actions are focused on what can be developed and/or delivered during 2022 with an immediate impact, whilst acknowledging our longer-term ambitions for the area which will require longer term planning, development and investment. Priorities were identified by interviewing local councillors, businesses, trade organisations and Council officers.



2. Purpose of the Visitor Management Plan

To work across the Council to identify actions and interventions which enhance the experience of our visitors, which in turn support our tourism businesses and the jobs they sustain for the 2022 peak visitor economy season. To develop plans which are respectful of our communities and the environment and deliver lasting economic benefits to North Ayrshire.

In recognising the issues, priorities and actions that will assist to support the visitor economy over 2022, the evidence-gathering and exploration of potential interventions has also highlighted that there are strategic issues that will require a longer-term lens to identify all appropriate interventions. In part, these will be informed by strategy development at regional and local level, the recovery and renewal of the visitor economy following the pandemic and options analysis of potential longer-term interventions. This plan will therefore provide a platform for action in future years, particularly where monitoring of interventions can be captured to inform future action.

3. Objectives

Our objectives are to optimise our infrastructure and service delivery to ensure these are managed as we work to:

- Promote North Ayrshire as a great place to live, work, visit and invest.

- Promote our key assets
- Minimise any negative impacts visitors have on communities and the environment
- Encourage sustainable visitor patterns by promoting our tourism assets and potential across all of North Ayrshire, including our inland localities – Garnock Valley and Kilwinning
- Communicate with our visitors while they are in North Ayrshire
- Encourage responsible behaviour
- Identify interventions for seasonal and temporary challenges
- Create outdoor opportunities
- Support eco-tourism and sustainable tourism
- Disperse visitors throughout the area
- Use events to show off our assets

4. Challenges of 2020/21 and Impacts of Covid-19

There has been an overall change in behaviour due to the pandemic. Outdoor activities and the space we have to offer have a renewed appeal to visitors and residents. Popular destinations have seen an increased demand for parking, motorhome accommodation, public conveniences, an increase in littering, waste and antisocial behaviour and queuing for ferries at peak times.

Visitors

Following release from lockdown periods, we saw a huge increase in the volume of visitors, as pent-up demand and the lack of international travel led to more day trips and more UK residents looking to holiday in Ayrshire, while there was a dramatic reduction in overseas visitors. In 2022, there is likely to be some continued lack of confidence around foreign travel so demand for daytrips and staycations will remain high and we expect return visits from visitors who have already discovered what North Ayrshire has to offer.

Communities/Residents

Geographic pandemic restrictions which forced residents to remain in their local authority areas led to many North Ayrshire residents discovering the assets on their own doorsteps and taking to our outdoor spaces, parks, beaches and attractions. This change in behaviour has continued in spite of restrictions easing, which is a positive outcome for wellbeing and mental health, though has also led to an increase in demand on our visitor infrastructure and services and, in some areas, has caused resentment towards visitors.

Businesses

Our businesses have had to cope with frequently changing restrictions, periods of closure or restricted opening, the challenges of social distancing reducing capacity, and staff shortages due to illness, isolating and many staff changing careers. Our island businesses have also struggled with the availability of staff accommodation.

This has made it very difficult to meet the demand posed by the high volumes of additional visitors at peak times and will continue into 2022.

North Ayrshire Council

The increase in use of our spaces by both residents and visitors in 2020 and 2021 put an additional burden on Council services, while social distancing also impacted how some services could be delivered. Services responded to unprecedented demand with additional infrastructure and flexibility of work patterns where possible, and learnings from that experience have informed this visitor management plan for 2022.

