

## Members' Library Service Request Form

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Originator	Eamon John
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Document Title	Coast and Countryside Management Report

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**REPORT TO:** MEMBERS' LIBRARY SERVICE

**MEETING DATE:** March 2022

**BY:** Executive Director for Place

**SUBJECT:** East Lothian Coast & Countryside Management  
Season 2021

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## **1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To advise Members of the strategic and operational planning and delivery that took place for 2021 across East Lothian's coast and countryside sites, to support public enjoyment and quality of experience of these areas.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the developments and wide range of multi-agency activity deployed to manage East Lothian's coast and countryside sites through the 2021 season.
- 2.2 Members are asked to note the ongoing Multi-Agency strategic planning for the upcoming 2022 season.

## **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Members will recall a Motion to Council at its meeting on 27 October 2020 in support of the Council's Countryside Rangers Service, and subsequent Members Library Report in January 2021, on East Lothian's coast and countryside management, and the experiences captured during 2020. This was the initial period, of the Covid-19 Pandemic which brought the unprecedented numbers of visitors to East Lothian coast & countryside sites and produced the significant challenges on the ground operationally.
- 3.2 The Multi-Agency overview group established to coordinate both the strategic planning and operational deployment in managing the council's coast and countryside sites has continued to operate since its formation in the early months of the Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020. With representation

of council officers from Countryside, Roads, Communications, Emergency Planning, Safer Communities, Environmental Health and Police, chaired by the Head of Service for Infrastructure. The group met weekly and coordinated the actions across sites throughout the spring / summer period of 2021 and remained in planning and response mode until the September 2021 weekend where it moved on to a strategic planning focus for the 2022 season.

3.3 Learnings from the experience of 2020 helped shape the conversations and decisions for 2021. Examples include but are not limited to :

- The introduction of new Land Management Rules to support Countryside Rangers on the ground.
- Additional council infrastructure support operationally from roads, amenities and waste at prioritised times.
- Co-ordinated communications messaging around wild camping, open fires, water safety and general outdoor responsible behaviour.
- Over flow car parks prepared and ready at certain sites when needs arose.
- Joint patrols on the ground at hot-spot locations between Countryside Rangers and Scottish Fire & Rescue Service.
- Police Scotland patrols and extra resource prioritised at anticipated peak periods
- Community Warden patrols
- Countryside Rangers daily reports from across sites.
- New camping and visitor management signs installed.
- New Water Safety signage installed at coastal sites.
- New paths created to facilitate additional number of visitors and to promote social distancing opportunities on sites.

3.4 The above learnings and delivery built strong working collaborative relationships, both strategically at the Multi-Agency level, and operationally, in on ground delivery amongst partners and peers.

3.5 East Lothian was also and remains to be, part of an ongoing National Group established through Government Ministers to focus on 'Prevention, Regulation and Reassurance', considering and advising on issues such as antisocial behaviour, litter, toilets and transport. The five identified "hot spots" across Scotland are, the North Coast 500, Cairngorm National Park, the "5 Lochs Road" located in Perth & Kinross, Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park and the East Lothian coast. This has allowed us through our Principal Countryside Officer to feed in the East Lothian experiences and to hear and consider wider partner experiences elsewhere within the country.

