



# Better Places Green Recovery Fund

# Arran Access Ranger

## Final Report – November 2021



Aspiring  
UNESCO  
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Geopark

## Introduction

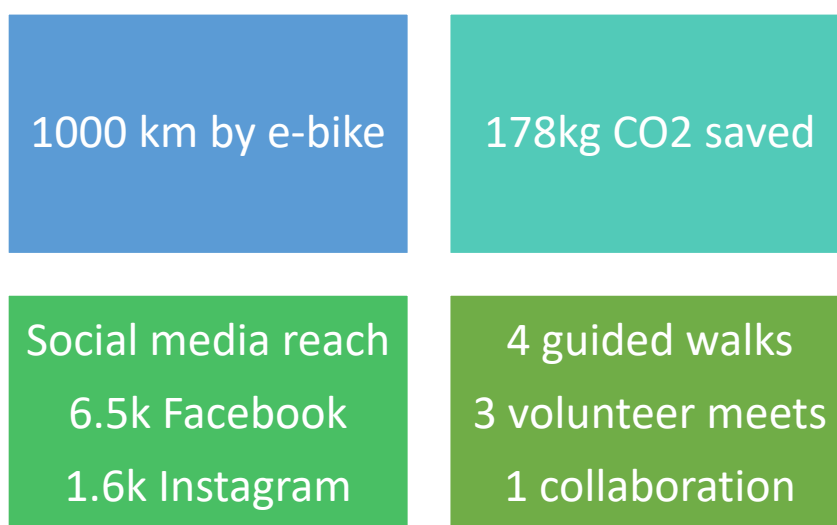
The role of the Access Ranger has directly helped with the management of people, pressures and associated outdoor services and facilities. The ranger has engaged directly with the public and encouraged responsible behaviour through the promotion of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Low-level walking, wildlife watching, and high-level walking are the top three visitor activities on Arran (Visit Arran, 2020). As a result, outdoor access is of utmost important to Arran and is a key part of the island's tourism industry. Access is, of course, of great importance to local people as well – three-quarters of islanders report that they undertake outdoor activity daily or more than once a week (Arran Economic Group, 2019).

Since its inception in 1999, the Arran Access Trust ('AAT') has evolved from a community group set up primarily to resolve issues between landowners and walkers to the leading access organisation on Arran taking a strategic approach to the management of access provision throughout the island. The ATT is the charity that manages the Arran Coastal Way (a National Long-Distance Trail) and Arran Geopark (an Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark).

The concept of a ranger service covering the island as a whole has been considered by the ATT for many years and this project has enabled the concept to be tested. The Geopark has a management plan with long-term aims which include education, conservation, and sustainable development. As such, it was considered that the Geopark would be the best vehicle to promote this new project and contribute towards the Geopark's aims.

'Arran Geopark Ranger Service' branding was used throughout the project period – including use of the well-known ranger service logo – and the Geopark's social media presence was used (@ArranGeopark). Acknowledgment was also given to @NatureScot and the #BetterPlaceGreenRecoveryFund.



**Figure 1: Headline achievements**

Project Activity		Location/site(s)	Predicted Outputs	Score
1	Liaison with land managers, landowners, community representatives and Visit Arran.	Isle of Arran	Identification of hot spot areas and ideas for visitor management solutions.	★★★★★
2	Promoting the SOAC and the work of AAT	Isle of Arran; onboard ferry	Responsible behaviour is encouraged; improvements made to hot spot sites.	★★★★☆
3	Visitor Engagement	Isle of Arran; onboard ferry	Visitors are aware of their rights and responsibilities. Potential issues/damage are prevented.	★★★★☆
4	Practical Maintenance Tasks	Isle of Arran	The island's path network and other green/blue spaces are in excellent condition.	★★★★☆
5	Non-Native Invasive Species Removal	Fisherman's Walk, Brodick (Arran Coastal Way)	The spread of NNIS is halted enabling future path works at this site.	★★★☆☆
6	Managing & Instructing Volunteer Groups	Isle of Arran	Locals and visitors are empowered to make a positive contribution to the improvement of the islands green/blue spaces.	★★★☆☆
7	Leading Guided Walks	Isle of Arran	Locals and visitors given opportunities to learn about the natural environment and responsible access.	★★★★★
8	Recording of visitor impacts across the island, in particular damage to the path network, landscape and wildlife.	Isle of Arran	Report on the visitor impacts during the season.	★★★★☆
9	Measurement of the success of any Visitor Management interventions.	Isle of Arran	Report on the impacts of visitor management solutions so that we are better informed to manage visitors in the future.	★★★★☆

**Table 1: Summary showing project activities, predicted outputs and a qualitative score of the success of each activity.**

# 1. Assessment of Project Aims and Outcomes

Each project activity listed in Table 1 is assessed in turn in this section as to whether it met the aims and outcomes of the project.

