

Public Petitions Committee
Thursday 24 September 2026
3rd Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

PE2224: Review legislation in order to strengthen the Scottish Outdoor Access Code

Introduction

Petitioner Robin Pettigrew

Petition Summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review the legislation concerning the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC), in order 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.

Website <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2224>

1. This is a new petition that was published on 2 July 2026.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 1,429 signatures have been received on this petition.
4. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received submissions from the Scottish Government and the Petitioner which are set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

7. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
September 2026

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2224: Review legislation in order to strengthen the Scottish Outdoor Access Code

Petitioner:

Robin Pettigrew

Date published:

2 July 2026

Petition summary:

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review the legislation concerning the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC), in order 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.

Background information:

The petition seeks to acknowledge that the right of responsible access must not be lost.

The success in delivering an increasing number of visitors has not been matched with sufficient infrastructure investment to accommodate them or any operational review process to monitor and improve the experience for visitors and residents. Scotland's rural attractions are therefore now woefully underserved in several key areas including infrastructure, support and consultation with locally impacted communities and non-tourist related industries.

This is now having a massive environmental impact across Scotland – wild fires, extensive litter and human waste pollution, destruction of and damage to flora and fauna, erosion of road verges by parked cars and vans, obstruction to other road users (including emergency services), fouling of watercourses by chemical waste, barbeques and campfires and damage to significant Scottish heritage sites.

The above is evidenced in the Highland Council Outdoor Access Rangers' reports.

Annexe B: SPICe Briefing



Scottish Parliament
Information Centre
Ionad Fiosrachaidh
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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 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.

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.

[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](#)

Alasdair Reid
Senior Researcher
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 you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

Annexe C: Written Submissions

PE2224/A: Review legislation in order to strengthen the Scottish Outdoor Access Code

Scottish Government written submission, 3 September 2026

Does the Scottish Government consider the specific ask[s] of the petition to be practical or achievable?

In considering the petition's proposals, it is important to distinguish between Scotland's framework for responsible outdoor access and activities involving motor vehicles. The right of responsible non-motorised access to land, delivered through Part I of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (LRSA) and guided by the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC), is world-leading in terms of its extent, scope and clarity.

Following substantial public consultation and discussion in the Parliament, it was the decision of the Scottish Parliament that these rights would apply to non-motorised access to land; and as with many systems of rights, would comprise an essentially voluntary code of conduct.

The petition raises an important point that camping with motorised vehicles (e.g. motorhomes or vehicle mounted tent boxes) is outwith the scope of access rights and, therefore, the guidance provided by the SOAC. The Scottish Government recognises that there can be challenges arising from the behaviour of a minority of road users. However, reviewing and extending the scope of Part 1 of the LRSA and the SOAC to encompass motorised camping would represent a significant departure from the current access rights framework established by Parliament.

As I will set out below, there are already a range of ways in which such behaviours can be deemed either illegal or antisocial, which are enforceable by the appropriate authorities under different pieces of legislation. The Scottish Government does not consider that extending the scope of access rights legislation or making the SOAC legally enforceable would materially improve the practical ability of relevant authorities to address instances of inappropriate vehicle-based camping, given the range of existing enforcement powers already available.

What, if any, action is the Scottish Government currently taking to address the issues raised by this petition, and is any further action being considered that will achieve the ask[s] of this petition?

The Scottish Government is already taking action to address many of the issues highlighted in the petition. This work focuses on three areas: promoting responsible behaviour through engagement and public awareness; supporting local authorities and partners to manage visitor pressures; and ensuring that existing enforcement powers are used where illegal or antisocial behaviour occurs.

Engagement and Awareness – Motorised Campers

Through our national tourism agency VisitScotland, the Scottish Government works with partners including Transport Scotland, Police Scotland and the Campervan and

Motorhome Professional Association (CaMPA) to educate and promote to motorhome and campervan users how to travel and stay in Scotland responsibly. This includes clear messaging and advice on VisitScotland channels including driving on the left, booking into a dedicated campsite where possible and on following the SOAC when accessing the countryside.