5. Actions taken in 2021

Throughout 2021, as a result of the challenges faced, we required new ways of working and service delivery. Some of the key actions undertaken throughout 2021 to respond to the increase in visitor numbers are set out below:

- Streetscene operatives working twilight shifts, additional staff, flexible shift patterns. Streetscene service operating for an extra 4 hours per day during peak times.
- Installation of 40 new larger capacity vermin-proof bins funded via Better Places (BP)
- Provision of 200 volunteer litter picking kits funded via BP
- Additional Caretakers and Seasonal rangers at Eglinton Park funded via BP
- New car park, barbecue points, signage, upgraded path network at Eglinton Park
- Review of North Ayrshire playparks and design of upgrade programme
- Review of street furniture and assets, benches, bins and picnic tables
- Participation in My Beach, Your Beach campaign – education and patrols
- Supported multi-agency Safer Shores campaign to tackle antisocial behaviour
- Stakeholder and public consultations on Largs ferry queuing and marshalling
- Social media campaigns promoting responsible access, Covid guidance for ferry travel, Keep North Ayrshire Tidy, Coastal Safety and #lovenorthayrshire
- New speed limits, parking restrictions and signage at key car parks in Largs and Dalry
- Identification of bus stop infrastructure improvements, implementation of phase one Route 11 bus priority system and investigation of the feasibility of bus lane extension at Pennyburn Roundabout
- Supported new motor home parking facility on Cumbræ
- Supported the extension of the Fisherman's Walk at Brodick
- Pan-Ayrshire 'Make it Yours' campaign delivered via VisitScotland
- Secured funding from the UK Government Community Renewal Fund for the Island Connectivity Study, assessing Electric Vehicle and e-bike infrastructure, low carbon hubs and a potential Mobility as a Service app and website, to support delivery of the Islands Infrastructure Fund and associated funding applications
- Development of the Ardrossan Low Carbon Hub funded by the ERDF Low Carbon Travel and Transport Challenge Fund

6. Priorities for 2022

It is important to recognise that priorities are not guided simply by the negative impacts of visitors, but set out how we optimise the visitor experience and wider economic benefit of tourism, recognising the benefit it can bring to businesses and communities, whilst balancing how to address some of the key challenges that have emerged since the pandemic.

Through research and stakeholder engagement amongst local councillors, businesses, trade organisations and Council officers, we identified some of the key issues and this has enabled identification of priorities for 2022.

- Creation of Visitor Management Plan to coordinate visitor management activities across the Council and communicate these
- Improve the visitor experience that North Ayrshire provides, whilst mitigating adverse impacts on communities through identified and coordinated strategic set of actions
- Prioritise actions in relation to:
 - Optimising the provision of litter management, particularly at destinations in North Ayrshire which experienced exceptionally high visitor numbers
 - Improving public toilet provision
 - Management of Ferry queues at Largs and the impact this has on the town centre
 - Upgrading end-of-life street furniture and play equipment
 - Communication with visitors while they are in North Ayrshire to promote responsible tourism
 - Promoting responsible access to Motorhome drivers and developing a proactive response to managing motorhomes
- Create a framework to build on this plan with longer-term ambitions
- Monitor progress of the Visitor Management Plan
- Set up system for feedback from visitors, industry and our communities

As outlined in Section 2, ongoing work to develop regional visitor economy strategic priorities, Ayrshire Growth Deal projects and other local policies and strategies should inform future visitor management plans and interventions beyond 2022. It is anticipated that the priority actions identified above relating to waste management, toilets, transport and other place infrastructure will inevitably require ongoing actions to continue to reflect the dynamic nature of a market that is changing, post pandemic. Indeed, some of the key areas of focus will require a more informed assessment of impact to determine the full range of interventions that could be delivered over time. The emergence of a regional strategy and a range of local priorities will shape how we approach these aspects in future, and how we can identify funding sources and partners to collaborate with to deliver our ambitions.

7. Proposed Actions for 2022

A detailed list of interventions to support management of the impact of an increased domestic tourism market over 2022 has been developed to ensure that our priorities and objectives for 2022 are achieved. The list of interventions developed includes revised operational priorities for services to reflect increased demand and provide additional resilience. Additionally, scoping of interventions that can be implemented in future years is included in the list of interventions, recognising that the collation of a comprehensive cross-service activity schedule is being established for the first time. While this is beneficial, it should be repeated on an annual basis and some of the scoping of future interventions will assist the Council in taking advantage of external funding and capability of partners to deliver services to improve the visitor experience, to leverage a greater impact in future years and develop a longer-term strategy.

While not all interventions have been able to be broken down to a quantum of spend, of the interventions planned, this delivers over £1.5m of action to visitor and place management actions in 2022 – not including development of capital projects under Ayrshire Growth Deal.