## 1.1 Liaison with land managers, landowners, community representatives and Visit Arran

From the outset we liaised with landowners, land managers, Visit Arran, and community representatives to identify hot spots and to discuss visitor management solutions. Liaison continued throughout the season to inform everyone in the progress made in access management and to encourage positive solutions to identified issues.

Top Issues	Resulting Impacts	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in campervans</li> <li>• Increase in campers</li> <li>• Increased road traffic</li> <li>• Extended stays of campervans</li> <li>• Human waste</li> <li>• Chemical toilet waste</li> <li>• Littering</li> <li>• Abandoned camping equipment</li> <li>• Fires &amp; BBQs</li> <li>• Fire pit proliferation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coastal erosion (exacerbated by vehicles)</li> <li>• Impact on farming &amp; wildlife (by human/toilet waste)</li> <li>• Impact on watercourses/marine environment</li> <li>• Damage to drystone walls</li> <li>• Damage to sensitive coastal ecosystems</li> <li>• Forest &amp; moorland fires</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IMPLEMENTED:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Remediation</li> <li>• Litter picking/beach cleaning</li> </ul> </li> <li>• PROPOSED:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New campervan facilities</li> <li>• Improved signage for existing facilities</li> <li>• Closure/blocking off of high risk sites</li> <li>• Requesting fees/donations for overnight stays</li> <li>• New off road multi-user routes</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**Figure 2: Summary of top issues, impacts and solutions identified during consultation with community groups.**

The key issues facing visitor management on the island is related to camping and campervan usage. Associated with this is the increase in vehicle traffic on the limited road network. Geographically the issues can be split into two broad areas. Firstly, close to Brodick the issues of camping and “dirty” camping are evident. Similar issues extend north to Sannox and its vicinity. Secondly, the issues of increased campervan usage are being felt on the west coast – extending around 55 km from Machrie to Lochranza. As much of this road is built on raised-beach, the effects of increased vehicle usage are being exacerbated by increasing coastal erosion.

Many of the issues identified are not only unsightly but also have potential to impact the natural environment, farming and wider terrestrial and marine ecosystems. Forest fire is of particular concern on the island. Extensive forest and moorland fires have occurred on Arran in recent history – there is concern surrounding the three endemic whitebeam tree species that occur in extremely small numbers.



**Figure 3: Typical issues encountered at selected 'hotspot' locations**

## 1.2 Promoting the SOAC and the work of the Arran Access Trust

The Access Ranger has made direct contact with those not engaging in responsible access and ensuring that activities are carried out in a more sensitive manner. Part of this educational role has been carried out via social media. The total reach for @ArranGeopark for the months of August, September and October was 6.5k via Facebook and 1.6k via Instagram. Two articles were published by the Arran Banner during the project period, see Figure 5 below. Acknowledgment was also given to @NatureScot and the #BetterPlaceGreenRecoveryFund.

The e-cargo bike has provided eye-catching low-carbon transport for the ranger service. Not only has it reduced the environmental impact of our activities; it has also acted as conversation-starter, which has helped to get our message out to visitors and locals. Over the duration of the project the bike has covered almost 1000 km – offsetting approximately 178 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> which would otherwise have been emitted had the Ranger Service's Toyota Hilux been used.

The model selected, a Riese & Muller Load 60, was recommended to us due to its full suspension design and the cargo bay having a load capacity of 100 kg. It also benefits from a

belt-drive and an internal hub gear – meaning that minimal maintenance has been required over the 1000 km. The gear ratios have been sufficient to get the loaded bike up the island’s sustained steep inclines. The range was typically around 70 km, however, an additional battery would have been useful at times to increase this – the bike can be upgraded to run on two batteries.



Figure 4: The e-cargo bike in action

# New access ranger ready to target visitor hotspots



Alex, above, will work with other organisations on Arran to help bolster the conservation work being undertaken.