VisitScotland also chairs a national working group on visitor management with partners including NatureScot, the National Parks and Police Scotland to help provide a strategic and coordinated approach to key issues facing certain destinations and promotion of responsible behaviour, including with respect to motorised camping.

Tackling Irresponsible and Illegal Behaviour

While the vast majority of visitors, including motorhome and campervan users, behave responsibly, the Scottish Government recognises that a minority can cause significant impacts through littering, inappropriate parking, waste disposal issues and other forms of antisocial behaviour. Responsible behaviour is central to the concept of exercising access rights, and a range of existing legal powers is available where conduct falls below acceptable standards. It is important that we do not allow the irresponsible behaviour of a minority to diminish the hard-won rights that are exercised responsibly by the majority.

A range of legal provisions exists for tackling illegal activity which is outwith access rights including littering, fly-tipping, off-road parking and road traffic offences.

Littering is a criminal offence under section 87 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. In Scotland, Police Scotland, local authorities and Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority have enforcement powers in relation to littering offences. Where an authorised officer has reason to believe that an individual has committed a littering offence, a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) of £80 can be issued as an alternative to prosecution.

Alongside enforcement, the Scottish Government continues to work with partners through the National Litter and Fly-tipping Strategy to support a consistent and effective approach to preventing and tackling litter across Scotland.

Enforcement Against Inappropriate Parking

The SOAC does not apply to motorhomes or campervans. The conditions outlined below apply to those overnighting in any vehicle.

Trunk roads

Overnight parking is permitted in laybys on the trunk road network, unless prohibited (by exception) with relevant road orders and signage. A Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) to prohibit overnight parking would be under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. It would be a matter for Police Scotland or the Local Authority to enforce depending on local enforcement arrangements.

Local roads and car parks

Local authorities may either block access to unregulated car parks, or choose to

regulate them again under a TRO. If regulated, users are subject to certain conditions which will be outlined at any relevant car parks. Currently, 23 local authorities in Scotland have Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE) powers under the Road Traffic Act 1991, which in theory can provide powers to local authorities to enforce parking restrictions which they have brought in using a TRO. In areas with DPE regimes, local authorities are responsible for parking enforcement and stationary traffic offences as civil penalties imposed by the local authority, as opposed to criminal offences enforced by the police. Enforcement of certain parking offences, however, such as dangerous parking, remain the responsibility of the police. In areas where local authorities do not have DPE powers, parking enforcement is a matter for the police.

Private roads

Landowners may prohibit and enforce against unwanted parking at their discretion. For example, when parking on private land users may be deemed to enter an implied contract with the landowner. If there are clear signs displayed in the car park/land setting out rules, then these are the terms of the contract. If any of these rules are broken, then the landowner can take steps to enforce them.

General Engagement and Awareness – Visitors to the Countryside

In 2020 the Scottish Government established a Visitor Management Group to develop a cross-Government approach to addressing issues caused by the significant increase in visits to the outdoors we first saw during the pandemic, both close to urban areas and also at rural pinch points in scenic or otherwise popular countryside areas.

Members of the Group include a range of public bodies such as VisitScotland, NatureScot, the National Parks authorities, local authorities, land owning/management representatives, community interests and Police Scotland. It addresses such issues as managing visitor dispersal, littering, environmental damage, public toileting and antisocial behaviour. A Visitor Management Strategy for Scotland was published in March 2021 and associated Action Plan in 2024.

NatureScot works with the National Access Forum (NAF) to address access issues when they arise through providing new guidance, resources and advice. Discussion in the NAF is the best way to identify any perceived concerns which may exist and consider how best to address them quickly, through changes to public messaging for those taking access or new guidance for land managers. For example, the NAF has recently revised its guidance on managing camping with tents and has developed new guidance on responsible access and disturbance of wildlife.

