



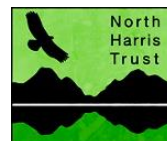
## VISITOR MANAGEMENT STRATEGY ISLE OF HARRIS

Prepared for  
North Harris Trust, West Harris Trust and  
Outer Hebrides Tourism

March 2021



Funded by NatureScot  
Better Places Green Recovery Fund



## CONTENT PAGE

	Page
INTRODUCTION	3
KEY SURVEY FINDINGS	5
KEY FINDINGS FROM CONSULTATION	7
KEY ISSUES	15
2020 ISSUES	17
KEY LEARNINGS FROM CASE STUDIES	18
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2021	20
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2022 AND BEYOND	27
OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS	28
CONCLUSION	33
<b>Appendix 1 – List of People Consulted – <i>separate document</i></b>	
<b>Appendix 2 – Online Survey Results – <i>separate document</i></b>	
<b>Appendix 3 - Destination Case Studies – <i>separate document</i></b>	
<b>Appendix 4 – Suggested Campaign Visuals – <i>separate document</i></b>	

The partners wish to thank NatureScot for funding the production of this Visitor Management Strategy through their Better Places Green Recovery Fund



## INTRODUCTION

The following quotation is an extract taken from the bid that the three partners behind this Visitor Management Strategy supplied to NatureScot as part of their original application for funding. This information from North Harris Trust, West Harris Trust and Outer Hebrides Tourism comprehensively outlines the project and the issues which have driven it.

*“The Isle of Harris, known for its rich traditions and stunning scenery, has seen a marked increase in the number of visitors in recent years. An ideal destination for visitors looking to get out and about in nature, Harris offers something for everyone, with rugged mountains and wildlife spotting opportunities to the north and unspoilt golden sands and turquoise waters to the west.*

*Data from Outer Hebrides Tourism suggests that the number of visitors to Lewis and Harris grew by 10% per annum between 2013 and 2017, with day visitors from the neighbouring Isle of Lewis accounting for the majority of this increase. Our own experience of tourism in West Harris has seen occupancy at our Seilebost electric hook-up site rise from 26% in 2015 to 91% in 2019.*

*North Harris Trust have 7 people counters at key visitor attractions throughout North Harris. These show an approximate 25% increase in visitor numbers over the past 5 years with significant pressure at certain sites, such as over 40,000 seasonal visitors to the Huisinis Gateway building, and up to 15,000 at sites such as the North Harris Eagle Observatory and Eilean Glas Lighthouse.*

*Increased visitor numbers has placed significant pressures on already limited infrastructure and services, with the Coronavirus pandemic highlighting pressure points. Public toilets for example are provided in most cases by community groups, relying on volunteers and often unable to react quickly to changing guidance or shoulder increased costs. The decision by some groups to not open public toilets following the relaxation of restrictions in mid-2020 led to reports of open defecation and inappropriate waste disposal by visitors.*

*Parking at “hot spots” such as Luskentyre Sands, Huisinis and Northton is inadequate, leading increasingly to more frequent instances to traffic management issues and inappropriate parking.*

*Going forward, we propose a collaborative approach to addressing visitor management, producing a Harris wide Visitor Management Strategy. We will appoint a consultant to first take forward research and consultation, identifying pressure points, inadequate infrastructure and service provision. The initial data collection, which will include input from visitors, communities, partner organisations and tourism attraction operators, will allow the creation of a Visitor Management Strategy, identifying visitor management impacts and opportunities, including making recommendations to address them, allowing the sustainable development of the tourism sector.*

*We believe that with appropriate visitor management, visitors can enjoy the unique experience which Harris has to offer, whilst being sensitive to the local environment.”*

**North Harris Trust, West Harris Trust and Outer Hebrides Tourism**

Bright Light Marketing was appointed by the three partners to carry out this Visitor Management Strategy in late February 2021, with a completion date of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. Bright Light Marketing are a Scottish based marketing agency with particular expertise in tourism. All three Directors previously worked for local and national tourism agencies. Since setting up the agency in 2007 we have carried out marketing projects and feasibility studies across Scotland.

Fiona Drane from Bright Light Marketing, who is the project leader on this work, has on a personal basis frequently visited Scottish Islands on holiday and has a good knowledge of both the issues for locals and communities but also the experience for visitors. In particular, Fiona is knowledgeable about Harris, having visited every year since 2012, with the exception of 2020. This gives her genuine knowledge of the island and a good understanding of the issues of visitor management.

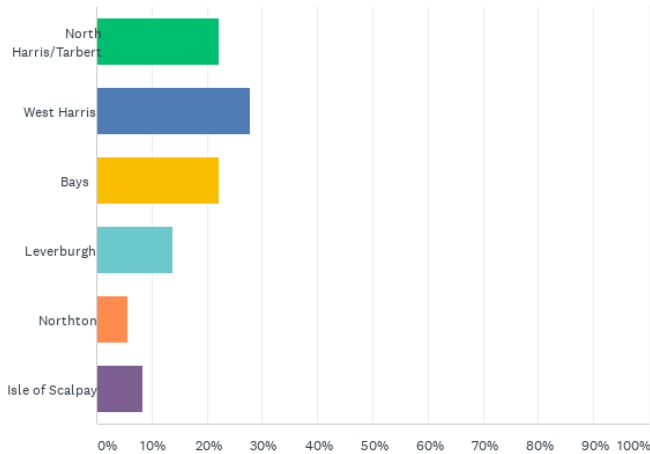
Bright Light Marketing met with the three partners via zoom upon appointment and liaised with them throughout the project too. It was agreed that the research part of the project would consist of:

1. **Online survey** – This was sent out to key community representatives, visitor attractions and tourism businesses and Harris residents and also to Members of Outer Hebrides Tourism. In total 131 people and businesses were sent a copy of the survey.
2. **Consultation** - This was conducted by Fiona Drane, with 95% taking place on zoom and 5% by telephone, with key people in the community, visitor attractions and tourism businesses and some local residents being consulted.
3. **Case Studies** – Bright Light Marketing carried out desk research looking at similar issues across the UK and solutions that had been implemented elsewhere. This was carried out both on the mainland and also by looking at other individual islands.
4. **Key Stakeholders** – Bright Light Marketing carried out zoom meetings with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Caledonian MacBrayne and VisitScotland.
5. **Other Islands** – Two zoom calls were carried out, one with VisitArran and the other with Skye Connect.

This extensive consultation and research form the basis of this report, outlining the results of the survey, the consultation work and the key learnings from the case studies. This then leads on to recommendations for 2021 which is likely to be similar to 2020, looking at what could be done via communications and any quick wins on infrastructure. The final part of the report then looks at 2022 and beyond and what could be put in place, the aim being to create an enjoyable visitor experience whilst at the same time sustaining the unique environment of Harris and reassuring the community that the island where they live and work has a sustainable future.

## KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

Q1 Where on Harris are you based?



The online survey was completed by 36 people

28% West Harris

22% North Harris/Tarbert

22% Bays

14% Leverburgh

8% Isle of Scalpay

6% Northton

81% this was the responders primary base

51% tourism main source of business/income/employment

37% substantial involvement in tourism

## The specific location(s) which people felt are particularly affected by increased visitor numbers





## KEY FINDINGS FROM CONSULTATION

Fiona Drane consulted with 25 people in the community individually, or in two cases as couples, mainly on Zoom but some via phone calls. All of these consultations were comprehensive, taking on average between 45 minutes and an hour per conversation.

In addition to this, Fiona Drane attended and presented to the Harris Forum and the Harris Economic Recovery Group. As part of the process, Fiona Drane met with Sarah MacLean of the Economic Planning Department of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. The Comhairle have set up a steering group made up of relevant departments and outside bodies such as the Police and the Outer Hebrides Tourism who are looking at key tourism issues for 2021 and beyond, and the findings of this report will feed into this. Also, two conversations with Caledonian MacBrayne were carried out, this resulted in confirmation that the operator are happy to assist with some of the communication outcomes that are included in the recommendations section of this report. Finally, Fiona Drane consulted with VisitScotland who are carrying out a Responsible Tourism communication campaign for 2021 due to community concerns across Scotland in 2020. Police Scotland and NatureScot are also involved in the important work of this group, which has been commissioned by the Scottish Government to look at visitor management issues.

There was unanimity in all of the conversations held with the local community and involved a cross section of the community. A key finding that came out was that the current infrastructure on Harris could not accommodate the number of visitors that were now coming to the island, even before 2020. In 2020 the volume of visitors and the closing of vital facilities such as toilets, simply exacerbated these issues. The general consensus was that the island needs to get the basics right. There were also concerns that 2021 would see a repeat of some of the issues that were prevalent in 2020.

In this part of the report, we firstly highlight the main areas that are considered to be tourist 'hot spots'. We outline the overall key issues and finish with some of the particular issues which were experienced in 2020. As previously stated, there was unanimous agreement on identification of the key 'hot spots' and the key issues, both in the main and also post Covid.

Key visitor 'hot spots' on Harris as outlined by the research:

- Huisinis
- Luskentyre
- Northton
- Rodel
- Tarbert
- Lay-by at Seilebost and Niseabost



### Overview of each Hot Spot

<b>Huisinis</b>	
Access	Huisinis lies at the end of the B887, 12.6 miles from the main spinal route (B859) linking Harris to Stornoway at Ardhasaig. The road is single track.
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Car parking</li> <li>• 5 electric hook-ups (operated as first come, first served)</li> <li>• 24hr accessible toilet</li> <li>• Shower</li> <li>• Interpretation of local landscape and history</li> <li>• Refuse disposal – general waste and recycling of glass, cans and plastic</li> <li>• Chemical waste disposal</li> </ul>
<b>Luskentyre</b>	
Access	Luskentyre beach and cemetery is 2.8 miles from the main A859 spinal route and is a single track road. Private, business and croft access is taken along the length of the road.
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Car parking</li> <li>• Toilet (run by grazing committee)</li> <li>• Refuse disposal</li> <li>• Camping Spots – 3 run by the West Harris Trust</li> </ul>
<b>Northton</b>	
Access	The first beach at Northton can be found 0.9 miles from the main A859 spinal route. The road is single track with private residence and croft access along its length. There are also several businesses within the village, each with their own dedicated customer parking.
Facilities	A couple of car parking spaces at the beach Refuse disposal – 1 small bin
<b>Rodel</b>	
Access	St Clements Church in Rodel is 2.7 miles from Leverburgh, following the A859, following a mainly single track road.
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Car parking at church</li> <li>• Toilet</li> <li>• Refuse disposal at Church</li> </ul>
<b>Tarbert</b>	
Access	35.7 miles from Stornoway to the North, and 20.3 miles from Leverburgh to the South. Port for Uig (Skye) ferry.
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Car parking</li> <li>• Toilet at bus station.</li> <li>• Bus station with services to other areas of the island.</li> <li>• Refuse disposal.</li> </ul>
<b>Lay-bys at Seilebost and Niseabost</b>	
Access	Located along the A859
Facilities	Vehicle parking Refuse disposal

The following pages takes each of these locations one by one and outlining the main issues.



## HUISINIS

Huisinis Gateway was built in 2017 to address some of the issues created by the huge number of visitors to this beach hotspot.



These facilities have been very warmly received by both locals and visitors alike, however, there are still issues as Huisinis is a very popular beach and one which is often used in photography to promote Harris. Although the new facilities have helped, there are still parking issues at peak times and instances of people still parking on the machair or causing issues by parking in inappropriate places.

There are also issues when motorhomes arrive and despite the hook up points being all taken, they decide to stay anyway and stay overnight.

This is exacerbated by the fact that the road to Huisinis is not for the faint hearted, taking 40 minutes plus to reach the beach. Anyone driving this route needs to be competent at driving on single track roads and have the ability to reverse their vehicle to give way to others. As well as allowing faster drivers to pass safely.

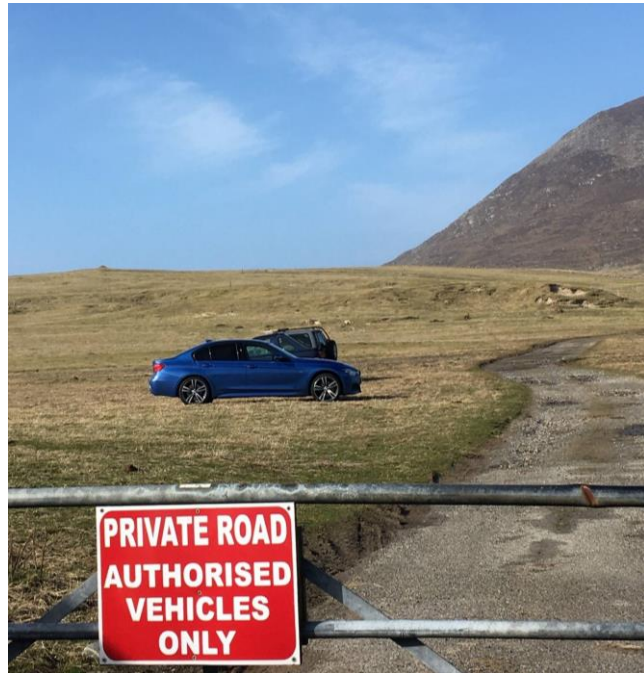
In some ways it is not surprising that when people do get to their end destination and find that it is busy, that they decide to stay anyway after what can be a fairly challenging journey.