A new access ranger has been appointed by Arran Access Trust and Arran Geopark to help conserve and enhance Arran’s landscape and heritage. The seasonal position, funded by NatureScot’s Green Recovery Fund, will see Alex Rose fulfilling a number of tasks to preserve and promote Arran’s outdoors.

Alex will engage directly with members of the public, educating the increasing numbers of visitors to the island about responsible behaviour through the promotion of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Alex has already started working to identify visitor hotspots and is discussing solutions to access issues in these areas. In particular, he will assess the impact on the path network, wildlife and



The access ranger position, along with this e-bike, left, was made possible by NatureScot’s Green Recovery Fund.



Alex Rose engages with a family visiting the island.

residents. He co-ordinated a volunteer work party last Wednesday where volunteers tackled invasive species, lined the boardwalk and cleaned

up the beach on the Coastal Way at Condon. In addition to the hands-on work and responsibilities, Alex will also work with island stakeholders to create networks and reinforce connections between the many organisations which share the aims of conserving and enhancing Arran’s natural heritage.

Alex will, where possible, make use of a low carbon e-bike to travel around the island. It was included in the funding for the role and is branded with Arran Access Trust and Arran Geopark logos.

To report cases of careless camping, overgrown paths and other access issues, Alex can be reached at ranger@arran.rock.co.uk or by searching for @ArranGeopark on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.



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Figure 5: Press coverage received in the Arran Banner

### 1.3 Visitor Engagement

One of the tasks of the Access Ranger was to provide friendly dialogue with campers and campervanners at hotspot sites. The intention was not just to ensure that campers were acting responsibly but also to provide information, for example, on wildlife sightings; location of visitor facilities; and recommending activity providers.

When not out-and-about the ranger also provided a presence at the Geopark's Lochranza Information Centre – which would otherwise have been unmanned. The centre provides a hub for the north end of the island, minutes from the ferry terminal, where facilities and information are otherwise scarce.



**Figure 6: Public engagement at a popular camping/campervan location and at a COP26 ‘fringe’ event held on the island**

Engagement with local people was also an important part of the project. The Ranger Service took part in two high-profile events held in collaboration with other local charities – these were an ‘e-bike open day’ and a ‘COP26 Fringe’ event. At the latter event public opinion through a ‘placemaking’ exercise (see Figure 7, below) looking at the challenges the island faces today and the potential solutions to these. A short survey was also given to visitors regarding the Ranger Service and the island’s bid for UNESCO Global Geopark status – this is presented in Section 2. Visitor Management Surveys & Monitoring.



**Figure 7: Public comments from a wide-ranging ‘placemaking’ exercise looking at Arran’s today (left) and future ideas for the island in 2030 (right).**

Top Issues	Resulting Impacts	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volume of road traffic</li> <li>• Poor access provision for walkers, cyclist, and less-abled</li> <li>• Poor public transport provision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Danger caused by vehicle traffic and lack of off-road routes</li> <li>• Put off using main roads when not in a car</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better/more public toilets</li> <li>• Improved bus service</li> <li>• Lower speed limit</li> <li>• More off-road/segregated routes</li> </ul>

**Figure 8: Summary of the issues, impacts and solutions identified during consultation with visitors and local people.**

It is also worth noting the positives that were highlighted through this process. There is a keen appreciation of the island’s wildlife, its natural heritage, its scenic value, and the accessibility of all of this within a small geographical area.

### 1.4 Practical Maintenance Tasks

Practical maintenance involving improvements to paths, signage, gates, litter-picking and beach cleans were of course central to the role of the Access Ranger. Reactive maintenance was also a key part of this project. Areas of concern were highlighted by AAT staff/volunteers and also as part of the ongoing consultation with landowners/stakeholders during the project. The power of social media was also utilised – posts and private messages were received from individuals to highlight issues. This enabled an element of ‘crowd



sourcing’ to identify high-priority issues. A phone number was also made available so that any issues could be easily reported.

Ongoing maintenance of facilities/infrastructure around the island was also a key outcome for the project. This would be otherwise be carried out by AAT volunteers (and others) or would in some cases be neglected until funds to carry out repairs or replacement would then be sought. As an example, costly path building that has been grant funded in previous years requires ongoing maintenance – this can be as simple as drain clearance – to ensure that paths are not washed-out during flood events. The introduction of a permanent island-wide Ranger Service would ensure that such assets are retained in good condition in the long-term for the benefit of locals and visitors.