- 3.6 With East Lothian's coast being recognised as a national 'hot spot' .The Multi-Agency agreed to prioritise funding that became available to Local Authorities facilitated by Nature Scot which was the 'Better Places 2 Green Recovery Fund'. The successful funding application delivered 8 seasonal Countryside Rangers to complement and enhance the work of the East Lothian Countryside Ranger Team on the ground for the 2021 high season. This additional resource was warmly welcomed and proved invaluable operationally. There is a real hope that this resource will be available nationally to draw on again for the 2022 season, but as yet remains to be confirmed. The successful funding application also saw 26 visitor management signs prioritised and installed across sites.
- 3.7 Estimated coastal visitor numbers for January to September 2021, based on car counter returns (x 2.5 occupancy per car) shows a significant increase on the previously unprecedented figures of 2020. January to September 2020 was estimated at 1,283,220 visits. January to September 2021 is showing 2,038,098 visits. The increase is up by 754,878. Specifically for the peak month of July the figures show the following increases.
- > July 2019 202,635
  - > July 2020 293,647
  - > July 2021 313,520
- 3.8 It is worth noting that the 2021 figures do not include those vehicles that could not get into the car parks, overflow car parks, and areas where no counters are present. As well as those visitors who took public transport, walked or cycled .Please see Appendix 1 for further information on visitor numbers and site specific information.
- 3.9 Coastal car parking figures also saw an increase in parking charge notices issued and parking charge notice payments. Please see Appendix 2.
- 3.10 Camping numbers was a particular challenge on the ground again in 2021 with a further increase in numbers witnessed to that in 2020. Whilst private campsites were open in 2021 we witnessed an unprecedented increase in tents along the East Lothian coast. The number of tents recorded in the last two years are:
- 2020 - 1577
  - 2021 - 3368
- 3.11 This represents a 113% increase. Please see Appendix 3 for further information on camping experienced along the coast. While staycations were being promoted by the Scottish Government and the local hotels and private campsites were open, they did also book up quickly and for some, the prices were prohibitively expensive. New camping and visitor management signs were produced and installed at sites although high levels of camping persisted along with fire sites. Encouragingly, there was more compliance with people camping by the beaches rather than on the

more sensitive grasslands and we saw a reduction in the number of fires in woodlands. Countryside Rangers continued to engage and educate the public on the ground throughout the high season with particular reference and emphasis on the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. With the aim of protecting, conserving and minimising damage to the Coastal sites from the high visitor numbers and disturbance brought about by the impact of Covid and the increase in staycations. However, there were too many campers with too many fires and high levels of irresponsible toileting resulting in damage to habitats and disturbance to wildlife.

- 3.12 There has been a significant increase in water activity along the coast in both formal and informal activity. Water safety has been a real focus over the past year with a specific Water Safety Group established with partners from, ELC, Water Safety Scotland, HM Coastguard, RNLI, Policer Scotland, Scotland Fire & Rescue Service, Dunbar Lifesaving Club, the Wave project and Coast to Coast Surfing. Initial focus for the group was linked to increased activity at Belhaven beach Dunbar, and the particular tidal risks experienced at that site. A site specific Risk Assessment was undertaken and subsequent mitigations including new water safety signage has been installed. Water safety messaging was a key communications component during the 2021 season. The Water Safety Group have now transitioned into looking at developing a water safety policy for the county. The aim is to have this new policy in place for the 2022 high season.
- 3.13 The Multi-Agency Group moved back into strategic planning mode following the September weekend holiday in 2021. Planning for the 2022 season continues before moving back into operational deployment stage from Easter 2022 – September weekend 2022. Strategic planning includes but is not limited to:
- Visitor Management Plan - work is currently underway with an external consultant funded by visitscotland through a strategic tourism grant. The aim is to have a visitor management plan that can be aligned with visitscotland Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, supporting future visitor infrastructure but importantly having a focus in criteria on a responsible tourism approach.
  - Development / Consideration of Bye Laws - There is no plan to amend the Land Management Rules in place following their review in 2021 however not all desired protections to be enforced by the Countryside Rangers are competent to introduce via Land Management Rules. Some must be established through Bye-Laws, the provision of which is provided for through Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. The establishment of bye-laws requires both a consultation period and Scottish Government consent. Some bye-laws are specific to the area being covered by the Bye-law, others can be replicated across zones so as to in effect cover a larger area. The provision of Bye-Laws are being reviewed to complement the Land Management Rules in place.

