

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2224: Review legislation in order to strengthen the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, lodged by Robin Pettigrew

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

[PE2224](#) seeks a review of Part 1 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 in order to strengthen the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. Specifically, it seeks to:

- Explicitly prohibit camping in a vehicle, outside of designated camping zones; and
- Make the provisions of the Code legally enforceable by introducing dedicated enforcement teams and fines for Code violations.

The petitioner runs [NC500 The dirty truth](#) a Facebook group that seeks to “expose and discuss the problems caused largely by overtourism, irresponsible behaviour and dirty camping in the North of Scotland (and elsewhere) where many small communities are swamped by tourism and in many cases are unable to cope through lack of suitable infrastructure”.

Land Reform Act and outdoor access

[Part 1 of the Land Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#) provides for a right to be “on land” or to “cross land” for recreational, educational or commercial¹ purposes. These access rights exist only if they are exercised responsibly, and do not extend to the curtilage of a building (e.g a private garden). They apply equally to all non-motorised modes of travel; motorised vehicles and vessels are specifically excluded. Further guidance is available in the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) (SOAC), which states:

In Scotland, you can go on to most land to enjoy the outdoors – as long as you behave responsibly. [...]

Scottish access rights apply, for example, to hills and moors, forests and woods, beaches and the coast, rivers and lochs, parks and some types of farmland. There are also some common-sense exceptions, including houses and gardens, other buildings and their yards or compounds, school

¹ As long as those purposes are for an activity which the person exercising the right could carry on otherwise than commercially or for profit e.g. mountain or canoe guides.

grounds and places which charge for entry. Access rights include things like walking, cycling, climbing, horse-riding, kayaking, swimming and watching wildlife, but do not include things like shooting, fishing or access with motor vehicles.

[SOAC guidance in relation to camping](#) makes it clear that responsible access relates to using a small lightweight tent “in small numbers and for no more than two or three nights in one place”. In summary:

- Camping well away from buildings and roads and going somewhere else if it's busy.
- Avoiding camping in enclosed fields of crops or farm animals.
- Leaving no trace of visit.
- Not lighting open fires during times of high fire risk (paying attention to fire danger warnings) or near forests, farmland, peaty ground, or close to buildings, or historic sites.
- If there are no public toilets, use a trowel to dig a shallow hole and bury waste, and go as far as possible from buildings, paths, open water and rivers, and from any farm animals.
- Use public transport, or if driving is necessary, designated car parks. Go elsewhere if car parks are full.

Informally, this is known as “wild camping” and is a right that has been enjoyed in Scotland for generations.

Roads regulation

The [Roads \(Scotland\) Act 1984](#) regulates public and private roads in Scotland, and provides for the following offences:

- Section 100 – “lighting a fire within, or by permitting a fire for which he is responsible to spread to within, 30 metres of a road, damages the road or endangers traffic on it”
- Section 129 – placing or depositing “anything in a road so as to obstruct the passage of, or to endanger, road users”, as well as pitching a tent or camping.

The [Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984](#) gives local authorities the power to regulate parking through Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs). These allow councils to control how roads and public car parks are used, including restrictions on overnight stays.

Highland Council

The voluntary [Highland Campervan and Motorhome Scheme](#) was launched by Highland Council in 2024. At a cost of £40 for a seven-day pass, visitors can park overnight in some local authority car parks and access showering facilities in leisure centres. [BBC News reports](#) that the scheme raised only £20,000 in its first year, missing the target to raise £500,000.

[Highland Council's Outdoor Access Ranger Report 2025](#) provides detailed information on visitor numbers, camping, littering, and associated behaviour. Key points include:

- A 13% reduction in informal camping.
- An 8% increase in motorhomes, campervans and rooftop-tents.
- A reduction in the number of fire marks recorded (2,681, down from 3,740), however an increase in the number of fires extinguished (236, up from 233).
- Blackwater toilet waste dumping increased substantially (207, up from 126). The report notes that “this appears to be a growing problem each year”.

Key Organisations and relevant links

- [National Access Forum | Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#)
- [Guidance on Roads and Access Legislation in Scotland | Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#)
- [Access Ranger Reports - Highland Council](#)
- [Outdoor access - Highland Council](#)
- [Abandoned tents and unsafe fires: What Highland rangers dealt with last summer - BBC News](#)
- [Motorhome Parking Rules in the UK – 2026 Update](#)

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18 August 2026

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if

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