Non-native species removal is considered in the following section.



**Figure 9: Litter picking from Brodick beach**



**Figure 10: Restoring fire pit damage by the Arran Coastal Way near Sannox**

### **1.5 Non-Native Invasive Species Removal**

Two high-priority non-native invasive species ('NNIS') - Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam - were tackled as part of the project. These are most prominent on the island along the coastline and a frequent backdrop for walkers of the Arran Coastal Way, particularly in the vicinity of the East coast villages.

Chemical treatment of knotweed was limited due to pesticides training being unavailable or fully booked during the project period. However, in collaboration with the National Trust for Scotland's Ranger Service, a stand of knotweed was cut and stem-injected in preparation for path works.

Himalayan balsam was tackled using hand-held slashers to cut back vegetation prior to seed dispersal. The practice will be continued around the island and is an excellent opportunity for volunteer groups to take practical action, with results that are satisfyingly easy to see.

### **1.6 Managing & Instructing Volunteer Groups**

Three volunteer events were organised. Two were work meets working involving path maintenance and NNIS work. The third was a craft event where volunteers created a mural depicting the Gaelic 'tree alphabet' – where each letter is represented by a different tree species. The event raised our profile in the local area and has helped us gain funding from North Ayrshire Council to provide services to Gaelic language and culture.



***Figure 11: Assisting the Arran Beach Buddies group at Blackwaterfoot beach***

# Gaelic Tree Alphabet completed at craft day

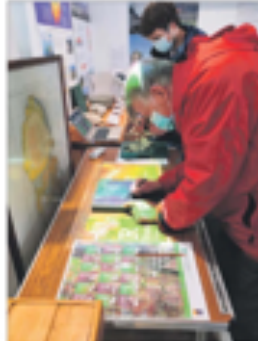
Volunteers of all ages enjoyed a day of arts and crafts in the Geopark information centre at the Lochranza Centre last Saturday.

They were crafting a Gaelic Tree Alphabet mural which will be installed shortly outside in the Geopark garden, where they are planting specimens of Arran's native trees and shrubs.

The Gaelic Tree Alphabet, or Celtic Tree Alphabet, has each letter assigned a tree or plant name. The Gaelic alphabet has 18 letters represented by 18 tree species.

Arran Geopark project co-ordinator Malcolm Wilkinson said: "We would like to thank all the amazing group of volunteers for their painstaking skills and to Forestry and Land Scotland for kindly donating the wooden boards - old green Forestry Commission signs that have now been recycled."

The information centre and garden are open to the public every day.



A volunteer hard at work on an etching.



More of the volunteers with their finished work.



The finished 18 letter alphabet.



Children show off their finished work.



Some of the finished alphabet letters.



A close-up shot of the alphabet work.

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Figure 12: Press coverage of the Gaelic tree alphabet event


## 1.7 Leading Guided Walks

The addition of the ranger to our small team (1 employee, several volunteers) allowed us to organise four additional guided walks to our existing seasonal walks programme. Due to the ranger's ecological background these were focussed on natural heritage, plant life, foraging and folklore. This contributed to the Geopark's aims of telling the island's story and expanding the offering and image of the Geopark beyond the geological heritage of the area

– this is a key part of our management plan and towards gaining UNESCO Global Geopark status.



**Figure 13: The Access Ranger guiding ‘Rock to Rainforest’ walk participants**

<p> <b>Jodie Wilson</b> recommends <a href="#">Arran Geopark</a>. 26 October at 12:54 · 🌐</p> <p>Super geowalk with Alex and a lovely bunch of people from rock to rainforest! Loved it! Interesting discussion and people. Thank you! Keep up the great work Jodie</p>	<p><i>“Just wanted to thank you for the walk from Pirnmill which I did appreciate very much... Your informative but easy style made the walk highly pleasurable”.</i></p>
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**Figure 14: Feedback from walk participants**

### **1.8 Recording of Visitor Impacts across the island, in particular damage to the path network, landscape and wildlife**