## NORTHTON

Northton is primarily a crofting village, with areas of the machair designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). At the end of the village there are several beaches and access via the gate in the photo on the right to a walk over the machair to Teampall, a ruined chapel that sits on a headland beside the remains of an older dun. It is a popular walk that is easily accessible and suitable for most abilities.



However, there is limited parking at the end of Northton, with residential parking on the road all the way along. The bus turning point is at the end of the road and although it is usually kept clear, in the visitor season there are cars parked all along and beside the turning point, meaning that the local service bus and school bus often struggle to get down and have, on occasion, had to leave their passengers at the start of the village. People also park on the machair as seen in this photo. This is harmful to the machair and also to the birds and wildlife that live there. In addition, the road to the small beach at Northton can be blocked with cars parking where they can. This means that it has been, and would be, impossible for emergency services vehicles to get down should either residents or visitors at that end of Northton need emergency assistance.

There have been proposals for a designated carpark at the beach end of Northton, but agreement would first require to be sought from the crofters.



## RODEL

St Clements Church at Rodel has the highest number of visitors of any attraction in the Outer Hebrides. It is one of the favourite places to visit for cruise ships coming into Stornoway. However, there is limited parking by the church for cars and one coach would fill it.

It is also yet again located in a beautiful setting so very popular with motorhomes and campervans but there are limited places to park and no designated area for overnight parking, sometimes resulting in overnight stays in unauthorised places.



public services  
**parking**  
congestion food provisions  
**toilet facilities**  
machair photo



## TARBERT

As the main village in Harris and where the ferry sails to and from Uig, Tarbert in the main season can be very busy, particularly when the ferry is due but also throughout the day.

There is limited parking in the main carpark, which is also the bus station. It is also difficult to park outside the main street shops especially when a visitor vehicle for example parks on the main street for the day restricting access to the shops for locals.

Both the Comhairle and the local community in Tarbert are looking at the issue of parking and a long-term solution particularly with the new ferry having greater capacity.



## LAY-BYS AT SEILEBOST AND NISEABOST

There are areas to stop and take in the view, with both lay-bys offering stunning views and are popular for photo opportunities. They are also becoming popular places for campervans, motorhomes and tents for overnight parking.



## KEY ISSUES

**After highlighting the visitor hotspots, consultees described in great detail the key issues that increased visitor numbers bring. Listed below as the common themes applicable to all the hotspots:**

### **LACK OF DRIVING ABILITY ON SINGLE TRACK ROADS**

This is an issue that causes concern across all visitor groups. Arriving from Ullapool or indeed Uig, the first time that many visitors encounter single track roads is on their arrival on Harris. Many new visitors have either never driven on them or have had limited experience. So, they do not know to draw in at a passing place on their side of the road, or to draw in if there is a line of traffic behind them. Or, this could even be just one vehicle which could be a local trying to get to work, catch the ferry or worst-case scenario, trying to get to an emergency such as the lifeboat. There is also an issue that vehicles, and this tends to be motorhomes, are not prepared to reverse back when the nearest lay-by is on their side of the road, or even worse, are new to the vehicle and do not know how to reverse the motorhome. There is also an issue on occasion with cyclists who again don't draw in and let faster vehicles overtake. It can also be a safety issue for cyclists and vehicles when trying to overtake.

Many of those consulted said that in summertime they have to factor in significant additional time to their journey to accommodate this issue.

### **INCONSIDERATE PARKING**

This is an issue in not just the hot spot areas but also across the island. Over parking in hot spot areas without consideration for safety and the ability for others to be able to arrive or exit. In extreme cases parking over people's driveways and causing access issues or parking on the machair. Visitors often do not consider how they would feel if lots of vehicles caused congestion in their village and parked across access roads or residents homes or businesses. Or cannot use passing places as vehicles are parked in them.

### **LITTERING**

Littering was seen as an ongoing issue with some visitors, on finding bins full, just leaving their litter behind. But it was a particular issue in 2020. In general, though in any year there was a general consensus that there were not enough litter bins for the number of visitors and that due to reduced budgets the Council was unable to empty them as frequently as required. This has led to visitors using business bins, resident bins and leaving litter outside. Leaving a unique environment with litter and bins overflowing, is not a great experience for locals or visitors.

### **MOTORHOMES**

There is agreement that owners of motorhomes/campervans usually know how to drive the vehicle, safely disposing of their waste and where to stay overnight. However, in some cases there are those who hire motorhomes/campervans and have never driven one before, let alone driven on single track roads. This sector also might not be aware of the appropriate places to stay or indeed where and how to dispose of their waste. There is also, in very limited cases, an issue with groups of motorhomes driving together in convoy making it impossible to pass.



### **MISUNDERSTANDING OF WILD CAMPING**

Wild camping should mean you are out of sight of a road, your vehicle and any homes, but for some it means camping beside a verge and near their car, or on occasion on crofters land without permission, or indeed sleeping in their vehicle overnight or on some of the beaches erecting tents side by side with other campers.

Anyone in Scotland has the right to wild camp but should always be following the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. [www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/practical-guide-all/camping](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/practical-guide-all/camping)

### **UNREASONABLE BEHAVIOUR**

This could be anything from blocking a resident's driveway or gate to parking or camping on their land, leaving a trace, not leaving when asked, or in very extreme cases, using benches to start fires on beaches and setting them alight in inappropriate places or not taking their litter away with them. Basically, things that if it happened to them at home, they would protest but don't think of the impact it has on the local community here.

### **LACK OF SIGNAGE**

Although there are signs throughout the islands, for example to advise road users to give way on single track roads, there are very few signs to advise that a road might be challenging to drive, that it is a crofting area, an area of environmental importance or in the case of Luskentyre, there may be a funeral taking place.

So, without good signage people sometimes drive and find themselves unable to turn back or reverse, or park where they should not.

### **WASTE ISSUES - SCOTTISH WATER**

In the main, all of the public sector bodies and local community groups work well together and are working to the same goal. One area that did cause concern was chemical waste disposal and Scottish Water. The Scottish Government in recent years gave funding for new waste disposal points across Harris so that waste from motorhomes could be put in them. Yet Scottish Water is currently refusing to empty these tanks. As there is no contractor on the Outer Hebrides able to empty them, a company from the mainland is required to visit at considerable cost. This has resulted in huge frustration for businesses.