Over the years, NatureScot has developed a wealth of online resources and promotional materials for disseminating messaging to explain how to access the outdoors in a safe and responsible manner. It has also recently refreshed its resources for schools and young people.

We all want to see responsible tourism, which balances the needs of local communities, the local economy and visitors and the environment. The response to any visitor pressures needs to be a combination of visitor messaging, encouraging responsible behaviour and visiting at quieter times of year, alongside practical

responses such as improved infrastructure, engagement and education. In that regard, the Visitor Management Group, NatureScot and VisitScotland will continue to promote responsible visitor messaging alongside partners such as local authorities and others who lead on infrastructure and ranger services.

It is a matter for local authorities, roads authorities or Police Scotland to manage any infringements, which can include fixed penalty notices or prosecution under the relevant existing legislation.

Engagement and Awareness – SOAC

Responsible behaviour is key when exercising access rights. We know that the vast majority of people follow the rules and behave responsibly but we are acutely aware of heightened impacts in some rural places and communities through irresponsible and criminal activity from a small minority involving antisocial behaviour, littering, human waste, damage to property and the environment, fires and inconsiderate car parking. It is important that we do not allow the irresponsible behaviour of a minority to diminish the hard-won rights that are exercised responsibly by the majority.

Under section 2 of the LRSA, access rights must be exercised responsibly. The three key principles of the SOAC are that people should respect the needs of other people, care for the environment, and take responsibility for their own actions. The wild camping guidance is contained on SOAC page 115. The wild camping guidance contains a stipulation that wild campers should keep well away from buildings, and if they wish to wild camp close to a house or building, seek the owner's permission. The SOAC also provides that land managers could work with local authorities in managing sites used for wild camping, if the land manager experiences large numbers of roadside campers or have well-used wild camping areas, to assist with the management of those camping sites.

The National Access Forum (NAF) has revised its guidance on managing camping with tents. On page 5 it states that the SOAC is intentionally worded in a sufficiently open way to accommodate the wide range of circumstances that apply in different places, rather than prescriptively specifying hard limits on, for example, the size of tent or distance from a road or building. If camping exceeds acceptable thresholds in particular locations, for example because of the collective impact of large numbers, the SOAC encourages local management, guided by local circumstances, to address these impacts: <https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/doc/managing-camping-tents-scotland> Campervans are motorised and not within access rights so may be managed through parking regulation or other provisions.

VisitScotland (VS) encourage visitors to book into a dedicated campsite, highlighting the range of options available across Scotland on their own channels and marketing activity. For those still seeking a wild camping experience, VS provide guidance on Scotland's access legislation and how to be a responsible visitor by following the SOAC, on their website and owned channels:

<https://www.visitscotland.com/accommodation/caravan-camping/wild-camping>

As part of the Visitor Management Steering Group there is a sub-group currently tasked specifically with reviewing the guidance and legislation dealing with motorhomes and campervans including the Caravan Exemption process. This will

include tightening up on the requirements to consult neighbours and create a more formal complaints process. The group consists of representatives of Scottish Government agencies, National Parks, local authorities, the campervan/motorhome industry and organisations representing users.

When their review is complete they will be presenting a series of suggested guidance and possible legislation changes for Ministers to consider.

The Scottish Government promotes inclusive and respectful communities in which all people live in safety and security, where individual and collective rights are supported, and where disputes are resolved fairly and swiftly. Local authorities and National Park Authorities (“access authorities”) take the lead role in managing outdoor access and therefore we suggest that you contact your local access authority if your concerns relate to access rights or Police Scotland if you feel as though a offence has or is being committed. A list of local access officers is available: <https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/doc/scottish-access-officer-contact-list> Ranger services are able to assist encourage responsible behaviour through face-to-face contact on the ground: <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/land-and-sea-management/managing-access-and-recreation/recreation-policy/ranger-services-scotland>

Annually NatureScot and partners promote specific messaging about the SOAC and elements of it, to a wide audience. Spring 2026 saw NatureScot's SOAC social media campaign generate over 695,000 impressions (opportunities to view the content) and achieve a click-through rate of 2.72% – 183% higher than last spring. The spring radio campaign reached over 1 million people and digital audio adverts generated over 117,000 listens. Influencer content generated nearly 121,000 views with strong engagement. The SOAC website had over 57,000 page views during the campaign period with a 93% engagement rate (the percentage of sessions that are considered engaged sessions).