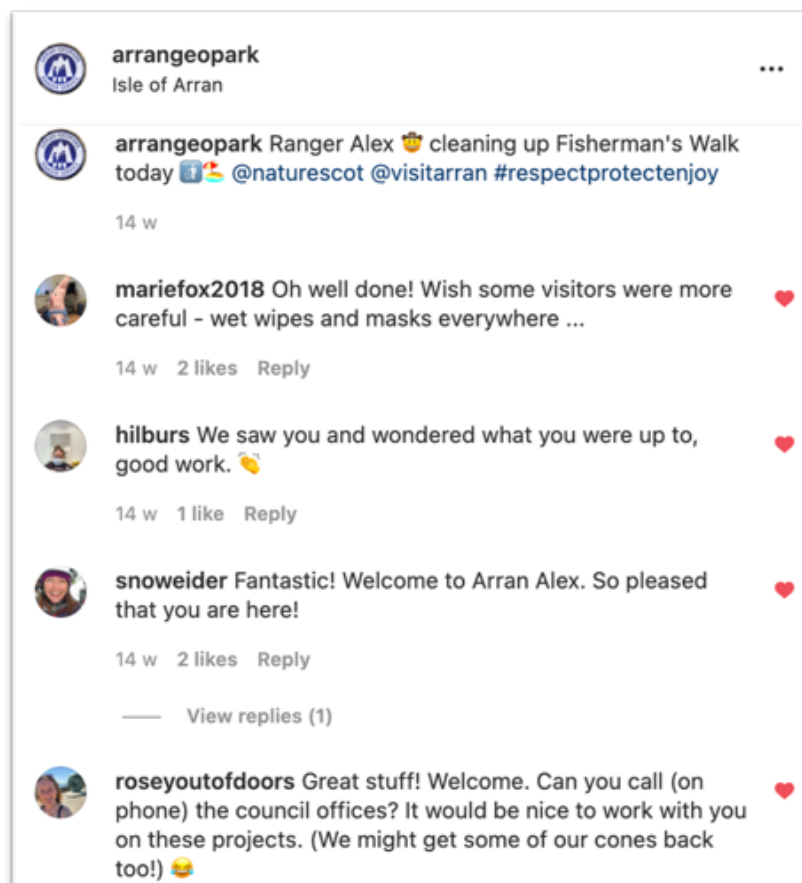
We have begun monitoring visitor numbers this year via path counters at three key locations on the Arran Coastal Way. These have already proved helpful in our discussion with North Ayrshire Council and landowners to illustrate the popularity of footpaths and the

contribution they make to the local area. This data is shown in Section 2. Visitor Management Surveys & Monitoring.

A baseline photographic survey of the Arran Coastal Way was conducted in Spring 2020 by Arran Access Trust staff. This has highlighted the high-priority areas where action is required. As the Arran Coastal Way is a Nation Long-Distance Trail and one of Scotland's 'Great Trails', it is of course an important part of the island's access network – for visitors as well as locals. The Coastal Way has the dual pressures of erosion by walkers in combination with the impacts of coastal erosion. Predicted future increase as a result off sea-level rise as well as more frequent and higher magnitude storm events are likely to impact further on the route.

### 1.9 Measurement of the success of any Visitor Management interventions

The success of the Access Ranger role has been gauged through monitoring of key 'hotspot' sites by the ranger and ongoing communication with landowners and other stakeholders. As the Ranger Service covering the island as a whole is a new concept, part of the role has been to raise awareness of the benefits of the service. A survey was carried out which indicated strong support for the Ranger Service, this is discussed in the following section.