It was agreed at the presentation of the initial findings to the partners that the partners would take this up with the appropriate body at Scottish Water and with the Scottish Government.

## **2020 ISSUES**

All of the issues above existed in 2020 but they were exacerbated by the COVID19 situation. The main campsite at Horgabost was shut. Many of the public toilets were closed or best-case scenario limited access due to Covid restrictions. Tourism opened up quite quickly in July after months of lockdown and after people who had been cooped up in their homes for months with no outside space wanted to get to a rural area or an island. People were still scared and being in a motorhome gave security. As did the thought of buying a tent and just escaping, even though they may have had limited camping ability or indeed the knowledge that the weather in the Outer Hebrides is changeable and there are still summer storms. As a result, these visitors came poorly equipped in terms of clothing and equipment and the knowledge that wild camping should be out of sight. Bins were not emptied as frequently as required, and many accommodation providers and cafés stayed shut.

## **2020 CLOSURE OF MOST PUBLIC TOILET FACILITIES**

With a few exceptions such as the Council run toilets in the bus station, the public toilets in Harris are run by the local communities. They are responsible for maintenance and for cleaning. The majority raise money to pay for a cleaner and maintenance by having an honesty box and asking for contributions from visitors. In 2020 with covid safety measures in place, increasing cleaning costs and other related issues meant that many toilets were closed. This resulted in lots of issues including human waste which caused disgust but also concern about the impact on the environment.

The local communities do a sterling job, however there is a general consensus that more toilets are required. Areas mentioned include Leverburgh, Tarbert and Northton.

## KEY LEARNINGS FROM CASE STUDIES

Bright Light Marketing, as part of this project analysed visitor management issues across the UK and just as importantly, looked at some of the solutions. Listed below are the key learnings we suggest that could be potential solutions on Harris. The full analysis of these case studies is contained in the appendix section of this report.

### 1. Communication is key

If you do not tell people about particular issues and the potential impact that their behaviours may have, then there is a good chance that they simply won't know about them or understand why they should behave in a certain way. So, it is important to have appropriate communications in place, both before they arrive but also when they arrive and that appropriate signage is in place.

### 2. Wardens and Rangers

Across the UK this is seen as one of the best solutions. Firstly, wardens or rangers give a human face to the communication. They can inform visitors about the best place to camp, what wild camping is and what it is not, the best beach for a fire and how to safely put the fire out. Where to put litter. They can give lots of advice and be there to be the welcoming face.

But they can also be the enforcer when visitors are using an inappropriate place or behaving irresponsibly and if the visitor does not listen to them, they can inform the police.

### 3. Voluntary Tourism Giving

There are other initiatives similar to this but the one that may work best in Harris is the Arran Trust. The Arran Trust was set up both to add value to Arran as a sustainable island for the future, but also to give back to the community and improve the product for the community and the visitor. So, for example upgrading and improving walks that had suffered erosion or setting up a mountain bike club for high school children.

Participating businesses ask overnight visitors to make a voluntary contribution a minimum of £1 per night when they pay their bill at the accommodation. They also have donation cans throughout the island, and you can be a friend of Arran Trust for an annual fee of £12.

### 4. Enforcement

Island examples of this are Tiree where you need a designated place to stay and the Isle of Man where you cannot bring a towing caravan over unless you have a permit which shows where you are staying on the island in a suitable designated area.

Put simply, if people know there will be enforcement and that it will hit their pocket they are less likely to do it than if they think they can get away with it as there is no enforcement.

### 5. Educate

Alongside enforcement is an explanation about why it is necessary, especially if that explains the impact it has on the community and on the environment.

The New Forest National Park will use its planning powers, deploy rangers and other staff to patrol the Forest, use its significant social media reach to promote the New Forest Code, extend

the New Forest Tour season to reduce traffic and will promote the use of rights of way in the perimeter of the National Park as an alternative to visiting the open Forest.

In addition to onsite signage within Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park, a digital communications campaign will be targeted to reach people before they even arrive, so they clearly understand the responsible behaviour that is expected of them. 'Love It Like A Local' is just one element of the National Park Authority's litter prevention activities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2021

The following issues highlighted in the consultation will be addressed by better COMMUNICATION:

- LACK OF DRIVING ABILITY ON SINGLE TRACK ROADS
- INCONSIDERATE PARKING
- LITTERING
- MOTORHOMES
- MISUNDERSTANDING OF WILD CAMPING
- UNREASONABLE BEHAVIOUR

Part of the communication strategy will include:

- SIGNAGE

The specific issue of:

- WASTE ISSUES - SCOTTISH WATER

Will require lobbying and direct communication between the partners and Scottish Water to resolve this crucial matter.

### 2021 Summary Table Actions

Communications	Action	Responsibility
Open/Closed List	Prepare a list of who is and who isn't open on Harris in 2021.	
	Discuss implications if any businesses do not open on the island particularly campsites and decide management of this and communication, both to the community and visitors.	
Campaign Theme	Agree a campaign such as suggested <i>Harris is a Special Place</i> and the key promotional pieces for 2021.	
Communications with Community	Firstly, communicate with the Harris Forum and then with the wider community about the study. Outer Hebrides Tourism could also send a message to their Harris members.	
Communications with Stakeholders	In the first instance with the Comhairle feeding into their steering group on this topic, then speaking to CalMac and VisitScotland.	
Communication with Visitors	Information included in Outer Hebrides e-newsletter and on their website. CalMac and VisitScotland also to include in their communications and encourage tourism businesses to do the same.	
	Extend the Season - look at the potential for this for 2021	
Infrastructure	Action	
Camping	Signage in unsuitable areas to say no camping overnight or add boulders by the side of the road to prevent it, plus, upfront in communications. Wardens, if appointed, could enforce this.	
Public Toilets	Liaise with communities re opening of these facilities and in case of closure of any for the season agree a plan of action. Such as signs against the disposal of human waste and the provision of plastic trowels with information how to get rid of	

	waste.	
Signage	Signs at Luskentyre and Huisinis which outline the single-track road and driving, plus the cemetery for Luskentyre.	
Web Cams	Webcams at parking such as Luskentyre and Huisinis.	
Wardens	Appointment of two seasonal Wardens.	
Waste Scottish Water	Take the issue of not taking away waste to the Scottish Government and high up in Scottish Water.	

There is a limited time to prepare for the return of visitors. This time will be crucial in getting messages out to the community about your plans for the season ahead and to give reassurance that it won't be a repeat of 2020, as well as getting messages out to visitors that they are welcome, what will be open, the safety measures in place and what is expected of them when they visit.