- Enforcing overnight coastal car parking restrictions – ensuring restrictions are enforced at coastal car parks would greatly assist with the challenge of tents and camping experienced at certain sites. This will require an amendment to the current TRO which would be a waiting restriction which can take up to 18 months to deliver. This work is now being progressed.
- Seasonal Countryside Rangers – through the national hot-spot working group we continue to advise on the need for seasonal capacity support on the ground through seasonal Countryside Rangers.
- Consideration of the return to more recognised levels of international tourism/travel and any effect either way on the East Lothian experience.

3.14 Virtually all of East Lothian's coastline is subject to National, European and International designations to protect natural heritage. Yet it remains the busiest by visits, per kilometre, in Scotland. Protecting and managing this essential and highly valued environmental asset is crucial for the County.

#### **4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 This report supports the council in managing its highly valued environmental assets for both local residents and visitors to the County, and contributes to the Council's duty in managing designated environmental assets.

#### **5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

5.1 The subject of this report has been through the Integrated Impact Assessment process and no negative impacts have been identified.

#### **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 Financial – At this stage there are no direct financial implications associated with the recommendations in this report. Although additional expenditure may well be expected following the production of the Visitor Management Plan and in order to draw down external visitScotland funding. It is expected that expenditure will also be required when making amendments to the current Traffic Regulation Order to support the enforcement of overnight coastal car parking restrictions.

6.2 Personnel - None

## **7 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1 Members Library Report ref: 12/21, East Lothian Coast & Countryside Management, January 2021.
- 7.2 Motion to Council in relation to Countryside Rangers Service, 27 October 2020.
- 7.3 Minutes from the meeting of East Lothian Council (noting the amendment to the above motion), 27 October 2020.

**Appendix 1:** Visitor Numbers

**Appendix 2:** Coastal Car Parks

**Appendix 3:** Camping

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<b>DATE</b>	January 2022

## Appendix 1

## Visit Numbers

Estimated coastal visitor number of visits for January to September 2021, based on car counter returns (x 2.5 occupancy) shows a massive increase with figures from 2020.

- January to September 2020 **1,283,220**
- January to September 2021 **2,038,098**

The increase is up by **754878**.

For the month of July the figures show the following increases.

- July 2019 **202,635**
- July 2020 **293,647**
- July 2021 **313,520**

However, please note that the above figures do not include those vehicles that couldn't get into the car parks, overflow car parks and areas where no counters are present as well as those that took public transport, walked or cycled in. Also visits are subject to the weather conditions.