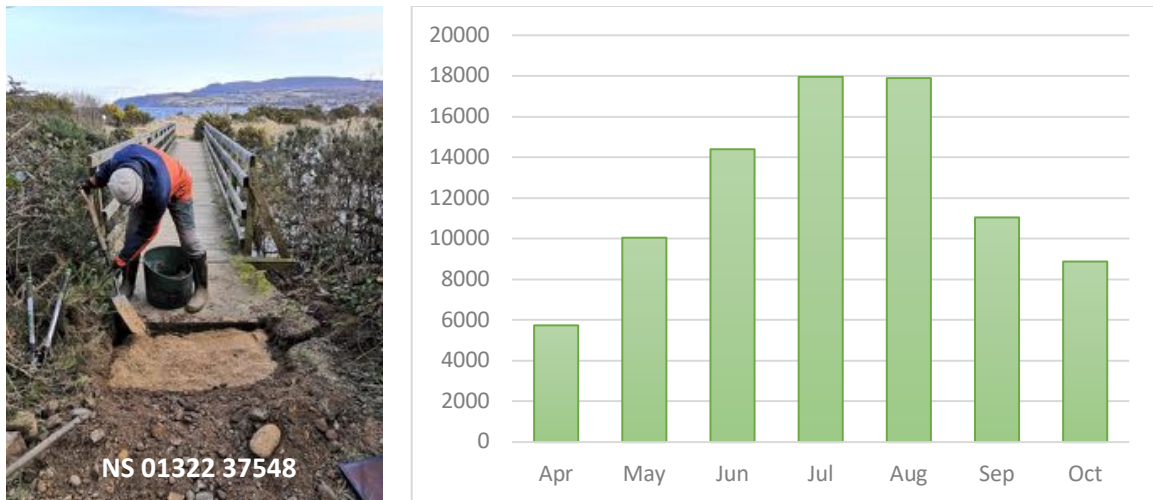


**Figure 15: Instagram comments following the introduction of the Access Ranger**

## 2. Visitor Management Surveys & Monitoring

### 2.1 Path Counter Data

Footfall data is provided below for a popular section of the Arran Coastal Way, at Cladach, close to Brodick. The monitor is a small data logger connected to a buried pressure pad. This is considered to be one of the most popular footpaths on Arran, due to its proximity to the main ferry terminal, and being used as a through route to NTS Brodick Castle, Country Park, & Goatfell. For the peak months of June, July, and August; the average daily count was 541 and the maximum in any day was 1041. Due to path users being constrained by access to a bridge, this is considered to be an accurate indicator of footfall.



**Figure 16: Footpath counter location and monthly totals for Cladach, near Brodick**

### 2.2 Public Survey Data

A survey was printed and offered to attendees of Arran Geopark's station at the COP26 Fringe event at the Ormidale Pavillion, Brodick, on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> September 2021. The survey is shown below. Respondents were anonymous visitors and residents of Arran.



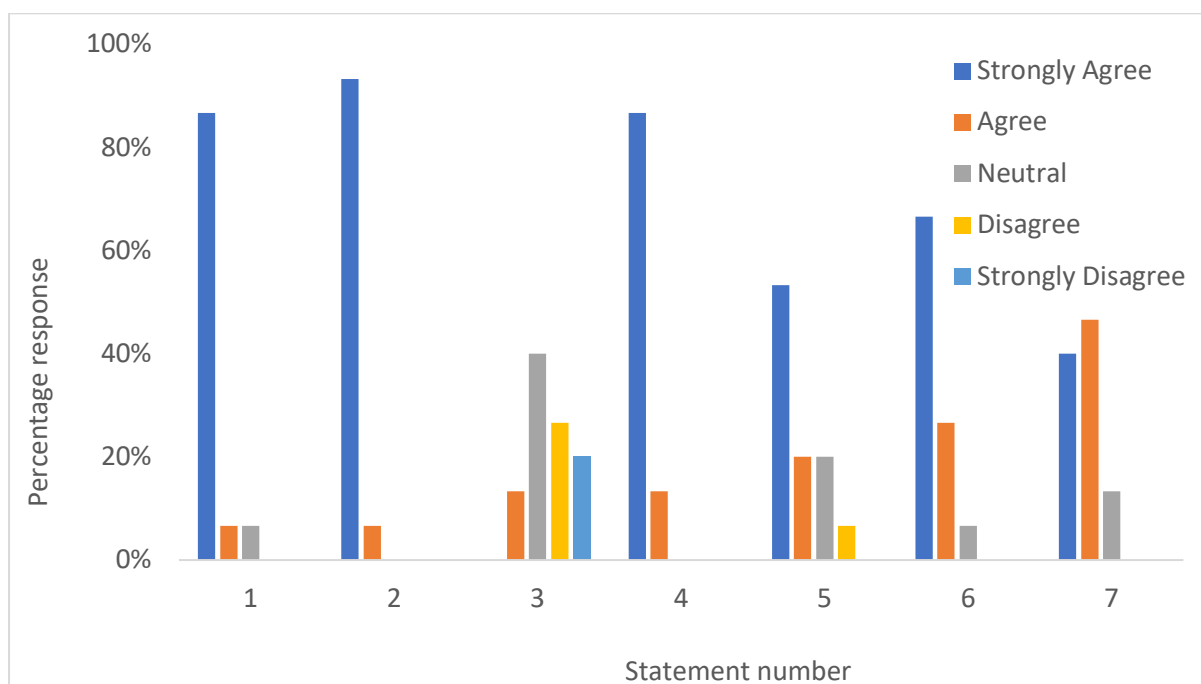
### Listening to you!