Actions	
Litter Management (Streetscene)	
Training and additional resources	
Streetscene Training Scheme	Training scheme to create three additional squads to undertake grounds maintenance work and provide additional operational flex during periods of high demand. Scottish Government Funding.
Operational Flexibility	
Twilight Shifts	Extend operating times to meet demand.
Operational Flex	Adjust operations as in 2021.
Infrastructure	
New Bins	Installation of 51 upgraded, vermin-proof bins.
Other Activities	
Volunteer Support	Provide equipment and support to community litter picking groups.
Adopt a Spot initiative	Support volunteers to commit to litter picking in their adopted spots, under the new Streetscene Volunteering Strategy.
Public Transport, Roads and Parking	
Ferries	Work with partners to confirm programme for Cumbrae ferry slip improvements, produce detailed design and tenders and implement improvements to Largs queuing and marshalling. Funding outcome anticipated March 2022 – note funder has supported previous phases. Ongoing collaboration with service provider.
Buses	Liaison and engagement with partners and identification of external funding to improve bus stop infrastructure, bus route extension and

	bus lane congestion measures. Funding outcome anticipated March 2022 – note funder has supported previous phases.
Largs Town Centre Ambassadors	Extended car park marshal role to more of a town centre ambassador - create 3 seasonal part time weekend posts partly funded by the car park and partly funded by sponsorship.
Improved Parking and Layby provision	Identifying priorities and implementation, including upgrade of car park at the Mountain Rescue Centre in Brodick; upgrade series of lay-bys at strategic locations on the Isle of Cumbrae, funded by Islands Infrastructure Fund.
Local Transport and Active Travel Strategy Review	Review strategy to identify opportunities for 2022-27.
Active Travel	Submit funding applications, secure funding and implement identified active travel and outdoor access improvements and projects across North Ayrshire.
Transport Implementation	Submit funding applications, secure funding and implement identified public transport and transport improvements and projects across North Ayrshire.
Islands Connectivity Development	Develop the UK Government Community Renewal Fund funded Islands Connectivity Project to identify priorities for electric vehicle and bike infrastructure, a low carbon hub and Mobility as a Service (MaaS) feasibility.
Islands Connectivity Implementation	Secure and align funding to implement the recommendations of the Islands Connectivity Project including: Cycling, Walking and Safer Routes, Islands Infrastructure Fund and Place Based Investment Programme allocations – quantum of funding to be confirmed.
Ayrshire Coastal Path development	Feasibility and design of improvements to the Largs Promenade and Coastal Path between Bowencraigs and Aubrey Park to support future applications for implementation. Work with Sustrans to implement further phases of the Fairlie Coastal Path.
Ardrossan Low Carbon Hub implementation / Ayrshire Coastal Path Development	Delivery of the Ardrossan Low Carbon Hub funded by the ERDF Low Carbon Travel and Transport Challenge Fund including: North Shore Coastal Path; Ardrossan Harbour active travel link; and electric vehicle and e-bike charging hubs at both locations.
Promoting Responsible Motorhome visitations	Promote material developed to guide motorhomes within North Ayrshire and encourage responsible access. Undertake analysis of where additional infrastructure should be provided to support and direct motorhomes to the most appropriate locations, in conjunction with analysing the capacity and locations where motorhome services are provided by our businesses. In tandem with this we will explore funding opportunities to support delivery of infrastructure.
Public Toilets	
Existing facilities	