As one islander who was consulted said: *"We need to make sure that the basics are in place."*

Vital things to do are:

### 1. **What is open and what is not**

Find out who is and who is not open and work out where the gaps are going to be. From accommodation to cafes and restaurants.

Bright Light Marketing spoke to the Horgabost Campsite, which is the main site on the island usually for tents as well as motorhomes and caravans. The Horgabost Campsite is planning to open up for motorhomes using the same booking system as in September 2020, but are undecided if they will open for tents and will make that decision around the end of April once it is clearer what is required with regard to opening the shower and toilet block with more frequent cleaning. If they are to open for tents it would not be till late June, though this would fit in with the main family holiday season. It is a commercial decision if Horgabost Campsite opens this year, but they are very aware of the impact closing may have across the rest of Harris.

### 2. **Public Toilet facilities and Infrastructure**

Liaise with the Comhairle and local communities regarding public toilets, with hopefully all of them being open this year. Also, you need to find out about waste collection and be aware of proposed bin collection times. It is also of urgency that an agreement is reached with Scottish Water that is applicable across Harris and cannot be reneged on once the season starts.

### 3. **Wardens**

Wardens are used across the UK and indeed have been invested in by Highland Council. We think that recruiting two Wardens on a seasonal basis for the 2021 season would give reassurance to the community, whilst also being useful for visitors. You will always get people that won't follow rules, but they tend to be the minority and at least if the Wardens are aware of this then they can report them to the Police. The vast majority of visitors take heed of good advice, for example that they are not wild camping in plain sight of the road or that getting to Huisinis might not be easy in their large motorhome. As importantly, they can inform visitors

about basic matters such as public toilets and how to dispose of human waste if you are wild camping but also offer guidance on the best places to go.

#### 4. Key Stakeholders

Speak to the main public bodies. Firstly, the **Comhairle** and share your plans with them as they have a steering group and are also working on a plan and this report is going to be read by them and used as part of their overall strategy, so liaison is key for shared support and resources.

We would also recommend that you speak to **VisitScotland** and if Horgabost Campsite is not opening, discuss with them how they can also communicate out this message and in general what key messages you would like them to promote this year and share with them your visitor campaign. They were keen to help as much as possible and this included adding content and material to their website. VisitScotland are targeting young people via influencers on platforms like TikTok and again are happy to get messages out with regards to Harris and also potentially have an influencer write about Harris. The message here is that they are very welcome but come prepared as the weather is changeable, and you need proper equipment both in terms of camping but also clothing. We would also recommend ongoing liaison with VisitScotland throughout the season. VisitScotland is also going to communicate with Campervan and Motorhome rental companies and as part of that could share your visitor communications. Perhaps if the companies are aware that visitors are planning a trip to the Outer Hebrides, that they consider hiring a smaller vehicle as they are likely to enjoy the experience more rather than the stress of driving a large vehicle on single track roads and trying to park it.

Thirdly, we recommend that you share information about what is and what is not open with **Caledonian MacBrayne**, they have also said they would consider adding a single-track roads information video to all e-bookings so that visitors can click through and watch it. They do currently have a video on their website for all the destinations [www.calmac.co.uk/destinations/harris](http://www.calmac.co.uk/destinations/harris), but by adding it to their bookings would get the message out to a much wider visitor group. They have also said they would give poster space and also leaflet space on board the ferries and this is a valuable opportunity which should be taken up. As well as promoting messages on their social media platforms. Visitors travelling over the Minch do have time to look at posters and also to pick up information. Caledonian MacBrayne were less sure if they could show a video on their TV's but this is something that should be discussed further with them. That would cover the Uig to Tarbert route and the Ullapool to Stornoway route. It would also be good to speak re the Berneray to Leverburgh route as many visitors, especially those in motorhomes, will start in Barra and travel down all the islands in the Outer Hebrides. Suggesting the leaflet is handed out with the tickets at check in for this ferry. But if not possible, leaflets and posters should also be available aboard this ferry too.

Finally, we recommend that all content and messages is shared by **Outer Hebrides Tourism** in their communications. The visitor survey showed that this website is used by the vast majority of visitors to plan their trip and while they are on Harris. North and West Harris Trusts should also add information to their own websites as well as asking the operators of other relevant websites which are used by visitors, if they might be willing to also share these communications, including accommodation and other tourism providers. The more that visitors see the messages, the more they will understand and hopefully it will be a better visitor experience for



them too as they will come better prepared and have a greater understanding during their visit of the unique location that they are in.

## 5. **Communication with the Community**

There is real concern that 2021 will be a repeat of 2020. This is natural and again having not had any visitors this year, many rural communities have concerns about this, especially in the light of what happened in 2020 which is why the Scottish Government commissioned the Responsible Scotland campaign. Through the Harris Forum the plans for the forthcoming year should be shared with the community. Explain that it might not all be in place for the 26<sup>th</sup> April but that you have started the process.

Once you have the support of the Harris Forum, we would recommend that you send out a press release explaining the study to the local press and share the release to all community groups as well as on Facebook groups.

It is important to get this message out as soon as possible. You may have to do it twice. The first time in early April with the overall theme and content of the campaign and secondly if you succeed in getting grant funding for the wardens, as this process may take longer. Also, if you are unable to achieve this funding and do this for 2021, but have already promised this, it may cause disappointment and also reservations for the year ahead. So, it would be best to communicate this once funding has been approved.

## 6. **Plans for 'Hot Spots'**

The Comhairle did mention that they were looking at **signage** for Luskentyre and Huisinis at the road ends, firstly to show that it was single track and that in the case of the latter, it takes 40 minutes to get to the beach. But also, for Luskentyre that there may be a funeral. It would be good if these signs were in place for this coming season. Even if the signage was temporary for one season and more permanent solutions were put in place for the future. One of the other suggestions during consultation was that **cameras** could be installed at the key hot spots and that these webcams could be promoted to visitors so they could see when the carpark at both places were full. This could be available on the Outer Hebrides Tourism website and was also something that VisitScotland said they would consider for their website. It is also something that if accommodation providers and the wider community knew was there, they could get that message out to visitors, it is also a message that the wardens could give out and indeed the local community too. We would also suggest that signage is also considered for Northton.

Another idea that could be considered for 2021 and certainly beyond that, is the use of a **shuttle bus** which would take people from each road ends down to each location. The difficulty here for 2021 is, where would visitors then park? As parking would need to be created at the road ends. But it is something that Skye is doing by using the unused school buses to take people to hot spots such as the Fairy Pools. It might not be feasible for 2021 for Luskentyre or Huisinis. But it could be a solution for Northton in 2021. Again, signage should be considered at the road end as well as perhaps enforcement signage at the end. An **interpretation** board as you are going on to the Machair should be considered outlining the importance of the environment.