A wide range of other organisations promote guidance on accessing the outdoors provided by the SOAC, including the National Parks, local authorities, ranger services, VisitScotland, Police Scotland, Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and Scottish Water, among others.

Concerns have been expressed with respect to the behaviour of some campervan users and there is a perception that SOAC is misunderstood or misrepresented by vehicle hire companies. VisitScotland undertook research in 2023 on behalf of the Visitor Management group to better understand the motivations and behaviours of people visiting Scotland in campervans and motorhomes. [Motorhomes, Caravans and Camping Tourism Insights | VisitScotland.org](#) The research found that many visitors do wish to do the right thing and are actively seeking out information on issues such as parking and waste disposal.

The Need for Legislation to More Effectively Enforce SOAC

The petition proposes new primary legislation to make compliance with the SOAC legally enforceable. However, when enacting Part 1 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, the Scottish Parliament determined that access rights should be supported by a statutory code providing guidance on responsible behaviour, rather than by a

system of direct regulation and penalties. The SOAC was therefore established as a voluntary code. Although it does not carry legal force in itself, the courts may have regard to the Code when considering whether behaviour is responsible. In addition, a range of existing criminal and civil sanctions already applies where behaviour crosses the threshold into illegality or antisocial behaviour.

Dedicated Team to promote the SOAC

On a day to day basis, the promotion of the SOAC at a local or site level is the responsibility of the National Park or Local authorities, generally through their countryside ranger service; public land owning bodies or Scottish Government executive agencies such as Forestry and Land Scotland or other partner organisations may also have such services. Generally, where behaviour is encountered which is not SOAC compliant, the initial approach is to engage with the person(s) involved to resolve the issue in an informal manner. Where this proves not to be successful, the appropriate regulatory authority and/or Police Scotland will be brought in to deal with ongoing infringements.

Effective promotion, oversight and enforcement of responsible access rights is reliant on local engagement and the close working relationships that have been established between organisations, based on a clear understanding of respective roles and responsibilities. The creation of a new team with enforcement powers which overlapped those of existing organisations could lead to confusion over roles and responsibilities and a less effective response to SOAC infringements.

The Scottish Government therefore considers that effective promotion and management of responsible access is best delivered through the existing network of local authorities, National Park Authorities, ranger services, land managers and enforcement agencies. These organisations already possess established expertise, local knowledge and clearly defined responsibilities. The creation of a new national enforcement body with overlapping functions could duplicate existing arrangements and create uncertainty regarding roles and responsibilities, without providing a clear improvement in outcomes.

Is there any further information the Scottish Government wish to bring to the Committee's attention, which would assist it in considering this petition?

The Scottish Government recognises that the growth in motorhome and campervan tourism has presented challenges in some locations, particularly where infrastructure and facilities have come under pressure. We are already taking a range of actions, working alongside local authorities, public bodies, communities and the tourism sector, to address these issues.

To date, £24.5m has been invested through the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) in 86 projects across 17 local authorities and both national park authorities; investing in infrastructure and visitor facilities such as low carbon transport, multi-use paths, toilets and motorhome facilities, car parking and integrated active travel solutions. New signage has been approved by Transport Scotland to signpost these facilities. Awareness raising and engagement with campervan stakeholders and communities has also been fruitful and stakeholders are aligned on our messaging,

recognising that they do not want campervan users to be demonised. Responsible practice is therefore promoted.