Reinstatement	Reinstatement/replacement of the Melbourne Park public toilets in Saltcoats which were fire-damaged in late 2021.
Refurbishment	Refurbishment of the Promenade Toilets in Largs, financed by the Largs Car Park Fund.
Review of operational arrangements	Facilities Management are undertaking a review of cleansing programmes and facilities for retained public toilet facilities
Comfort Schemes	Engage with businesses to explore comfort scheme provision.
Playparks, and public areas	
Upgrade and renew playparks	
Playparks	Replacement and upgrade of playpark equipment across North Ayrshire. Procurement underway.
Renew benches and picnic tables and upgrade bins	
Benches	Installation of 115 benches.
Picnic tables	Installation of 41 picnic tables.
Bins	Installation of 51 upgraded, vermin-proof bins (ref above).
Additional visitor and cultural interventions	
Heritage Trails	Further develop and enhance Heritage Trails.
STEM Trail	Create new STEM trail for Eglinton Park and Cumbrae.
Eglinton Park	Enhanced walking routes with additional benches, BBQ disposal units and outdoor classroom, upgraded all-ability play area.
Interpretation	Interpretation panels at Ardrossan Castle and St Bride's Chapel, Lamlash.
Lighting and interpretation	Upgrading at Kilwinning Abbey Tower.
Marine Tourism	
Moorings, transit marinas and step-ashore facilities	
Moorings	New payment system being developed for North Ayrshire Council's 67 visitor moorings around Arran and Cumbrae.
Marinas	Programme of consultation and development work via AGD to add marina expansion at Ardrossan and step-ashore facilities at Arran, Cumbrae and Irvine.
Communication, Education and Engagement	
Communication, campaigns and enforcement activities	
Targeted Campaigns	Targeted info to visitors through print, PR and web using social media, Instagram campaigns (e.g. Keep North Ayrshire Tidy; @LoveNorth Ayrshire).
My Beach Your Beach	Participation in educational campaign.
Safer Shores	Participation in education and enforcement activities.
Multi-Agency co-operation	Multi-agency co-operation to gather intelligence on unofficial events (e.g. beach parties, car cruises), with interventions to mitigate effects from litter, noise and anti-social behaviour.
Ayrshire Smiles	Ongoing promotion of 'Ayrshire Smiles' customer-service training website in conjunction with South and East Ayrshire Councils.
Events and Festivals	
Events and Festivals, cultural activities	
Making Waves Festival	New family-friendly festival at Irvine's Beach Park and Harbourside in July 2022 promoting wellness and community.

Community Event Support	Provision of event equipment for community events to reduce costs and improve event sustainability.
Queen's Platinum Jubilee	Support a range of community-based commemorative / celebratory events and activities.
Scotland's Year of Stories 2022	Development and delivery of local programme of events and activities.
Events and Activities	Delivery of new events and activities at Harbour Arts Centre, North Ayrshire Heritage Centre, Museum of the Cumbraes, Irvine Townhouse.
Partner Engagement/Activities	
Marketing Campaigns	AADA, Visit Arran and Ayrshire Food and Drink marketing campaigns to promote the regional offer.
Regional Partnership	Implementation of new Regional Visitor Economy Strategy developed in conjunction with Ayrshire Visitor Economy Strategic Group, including regional priority projects currently being established to support visitor management.

NOTE: it is intended to develop an accompanying representation of this Plan showing the impact across our localities.

8. Visitor Management Plan Ambitions

This plan focuses on identifying early interventions and highlighting developments which are underway. Larger investments and longer-term projects require appropriate planning, consultation, review and implementation and by necessity must form part of a longer-term strategy.

This plan should be a working document, reviewed periodically. It is anticipated that the actions contained within this Plan will form the basis of a monitoring Plan throughout 2022, with services across North Ayrshire contributing to the ongoing monitoring of delivery.

As outlined within the 2022 Plan, there are a number of strategic themes that will require ongoing review and action and to be informed by infrastructure capacity assessment. In addition to the delivery of the actions in the Plan, throughout 2022, and in developing a Plan for 2023, the following priority areas will be reflected on – both in terms of identifying issues, potential action and resourcing implications: -

- Reflecting on strategic priorities identified through the Ayrshire Regional Economic Partnership
- Reflecting on local strategic priorities, including those informed by the Ayrshire Growth Deal and the Council's marine tourism programme
- Working with communities and businesses in considering public toilet provision to support visitors
- Implementation of identified solutions to support motorhomes.
- Reviewing arrangements for supporting stranded passengers on islands where ferry services are disrupted and continuing to work with partner organisations and communities to ensure our ferry services are resilient and supporting the needs of our communities
- Review information related to local beauty spots in terms, with a view to identifying immediate solutions and future action

- Proactively identify potential funding sources from external funders to support future activities.