At Rodel, there are plans for additional parking, motorhome facilities, shower and toilet facilities. It is very unlikely that cruise ships will return in 2021, so there should not be the issue of coaches taking up the parking spaces this year. But there may be issues with large vehicles in

the small parking space, wild camping and motorhomes. Again, there could be temporary signage in the parking spot beside St Clements Church but that would need consent by the local community. Rodel should be included in the leaflet and finally if you were able to fund wardens, this would be a place that they should monitor on a daily basis.

With regards to Tarbert, we are aware that the Comhairle is looking at the issues and that there are ongoing discussions by local businesses as part of what is being called the **Tarbert Masterplan**. There again like Rodel, a more permanent parking solution is not going to happen in 2021. So, this also needs to be communicated to visitors. We are aware that visitors prefer to park and to have limited distances to walk, but could parking be considered at the school during the holidays? With an honesty box where donations would go back to the school? And clear communications that this is the best place to park in Tarbert if you are coming for the day to prevent congestion in the village. This approach does work in other areas with carparks in the centre being paid for and either free parking further away or reduced payment.

The lay-bys at Seilebost and Nisaebost are not mentioned here as that would be an infrastructure project, but again if you are able to fund wardens, this could be an area that they monitor, particularly for overnight parking and the actual number of vehicles trying to do this.

All of the above points would of course need discussion with the local communities.

## 7. **Communication with Visitors**

The research from Outer Hebrides Tourism clearly shows that visitors really value the local welcome. It is mentioned as the sixth top reason for visiting, 40% said they got their information while staying here from locals and one in ten say that islanders and accommodation providers made their trip more special. Although there were issues in 2020, there was no evidence found that this had had a negative impact on the impression from visitors that Harris is a welcoming island.

Communication for the forthcoming 2021 season should be done as early as you can. We realise it will take time to agree and create a campaign, but we would recommend that Outer Hebrides Tourism send out a welcome back e-newsletter to their database in early April. This could mainly feature the Responsible Scotland campaign by VisitScotland with a link to that video and campaign [www.visitscotland.com/about/responsible-tourism/](http://www.visitscotland.com/about/responsible-tourism/). Let visitors know to book ferries early and if there are any restrictions, advise early booking to avoid disappointment and let visitors know what will and will not be open. Also send the video currently used by Caledonian MacBrayne on their website. Plus of course, a welcome back message.

This could then be followed with the campaign material. Bright Light Marketing were asked as part of this project to devise a memorable acronym for visitors which gets the messages across clearly and which could form the basis of a campaign, not just for 2021 but beyond. We have come up with an acronym using the word PLACE alongside **Harris is a Special PLACE** (Parking, Litter, Animals, Camping and Engage) Please help us to keep it that way. Using the hashtag #HarrisSpecialPlace. There is a full set of visuals and applications within the Appendix Section of this report but we have included part of the visuals here.

# HARRIS *is a* SPECIAL

**P**  
**PARKING**  
Always use designated parking areas. Don't park in passing places, on verges, on the Machair or in front of gates.

**L**  
**LITTER**  
Bin your litter or take it home with you. Leave no trace.

**A**  
**ANIMALS**  
Keep dogs on leads near livestock and let the wildlife be wild.

**C**  
**CAMPING**  
Wild camping should be out of view of local houses, roads and your car. Motorhomes should only park in designated areas.

**E**  
**ENGAGE**  
Know the Scottish Outdoor Access Code before you travel. Engage with locals and support local business.

*Please help us to  
keep it that way*



Bright Light Marketing would recommend that the campaign should be online on partner websites on Harris. With accommodation and tourism providers also using it as well as other relevant local bodies. So that visitors see it before their arrival but also that the messaging is reinforced upon arrival. This should be used in social media across as many accounts as possible locally to get the message out.

It should also be shared with VisitScotland who have said that they would share content on their website and in their social media as well as taking up the offer from Caledonian MacBrayne to add it to their website and also share the content on their social media channels. It is unlikely that a new video could be done for this season, so we suggest that Caledonian MacBrayne are asked to send out the existing video with their e-bookings. We would also recommend that you take up their offer of posters on the ferries.

Other supporting material should be a leaflet which fully outlines the campaign and that for 2021, it is orientated towards what is open and what is closed. Also, the safety measures which are in place and, if confirmed, use it to introduce the wardens and of course to provide a warm welcome. As well as printed material, this should also be commonly available to download as a PDF on the websites mentioned above.

This leaflet, as well as being available on board the ferries, should also be distributed across Harris to accommodation providers and tourism providers and available at key locations. Posters could also be at key locations too. QR codes could be used that would take visitors through to the information on the Outer Hebrides website. This campaign is also press worthy and could be sent out not just locally but also nationally. And VisitScotland should be encouraged to work their media channels too. As the vast majority of the day visitors are from Lewis, the leaflets and the promotion should also be available and promoted there too. The Distillery also said they would consider having the leaflet available on site, this being one of the key reasons for a day trip.



The main communication body for the campaign would be Outer Hebrides Tourism and it would be good if this could be the official launch platform and medium. Once again an e-newsletter sent out to the database and with updated messages throughout the season and on their social media channels would be a core part of this.

Unfortunately, in the current climate you still should consider the scenario again of another lockdown. The only certainty for 2021 is that it will be uncertain. What you can do though is have plans in place and ensure clear communication to the local community, work with stakeholders and clearly and consistently communicate with visitors using a campaign like **Harris is a Special Place**.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2022 AND BEYOND

### 2022 Summary Table Actions

<b>Communications</b>	<b>Action</b>
Campaign Theme	Continue with 2021 Campaign and Update material
Communications with Community	Carry out feedback from the community at the end of the 2021 season and get feedback on what worked and what didn't. Then communicate actions and priorities for 2022.
Communications with Stakeholders	Like the community as above liaise with key stakeholders on what worked and what didn't in 2021 and ideas for moving forward and keep communications on going. Also discuss using varied photos of Harris not just the hot spots.
Communication with Visitors	Ongoing communications but look at developing over all messages to include communications that visitors might not know.
	Extension of the season , look at developing for 2022.
Development of Voluntary Tourism Giving scheme	Look at a feasibility study as to how this could or could not work for Harris. This would be best done in 2021 with potential implementation in 2022 or 2023.
<b>Infrastructure</b>	<b>Action</b>
Camping	Assessment of 2021 but should consider this in 2021 for any changes for 2022 and beyond that would make people think twice about camping in verges looking at some of the models mentioned in the case studies.
Public Toilets	Ongoing liaison with communities.
Signage	Consider developing electronic signage that could be updated to say when full or a funeral for example.
Webcams	If webcams are installed in 2021 ongoing use if not consider installing. Consider extending this.
Wardens	Continued appointment of two seasonal wardens and agreeing long term how this could be funded and managed. Again, this should be done in 2021.
Enforcement	Look at ideas for enforcement including parking charges like other places or charging at peak times like Skye. Keep abreast of the outcome of the RET study currently being carried out by CalMac.
Develop and improve facilities for new markets	Look at how best to serve markets such as the developing cruise market.
Look at how Crofts could benefit from tourism	Look at if it's feasible for Crofts to look at having two to three tents or campervans on their land and charging.
Infrastructure projects	Both those already being looked at such at Rodel but also those which could be developed. Looking at current ideas locally but also what is being done nationally that may work in Harris.

## OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Upfront Communication

Overall, as mentioned previously, we feel that you need to be much more upfront in your communications. We feel that a campaign like ***Harris is a Special Place*** with the acronym PLACE gets this messaging across in a clear and memorable way. Other island communities such as Arran and the Isle of Man are very upfront about the importance of their environment and why it should be preserved as it is unique. We recommend that you adopt the same approach.

The vast majority of visitors to Harris are coming for that very reason and will value the communication and also spread the word and then it becomes an education for those who may not understand but want to visit.

For this reason, a campaign like ***Harris is a Special Place*** should not just be for 2021 but for future years too. Equally you should continue to work with stakeholders like Caledonian MacBrayne and VisitScotland and work together to ensure consistency of message. As well of course with Outer Hebrides Tourism, the Trusts and the local community as well as with accommodation and tourism providers.

We spoke to VisitScotland regarding the use of different photography for Harris, realising that Luskentyre is iconic and Huisinis looks stunning too but that other beaches are equally as stunning, less crowded and easier to access, so photos of them should also be included. They agreed to look at this. Equally they agreed that if there are key messages to get out, such as that both beaches get busy and to look at the live webcam, they would look at having this information on their website.

Communications that should be considered for visitors include: (not extensive and we are sure there are more)

- Single track roads and driving
- More challenging roads like Huisinis and alternative suggestions for beaches
- Issues in other area such as Northton and Rodel
- Crofting and its importance
- Respect for the machair
- Luskentyre has two cemeteries and may be closed for funerals.
- It is a local community who live and work here and please respect that.
- Equally respect the local environment which is unique and precious.
- What wild camping is and what it is not.
- Etiquette for campervans and motorhomes
- Parking etiquette
- Importance of shopping locally
- The importance of the Sabbath and what is and is not open.
- Be prepared for the changeable weather.

The campaign for 2021 with its key messages extended for the longer term, more upfront communication and work closely with the community and stakeholders to get this message across. We recommend that you use the campaign longer term and that at the end of each season you meet and discuss what has and what has not gone well that year and agree a

communication plan of action for the year ahead as well as looking at any infrastructure issues for that season.

We also recommend that you update the single-track video for 2022 and use actual drone footage of some of the single-track roads to get the message across clearly and visually. If people literally got a birds eye view, then they are more likely to understand and appreciate the point.

## **2. Voluntary Tourism Giving**

We do think that you should seriously consider adopting the same idea as the Arran Trust and ask for a voluntary contribution from visitors. It should be communicated to visitors that the money goes back into the community and the environment and linking it back to the ***Harris is a Special Place*** campaign - *Please help us to keep it that way.*

Careful consideration would have to be given to how you collect this. You either totally adopt the idea from Arran Trust where participating tourism businesses collect it as well as via charity cans and events. Or you speak to Caledonian MacBrayne and see if it can be added to the booking fee. As suggested in the summary document we recommend that you look at commissioning a Feasibility Study in 2021 looking at how this could or could not be implemented.

We do realise that some people will not want to be seen to tax visitors and we know there is a divide across Scotland with regards to the so-called tourism tax. However, given Covid it is highly unlikely that Scotland will now look at a tourist tax in the short term as previous hot spots like Edinburgh have been decimated and they will want to build the business back up. Secondly, this is not a tax, it is voluntary and has worked very successfully in Arran since 2010, greatly contributing both to the local community but also to the visitor experience, with money put back into walks and cycling routes for example.

It also goes back to the point that most visitors to the Scottish islands are doing so because they want to experience the unique landscape and experience that it offers and are quite happy to give something back. This is also shown by the Hebrides Tourism survey which showed that the majority of visitors shared a perception that the Outer Hebrides is an environmentally responsible destination. Overall, 86% of visitors agreed that Outer Hebrides takes care of its natural environment, with 48% agreeing strongly. 62% of visitors agreed that they themselves were encouraged to behave in an environmentally responsible way. This gives a strong indication that visitors in the main would be happy to contribute something and as it is voluntary, those who disagree do not need to pay.

## **3. Seasonal Wardens/Rangers**

We do think this should be considered but very importantly not just for 2021 but longer term. If it is just for this year, then the community and the visitor will really miss it afterwards and it is likely to increase community concern about tourism if they are not there in subsequent years. You will need funding for this for 2021 and this is mentioned in the previous section but after that it could be potentially funded by the Trust idea above.



Wardens/Rangers are used across the UK as an effective method of visitor management, quite simply because it works and there is nothing better than face to face contact to explain why it is not suitable to camp there, the safest way to have a barbecue on the beach and so forth. It is also why Highlands Council are appointing Wardens/Rangers this year and it has been successfully used by the National Parks for many years. No, it does not solve all the issues, but it does go a long way in helping to manage them better with a human touch.

We recommend that you look at recruiting seasonal Wardens/Rangers on an annual basis to supervise irresponsible behaviour, advise when the hot spots are full, with recommendations of other places to go. Liaise with the Police where necessary and also with the local community. As well as being the human face that visitors can go to for help and advice.

#### **4. Enforcement**

You could consider charging for parking in hot spot areas as mainland visitors are used to paying for parking in key areas and that if they park further away it is free, so an incentive to do so if they don't want to spend money. Equally this could be enforced with fines and clamping. You may want to consider the other ideas first but certainly if hot spots continue to have parking issues, even though parking within them has been extended, it is something that at the very least needs to be considered. If parking is free at less busy places then it is then an incentive to go there instead. Again, if it is clear that the money is going back to look after Harris, then people will understand. You could also consider looking at the Skye model which is to be introduced when you book parking at hot spots in advance and it costs more at peak times than it does say first thing in the morning.