Local authorities and public landowners are taking action to regulate or prohibit use of sites where appropriate and to direct users to sites with facilities. Local authorities and private landowners have the ability to enforce, prevent or encourage against parking where it is prohibited and the ability to prohibit overnight parking where required, either directly or through the help of Police Scotland.

Although it is assumed the majority of motorised campers will travel around Scotland responsibly, it is unfortunately a minority of users who may, through ignorance or conscious choice, choose to risk parking, littering or other fines. There are, however, adequate powers already in place to tackle these behaviours.

NatureScot, VisitScotland and other public bodies are working at a national level to communicate what the SOAC defines as responsible behaviour to everybody taking access to the countryside and to encourage best practice.

The Scottish Government's view is that the most effective response to pressures associated with motorised camping is a balanced approach comprising improved visitor infrastructure, clear communication of responsible behaviour, local management measures, and the use of existing enforcement powers where illegal activity occurs. Taken together, these measures can address the concerns raised by the petition while maintaining Scotland's established framework for responsible outdoor access.

This is best achieved through local delivery, as at present, rather than the creation of an additional team.

National Parks and Outdoor Access

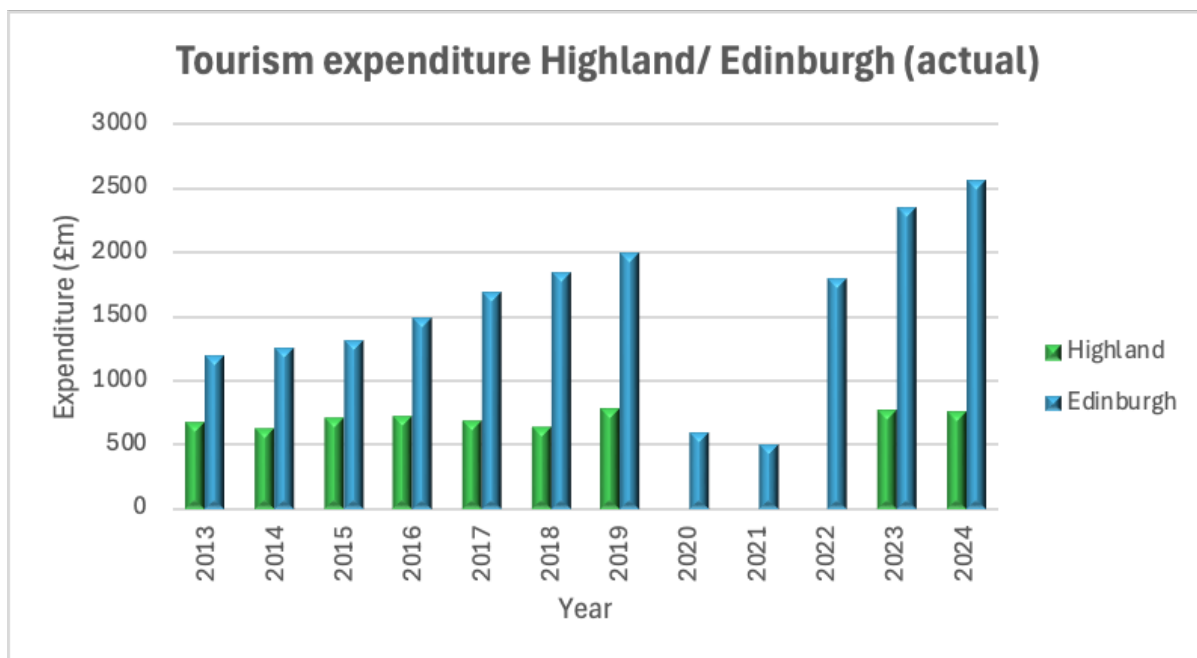
PE2224/B: Review legislation in order to strengthen the Scottish Outdoor Access Code