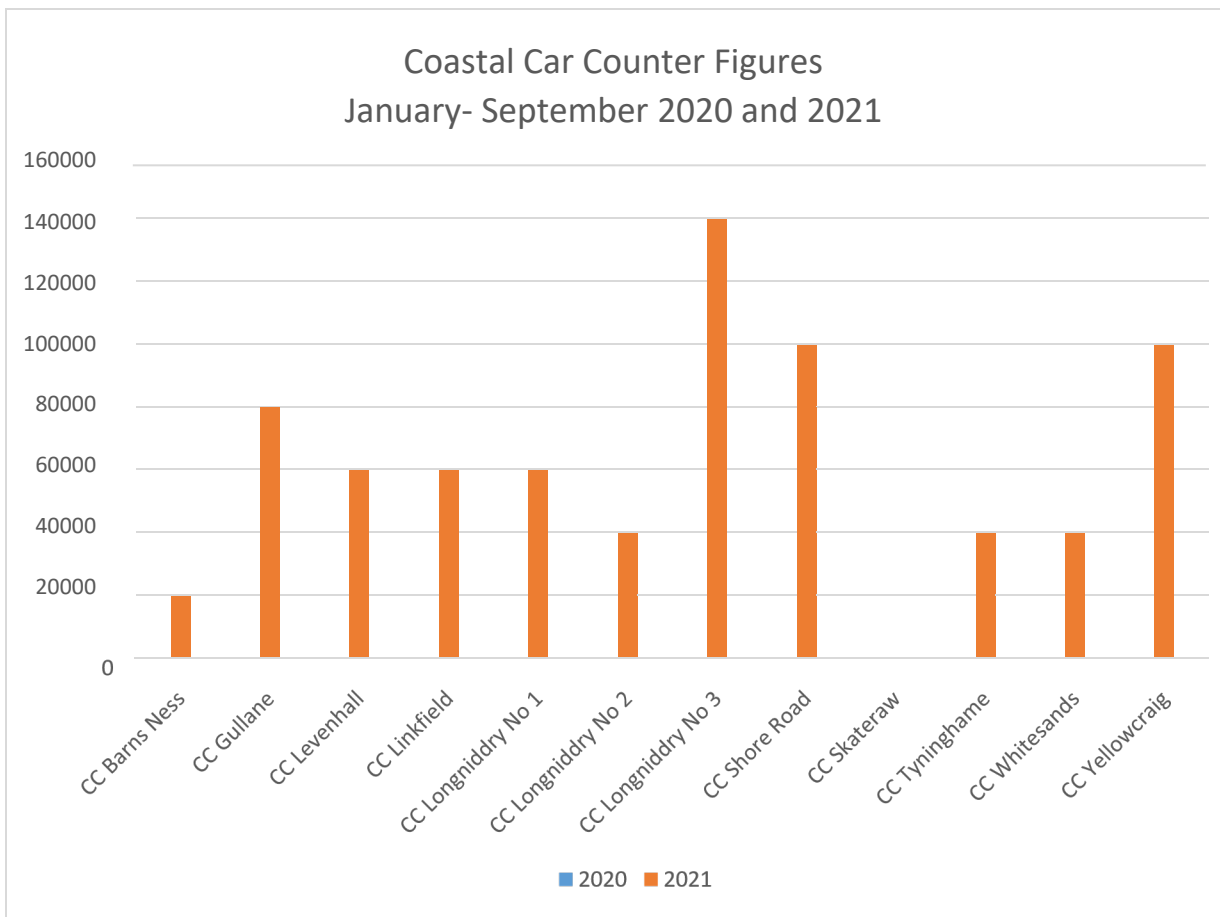
Table 1 shows the car counter figures and % increase at the busiest coastal sites.



Table 1

	2020	2021	% Increase
Barns Ness	17071	29678	54%
Gullane	59456	86969	37%
Levenhall Links	42979	69657	47%
Linkfield	55261	73962	29%
Longniddry 1	35468	61609	54%
Longniddry 2	27976	44246	45%
Longniddry 3	68481	140845	69%
Shore Road	75032	114091	41%
Skateraw	10731	15703	37%
Tynninghame	28988	38800	59%
Whitesands	22359	38800	54%
Yellowcraig	69486	100879	37%



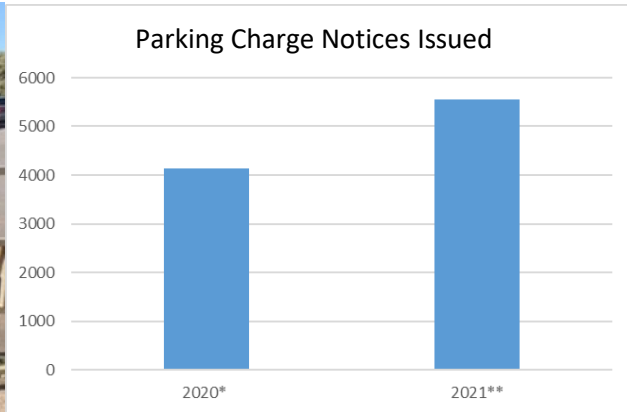


*Graph 1 N.B. 24 March – 19 June 2020 car parks were closed*

Car Park charging is in place at most coastal car parks with RINGGO/ cash machines available to take payments.

