



Organisational Update

Paper for information

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides a summary overview of the activities, progress on corporate matters and operational highlights between December and February.

2. Context

- 2.1 The Delivery Group reports, published on the Board microsite, provide greater detail on specific progress in Quarter 3 (October to December) and achievements against the 2015-16 Annual Operational Plan objectives.

3. Chief Executive Office Update

- 3.1 The Spending Review outcome decision was well received. While finding the necessary savings in our budget for next year is still be tough, we received a far more favourable settlement than many other public bodies which should be seen as a strong endorsement of the contribution we are making as an organisation.
- 3.2 The Chief Executive was invited to sit on the Scottish Government Digital Public Services Sponsor Board, representing the Rural Affairs, Forestry and Environment portfolio. The Board has met twice and seeks to co-ordinate digital transformation across different public sector services.
- 3.3 The Chief Executive hosted the Permanent Secretary, Leslie Evans on a recent visit to the Park to share a wide range of National Park Projects that have recently been delivered.

4. Conservation & Land Use Update

- 4.1 Contracts have been awarded for four Peatland Restoration projects in the National Park following successful bids to the Peatland Action fund. Site inspections on the ground are being undertaken by one of SNH's peatland officers who are working in partnership to support the Park Authority staff. The work is scheduled to be complete by the end of March 2016.
- 4.2 Whole Farm and Whole Estate Plans are currently being worked on for three holdings across the National Park. In addition, close working relationships with the Deer Management Groups within the Park and support towards the development of the

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public benefit section of draft Deer Management Plans currently being written by the groups is being well received.

- 4.3 A local landscape character assessment is to be undertaken to support the “Callander’s Pass - Mind The Gap” Landscape Partnership Programme.. The purpose is to undertake a localised assessment of the natural and cultural heritage in the project area that can then be used to strengthen the linkages between the various projects and maximise the overall benefits that the programme as a whole brings to people’s experience of the landscape.
- 4.4 Community engagement work for the SEPA-led Strathard Ecosystems Services project commenced in February with a community event in Kinlochard Village Hall on 27 February. Other partners including the Park Authority, Forest Enterprise and Stirling Council were in attendance. The community engagement element is being led by the Community Partnership. In relation to flood management in the project area, site visits have been arranged for March with Forest Research to look at the Duchray Catchment and discuss the different types of land management practices that could have downstream benefits on flooding in Strathard. Stirling Council are also currently conducting an EIA screening exercise as part of the design work for an embankment to reduce the frequency of flooding events in Aberfoyle.
- 4.5 The National Park Authority continues to be represented at the A83 Task Force meetings convened by the Minister for Transport. The debris flow nets to catch landslide material at the Rest and Be Thankful were tested on several occasions in the intense storms over the December and New Year period and generally worked well in preventing material from reaching the road. A further phase of debris flow nets is being considered to provide further protection. FCS are continuing with forest design work for the new scrub woodland that will ultimately help to stabilise the slopes above the A83.

5. Visitor Experience Update

- 5.1 Visit Scotland’s video to launch their new global brand promotional campaign ‘Scotland A Spirit of its Own’ includes stunning footage of our scenic routes installation An Ceann Mor and Loch Lomond. The Visit Scotland launch also featured the sublime culinary creations of National Park local produce champions Monachyle Mhor, who brought along their innovative National Park experience mobile restaurant. The National Park is also included in the wider promotional videos with a film featuring Ranger Fiona Thomson describing what the National Park means to her.

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- 5.2 Our Business Tourism Conference took place on the 23rd of February, over 80 businesses attended and heard about new developments in and around the Park from both the RSPB and St Peters Seminary project, we also had a presentation from Katherine Webster the Director of Cliffs of Moher a hugely successful visitor experience in Ireland. The day was expertly chaired by Prof John Lennon who provided a fascinating insight for businesses on the changing tourism environment and what it means for business in the National Park. The conference also provided an opportunity to update businesses on Your Park.
- 5.3 On 22nd February the 2018 European Championships were officially launched with Loch Lomond as the open water venue. Being part of the European Championships presents hugely exciting opportunities and we are now working closely with Glasgow Life to plan the event at Loch Lomond and to maximise the benefits to Balloch and the National Park.
- 5.4 Following the success of our food festivals in 2015 with over 60,000 attendees we are planning in 2016 to consolidate the four key festivals
- Loch Lomond spring Festival
 - Mhor Festival
 - Loch Lomond Food and Drink Festival
 - Balmaha Braw Weekend

We are also exploring introduction of new food and drink experiences with interest from a Glasgow based food market which would transfer well to the National Park.