Transport Scotland are currently looking at both the benefits of the Road Equivalent Tariff and the downsides such as locals struggling to get a ferry in the main season and looking at possible solutions to this such as charging more on a Saturday and a higher price for larger vehicles. This report is in draft but could include changes to what is seen locally in general as a good thing but has brought some issues with it and they may increase with the introduction of a larger ferry.

Enforcement is harsh and does take away freedom but equally if people are repeatedly ignoring advice, it is a way of quickly getting the message across. Again, most visitors are used to this on the mainland and would also be likely to understand that especially as it is being used to sustain the environment. The other issue though, is that it would really have to apply to residents too and that might be an issue leaving the community feeling like they are being penalised for tourism.

#### **5. Extend the season and continue to develop new markets**

We have mentioned extending the season for 2021 and it is something that we have also spoken with the partners about in person. We are aware that this has been tried in different guises before and know that it is not a new idea. Equally we are aware it is also something that Outer Hebrides Tourism is looking at as one of their four strategic objectives moving forward. We do think there is merit in looking at this, particularly for visitors who have stayed before in the first instance. As 87% of people in the Outer Hebrides Visitor Survey did say that they would like to return to the island in the future. Harris is stunning in winter and the promotion could of course include the Aurora Borealis, sunrises and sunsets and clear blue days. Equally, let people know that there is the odd storm or two and how perfect to be by the fire with a whisky or gin in hand looking out and reading and relaxing.

As part of this project, Bright Light Marketing spoke to Fred Taylor at the marina's in Tarbert and Scalpay. Both projects are in their infancy but in terms of visitor numbers, in 2019 they were 32% up from 2018 and were looking to grow year on year. There is a proposal to look at Leverburgh next. This would mean that sailors and yachts could sail all the way up or down the Hebrides from Barra to Stornoway. This is a growing market and post Covid it has the potential to grow again. It is also a sustainable market as they are not bringing vehicles over to the island, many of them like to base themselves in one place for a couple of days and will shop and eat locally as they tend to do a three-week holiday when visiting the Hebrides.

Linked to this is also the cruise market with substantial plans to grow this by extending facilities in Stornoway which will give larger ships access to the harbour. These visitors are again not taking up accommodation space which the islands could not accommodate but there are very few places that can take larger groups and again accommodate people wanting to use toilet facilities at the same time or indeed offer lunch or coffee. Developing group facilities need to be looked at.

Both by extending the season and working on less impactful markets like Marina's would not in themselves solve the problem, but they will definitely help and are something which should be considered.

## INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

### 1. Ideas for 'Hot Spots'

Infrastructure		
Location	Project	Outcome
Huisinis	Web Cam showing parking availability, linked to VisitScotland website	Advance warning of parking availability reducing congestion and discouraging inappropriate parking
	Extend carpark	Reduce congestion
	Park and ride Provide parking at the road end, with a regular bus service taking visitors to the beach	Reduce congestion
	Signage advising of challenging driving conditions	Advance warning of road condition
Luskentyre	Webcam showing parking availability, linked to VisitScotland website	Advance warning of parking availability reducing congestion and discouraging inappropriate parking
	Park and ride. Provide parking at the road end, with a regular bus service taking visitors to the beach.	Reduce congestion
	Signage advising of challenging driving conditions	Advance warning of road condition

	Interpretation signage	Educate visitors on SSSI designation/local history
<b>Northton</b>	Carpark	Provision of parking for beach users, reducing congestion on road
	Park and ride. Provide parking at the road end, with a regular bus service taking visitors to the beach.	Reduce congestion
	Interpretation signage	Educate visitors on SSSI designation/local history
	Public toilet	Provision of sanitary facilities
<b>Rodel</b>	Campervan facilities	Provision of campervan/caravan facilities including electric hook-up, toilets and showers. Discourage parking in unsuitable areas/provision of sanitary facilities.
	Carpark	Provision of parking at St Clements Church for both cars and large coach tours
<b>Tarbert</b>	Carpark	Reduce congestion
<b>Lay-bys at Seilebost and Niseabost</b>	Extend parking	Provision of parking

## 2. Croft Camping

Three crofters allow two to three tents or campervans and motorhomes on a croft. Bright Light Marketing think this idea has merit and would benefit the crofters and also gives the visitor the chance to stay on a croft and give Harris more accommodation.

## 3. Additional Campsites

There is a need for more formal camping. Options should be investigated to establish where and how additional facilities can be provided. . However, it must be borne in mind that the more campsites there are and the more campervans and motorhomes they can take, then the more traffic there will be on the roads and that can simply exacerbate other issues.

### JOB CREATION

One of the objectives of this report, was to look at job creation. Whilst the funding for this study will not create employment directly, it is hoped that through its suggested initiatives, employment opportunities will be created. The creation of a seasonal Wardens/Rangers service would be new employment. Infrastructure projects may create additional job opportunities, but at least will sustain existing construction jobs. The large marketing communication strategy may also require additional staff to execute. Employment related to most of the suggested initiatives would be formalized as part of funding applications.

## CONCLUSION

This study included extensive consultation with the Harris community both via an online survey and also face to face via zoom conversations. This clearly showed that there was consistency in where the 'hot spots' are and what the key issues are. It also highlighted a high level of understanding of the tourist economy with 86% of respondees confirming tourism is very important to Harris. Research of visitor management issues across the UK and in particular on islands was carried out. This included virtual face to face meetings with Skye Connect and Visit Arran as well as consulting with stakeholders such as the Comhairle, Caledonian MacBrayne and VisitScotland. All of this information and consultation has been considered in making the recommendations contained in this plan.

It is evident from the Hebrides Visitor Survey that visitors greatly value both the welcome of the locals, their advice and also the Harris environment. There were issues however in 2020 with visitors who had not visited before and were unprepared for the weather conditions and the island environment. The plan outlines **communication strategies** for not only first time visitors but also for visitors in general. This would be an overarching campaign ***Harris is a Special Place***. It would need both close liaison with the community as well as with key stakeholders to try and prevent a repeat of the issues from 2020.

There were visitor management issues in Harris pre Covid, which over and over again consultees stated were that the current **infrastructure** in Harris could not cope with the number of visitors and indeed that the island was reaching the maximum numbers that it could cope with during the main season. The final section of the report looks at ways to deal with that and lastly deals with potential infrastructure projects.

Naturally, visitors love Harris, for the very special place that it is. We believe that the recommendations contained in this report will enhance the experience for visitors and allow them to give back to both the island and the community. With additional infrastructure and communications campaigns, we believe visitors can be better-managed, easing the pressures on the local community in the summer season.

Finally, Bright Light Marketing would like to thank the three partners for all of their valuable support and to all of the locals who were willing to give their time and share their views and experiences with us, invaluable in helping us to bring this final report together.

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