There were issues with inconsiderate and poor parking with one incident resulting in Council vehicles being blocked and emergency gates also being blocked, which were resolved.

Where appropriate Parking Attendants issued Parking Charge Notices and resulted in a 35% increase from 2020.



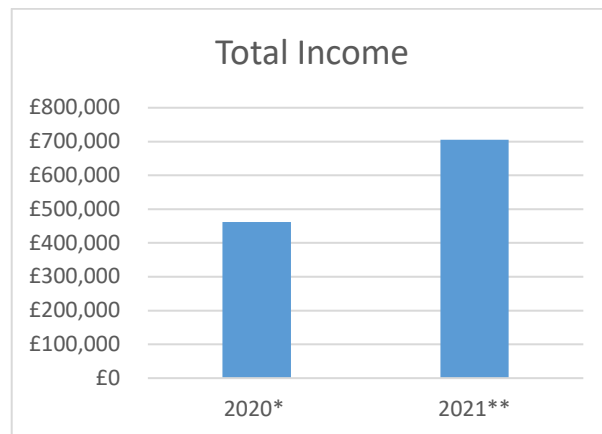
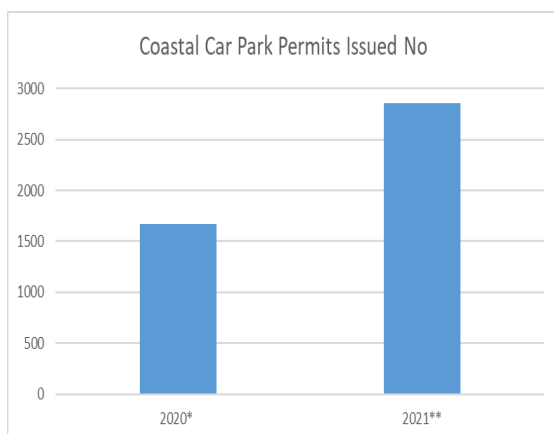
**Coastal Car Parking Figures**

	<b>2020*</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>***Increase</b>
Parking Charge Notice's Issued	4132	5562	35%
Parking Charge Notice Payments	£98,432	£132,212	34%
Coastal Car park Cash Collection	£156,832	£196,249	25%
Coastal Car Park Cashless Parking Ringo	£140,956	£257,892	83%
Coastal Car Park Permits Issued No	1668	2856	71%
Coastal Car Park Permits £	£65,770	£118,788	81%
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>£461,990</b>	<b>£705,141</b>	<b>53%</b>

\* 2020 Coastal car parks closed 23 March to 18 June

\*\*\* To note that these figures are likely to slightly increase when Nov – Dec figures are collated.

Currently there is an increase with income of 53% from 2020 to 2021. A significant change in payment is apparent with more people opting for cashless payment and higher number of applicants for parking permits. There was additional costs in 2021 with 3 seasonal Parking Attendants being brought in from May to September to cover the summer period.