Please rank how much you agree or disagree with the statements below on the following scale:

1 – Strongly disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neutral 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

1. Arran would benefit from a seasonal Ranger Service
2. Arran would benefit from a permanent Ranger Service
3. Tourism on Arran is currently sustainable
4. UNESCO Global Geopark status would be worthwhile
5. A goal of Net Zero Carbon for the island is achievable
6. I would like to be more involved in Geopark activities
7. I would volunteer for the Geopark

**Figure 17: The survey given to attendees of the COP26 Fringe event.**



**Figure 18: Responses (n=15 respondents) to statements using a Likert scale.**

Respondents were strongly supportive of a seasonal or permanent Ranger Service – over 85% of respondents thought so. There was less clarity over the current sustainability of tourism on the island. UNESCO Global Geopark status was supported by all participants. Almost 80% of respondents considered that it was possible for the island to achieve net zero. Lastly, the vast majority of participants would like to be involved in Geopark activities or to volunteer.



### 3. Challenges Encountered

The main challenge at the project outset during the recruitment phase. No applicants from the island were forthcoming, despite job share arrangement being made available and an above-average salary being offered. Local applicants were initially preferred due to the limited availability of affordable housing on the island. This is an ongoing and well documented issue for the island (Arran Economic Group (Arran Economic Group / Arran Development Trust)).

Volunteer work meets were limited due to the availability of volunteers. Despite advertising widely, volunteers were not forthcoming. This may be as a result of Covid – generally volunteers on the island are retired and may be more reluctant to engage in activities with others.

An additional ranger would have helped greatly in the Access Ranger's work. Existing AAT staff were often assisting with tasks – particularly important in more remote locations where lone working should be avoided. In future we would look to recruit at least a pair of rangers.

### 4. Unintended Benefits of the Project

As part of the ongoing consultation with community groups and other stakeholders, a number of unintended benefits arose during the project period. These are briefly summarised here:

- **Arran Gin Company**
  - As a result of our popular “Foraging & Folklore” guided walks, the Arran Gin Company has suggested organising future events together involving foraging and using their premises for fundraising activities.
- **Beach Buddies**
  - Practical support is planned to continue to assist with their activities.
- **Brodick Golf Club**
  - Plans for Japanese knotweed removal on the golf club's land.
- **COAST (Community of Arran Seabed Trust)**
  - Potential for a joint funding bid for ‘blue’ and ‘green’ rangers - covering the island's marine and terrestrial natural heritage.
- **Dougarie Estate**
  - Proposed development of “aires”, other facilities, and donation for campervan parking.
  - Proposed development of signage at key locations (see Next Steps, below).
- **Drumadoon Farm**

- Future collaboration is planned focussed on regeneration of this important site and visitor interpretation at their proposed visitors' centre.
- **North Ayrshire Council**
  - Funding has been secured for services to Gaelic language and heritage (see Next Steps, below).
- **Northlight Heritage/University of Glasgow**
  - Assistance was given as part of an archaeological test pit on a significant new discovery.

## 5. Next Steps

Through our coordination with Dougarie Estate it has been identified that and camper van impacts are one of their key priorities along their extensive seafront between Machrie and Lochranza (ca. 55km). Signage at key locations along this coast would be installed as part of this. These would include up to date notices highlights, for example high fire risk or stalking activities. A further project involves trialling a system of donations for 'wild' camping in hotspot sites along the west coast – this would provide a small income for environmental projects and for the estate.

*"We would gladly pay a nightly fee to park up and enjoy Arran's west coast... Especially if it contributed to local environmental projects". **Campervan visitor, August 2021***

We are also considering plans for a sustainable 'voluntourism' strategy. This would involve visitors paying to take part in work meets, for example, NNIS work or path maintenance. Such activities have proved popular for several environmental organisation (e.g. NTS, Trees for Life, John Muir Trust) and it is hoped that this could be a sustainable way to fund the Ranger Service in the long-term and achieve our environmental aims.

Lastly, North Ayrshire Council has awarded us with a 'small service agreement' to provide service to Gaelic language and culture. We are in the process of developing this in coordination with NAC. It is likely to involve guided walks, events, and signage interpreting place names and their relationship with the landscape.