Petitioner written submission, 16 September 2026

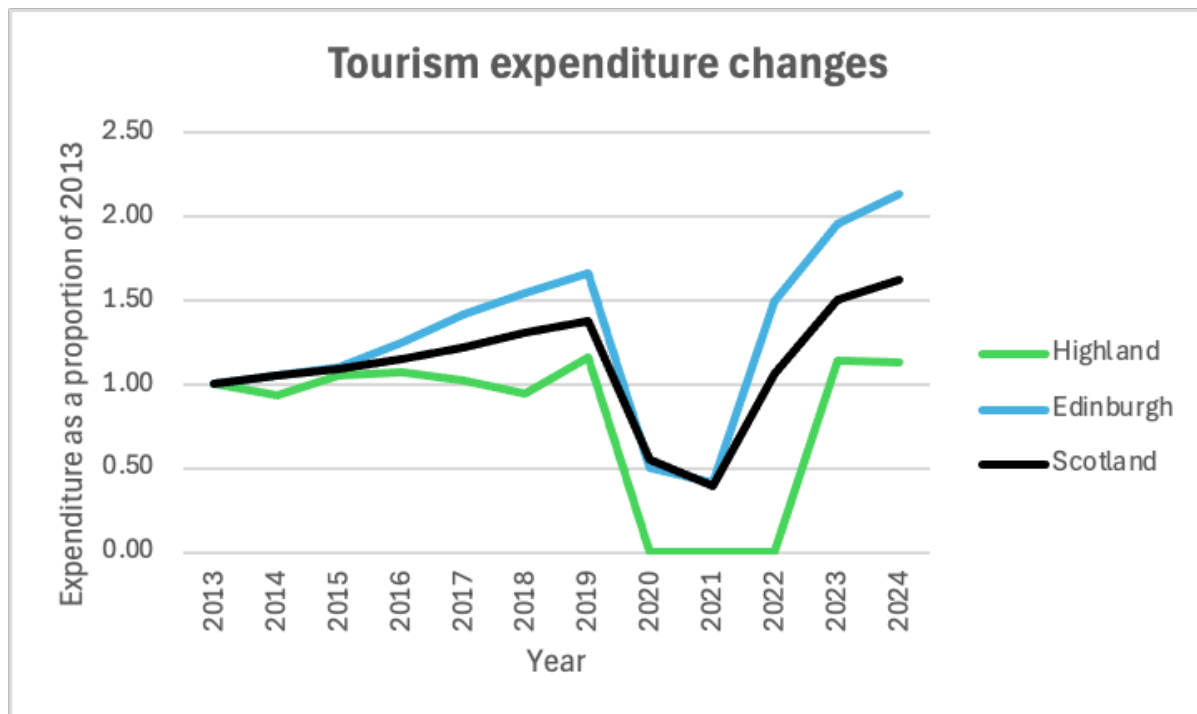
Please find a statistical analysis of Visit Scotland's figures in relation to types and visitor numbers, plus visitor spends.

These show that although vehicle-based visitor numbers are up, visitor spend is clearly not. Therefore, the commonly held view that increased visitor numbers equate to increased visitor spend is fundamentally flawed. Indeed, the cost of ongoing damage and pollution by irresponsible vehicle camping has become clearly evidenced in the Highland Council Outdoor Access Rangers reports, the closing and restrictions forced on the Loch Leven Nature Reserve and the repeated reports coming from the Glen Coe Mountain Resort.

According to Visit Scotland, total spend by international and domestic visitors in Highland in 2024 was £756 million.



There has been an increase in tourism expenditure between 2013 and 2024. However, once adjusted for inflation, this is only a 1.8% increase in real expenditure, and less than the inflation-adjusted expenditure in 2013.



This is at contrast to Edinburgh (90% increase in inflation-adjusted expenditure), and Scotland as a whole (45% increase in inflation-adjusted expenditure).