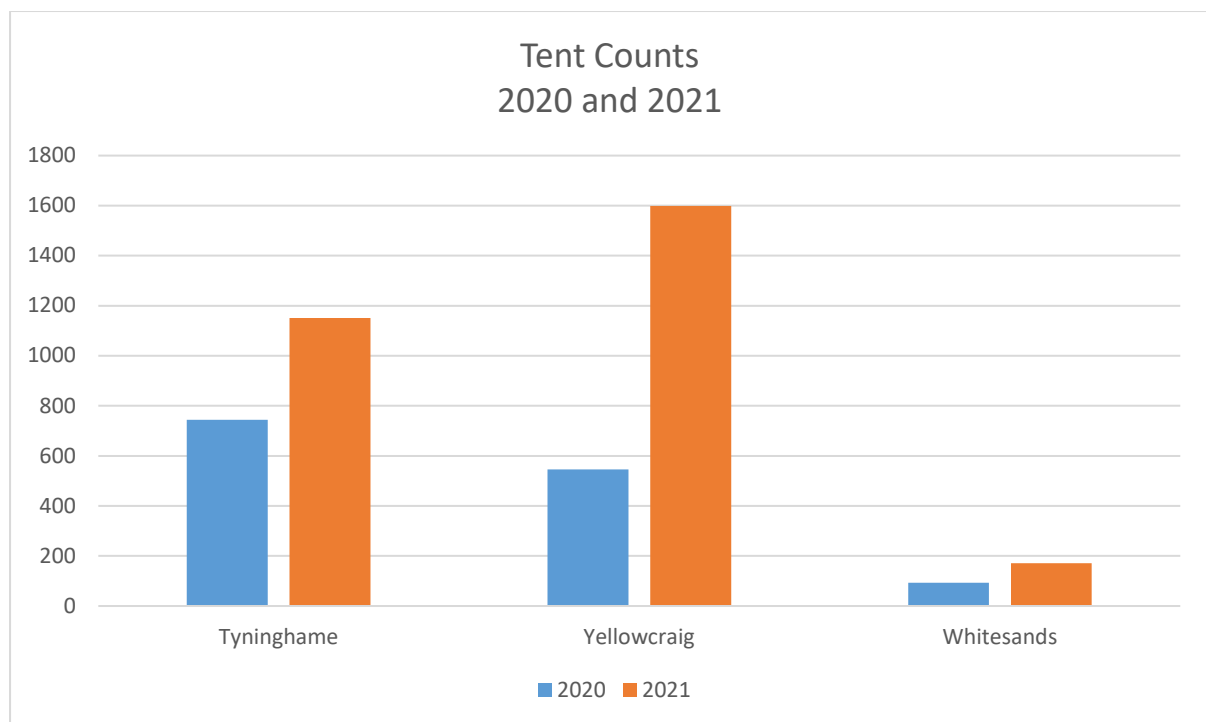
In 2020 there was a significant number of tents and people camping along the coast. In 2021, while campsites were open, there was an unprecedented increase in tents along the coast.

The number of tents recorded in the last two years are:

- 2020 - 1577
- 2021 - 3368

This represents a 113 % increase. (Graph 2 shows the top three busiest sites.)

All tents that were found were approached and all occupants were provided with information and advice on the Outdoor Access Code, litter and human waste management, wildlife disturbance and fires. The three busiest sites for tents were Tynninghame, Yellowcraig and Whitesands.



Graph 2

	2020	2021	% Increase
Tynninghame	744	1151	55%
Yellowcraig	546	1599	193%
Whitesands	93	171	84%

While staycation was being promoted by the Scottish Government and the hotel and campsites areas did open; they did also book up quickly and for some the prices were prohibitively expensive.

Numbers of tents again this year were particularly high at Yellowcraig and Tynninghame. It is thought that the numbers at Tynninghame were less than Yellowcraig this year due to the discouragement of poor parking by staff and no toilet facilities.

New camping and visitor management signs were produced and installed although high levels of camping persisted along with fire sites. However, there was more compliance with people camping by the beaches rather than on the more sensitive grasslands and a reduction in the number of fires in woodlands.



Online incorrect information is still available on various websites advertising East Lothian Coastal sites as areas for wild camping. This is a key aspect that needs to be addressed.

The car parks also had a significant increase in the number of people camping next to their cars both at Whitesands and Yellowcraig car parks. Large signs did improve the situation but there were still those who were under the impression that they were 'wild camping'. It is thought by staff that over 90% of the people who turned up to camp at East Lothian's coastal sites were not true wild campers.



With the interaction with the public there was the impression that a lot of campers were only hearing about SOAC for the first time. The ELC business cards that were produced which directed them to relevant websites definitely assisted in improving the message.



In terms of tourist attraction – the visitor experience is being compromised by the sheer volume of tents and campsite feel of areas. In addition, locals have been staying away from these busy coastal sites during the summer.