

Exciting changes are coming to RSPB Scotland Loch Leven. With growing numbers of visitors coming to the reserve or accessing the Loch Leven Heritage Trail, the site is now reaching capacity at peak times and the facilities and immediate area around the buildings are tired and in need of some TLC.

We are thrilled to therefore have secured the majority of the funding from the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund and The People's Postcode Lottery, that will not only improve facilities for visitors, creating an even better visitor experience, but will also improve accessibility to nature for more people and improve the environmental sustainability of the reserve.

The project will deliver an expansion of the car park, installing electric vehicle charging points and increasing the number of disabled parking spaces. Part of the courtyard buildings will be converted into a new toilet wing. It will contain a Changing Places toilet, an accessible toilet, two family cubicles and gender inclusive toilets, taking into consideration different religious needs. We will then make a new bright welcome area in the void of the 'old' toilets, which will connect to the shop. In the shop a new outdoor optics trial area will be created for those wishing to try before they buy and getting expert advice from our staff. Our very popular café will be given a face lift allowing visitors to enjoy the usual freshly made produce with stunning views across the loch. New nature inspired interpretation will be added to the site, all leading to an enhanced visitor experience.

Once all the changes are in place, we will introduce a car park charge of £3.00 per car (RSPB members and blue badge holders park for free) and stop the current entry fee charges for the Wetland Trail. This will make the whole reserve experience a more cost-effective family day out. It will contribute to the ongoing management of the reserve and its infrastructure to ensure it remains an amazing place for wildlife and people.

### **When is it all happening?**

As ever these things never run to the original timetable and our planned start date has slipped later into the year. Therefore, we have had to take the difficult decision to **close the car park, toilets and visitor centre** for the first half of the works programme to ensure the project can be completed as quickly and safely as possible. This means that **from Monday 19<sup>th</sup> April the site will be handed over to the contractors**. Unfortunately, the phased approach to the works that we had expected to deliver is going to be extremely difficult to achieve and at the same time keep our visitors and staff safe. The Health & Safety implications of having visitors in what effectively will become a building site, was too great a risk for us to accept.

The first half of the programme will involve completing the car park works, a large amount of the renovation work on the visitor centre and part of the new toilet wing. We will then be able to **open the car park** and hopefully some of the visitor centre safely, albeit with some disruption to visitors, from around the **middle of June**. Toilets will also be available on site.

The whole programme of works is scheduled to last 16 weeks, which our contractors are keen to hit, and so we are aiming to be complete on **Friday 6 August**. However, as anyone who has done any building or renovation work will know, things do crop up along the way that wasn't expected. So please don't hold us to this date!

We appreciate the project is going to cause inconvenience to many people, and especially at a time when Covid restrictions allow people to visit and meet up with friends, and we sincerely apologise for this. We want to minimise this disruption as much as possible and get back to welcoming you all as soon as possible and ahead of summer and the school holidays in June. We would ask for your patience with us over the next few months, whilst we transform the car park, toilets and visitor centre.

**However, we are NOT completely closing the reserve.**

The trails and hides (from 26<sup>th</sup> April) are open and can be accessed via the Loch Leven Heritage Trail or the Sleeping Giant path. So please do come and visit us, it will just take some extra walking or cycling to reach us from one of the many other car parks found around Loch Leven.



There will be a member of staff or one of our wonderful volunteers about every day to speak to and ask any questions of or find out how it is all progressing.

We are also hoping to provide takeaway drinks and snacks every day from the 26<sup>th</sup> April from outside the Visitor Centre, above the underpass. We are also hoping to provide some toilet facilities in the form of Portaloos, but at the time of writing, this has not been confirmed but we will endeavour to get these in situ as soon as possible.

There is parking at several locations around the Loch, in Kinross, Burleigh Sands and Findatie and we are working with the Council's Visitor Management Group to direct people to these and ensure parking issues do not occur elsewhere whilst we are temporarily closed.

**Wildlife Protection**

When we realised the timing of the project was looking like it might be starting during the bird breeding season we fully considered and assessed any potential impacts to birds (and bats) and have concluded that any likelihood of this is minimal or nothing that couldn't be mitigated for. However, we will continue to assess this throughout the project with constant monitoring and should any breeding activity be found, then works that might affect nests will cease. Please be reassured this has been a fundamental consideration of the works.

**Further Updates**

We will be posting regular blogs with more detail about the project and how it is progressing. We will always post a link to these on our social media and on our webpage, so these are not missed.

Any other updates will also be posted on RSPB Loch Leven webpage, Facebook and Twitter feeds.