Our guide to food and drink from the National Park is being reprinted to be distributed to all accommodation providers for the start of the season.

- 5.5 Re-surfacing work to the Loch Lomond Shores complex is nearly complete and will be inspected by our Capital Projects Team.
- 5.6 Our visitor survey interim report is giving positive results particularly indicating that visitors are valuing our food and drink offer, have a higher awareness of the National Park and more visitors are having an excellent experience.

6. Visitor Management Update

- 6.1 We have continued to support the Backbone Community Leaders programme, with direct support to a young participant from West Dunbartonshire Council who is involved with a group called 'Dates n Mates', supporting adults with learning difficulties to engage in the National Park. We have also provided support to a

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participant from the Andalus group, who support Muslims to plan their visits and come out to experience the National Park.

- 6.2 The Mountains and The People project, an Outdoor Recreation Plan priority, continues to progress well, premises have been secured at the Old Station in Balloch and the training officer for Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park has been recruited. A recent open evening for those interested in trainee posts and the activity project officer post was well attended. Interviews and selection will take place in early March. We are also supporting the recruitment of the Education and Volunteer Officer role.
- 6.3 Through increased partnership working with the Friends of Loch Lomond we have been able to reach an agreement on a range of joint delivery projects for 2016/17. These include delivery of an additional Junior Ranger Programme, the development of resources for Balloch Park, which are linked into the John Muir Way and support citizen science; and finally for the development of an education project to raise awareness of Wild Park Red Squirrel challenge. The Friends of Loch Lomond have allocated £1,500 of funding to help deliver this work.
- 6.4 We have been able to support Strathclyde University through their Student Teacher placement programme. We helped to run a session with the student teachers as part of their Learning for Sustainability project to develop a resource for Primary schools.
- 6.5 We are developing the relationship with Young Scot as a way of working smarter to help us to reach a wider range of young people, and understand their views when developing projects or plans. This relationship will help with future planning for development of the focus for this team and the next National Park Partnership Plan.
- 6.6 The John Muir Award Partnership project supported a training event for Outdoor Education Centres staff in the National Park to use the John Muir Award with their residential programmes. The focus of the presentation was on Your Park and Respect / Leave No Trace ethos that they can instil with the young people they support. ..
- 6.7 The focus of work with volunteers has been on the induction and training of the new Volunteer Rangers. We hosted our Volunteer Ranger induction day on the 30th January and had 18 of our new Volunteer Rangers in attendance. Recruitment of volunteer rangers has gone well this year and we expect to have 22 additions to our team starting in late March, ready for the Easter weekend. Volunteer Rangers receive training in first aid, mini bus training, wildflower identification and wildlife crimes.

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6.8 During Quarter 4 we received 59 requests for volunteer support. A proportion of this project delivery has been the Rhododendron Control work in partnership with the Countryside Trust, which is going well.

6.9 The Local Environmental Quality Audit (litter audit) for the 4 Your Park visitor management zones has been received from Keep Scotland Beautiful (KSB). It will be published on our website. Work is continuing with KSB to develop the necessary policies, procedures and training relating to the Authority's litter powers.

7. Rural Development Update

7.1 The remaining objections to the Local Development Plan were submitted on time to the Scottish Ministers on 9 December 2015 for 'examination'. Two Reporters have been appointed to conduct the examination which can take between 6-9 months.

7.2 Good early progress has been made to commence a focus on more strategic enabling discussions to progress the delivery of the Plan's Vision. Firstly, with a successful joint bid with West Dunbartonshire Council and Scottish Enterprise to Scottish Government for funding for a Balloch Charrette (a series of design based public workshops) due to take place in February/March and secondly a bid with Stirling Council for Callander to Sustrans Community Links Plus programme for innovative design solutions to increasing active travel in Scotland. This could provide further feasibility work, and capital funding, on new and improved bridge crossings over the River Teith as well as improved paths throughout the town.

7.3 There has also been an increased number Callander Partnership meetings in light of concern over the implications for the town due to the imminent closure of a number of shops. Advice and support has been provided with a package of proposals and options being considered by community groups and this is complimented by our work that has considered the infrastructure and development needs of the town as reflected in the work mentioned above.

7.4 Progress continues to be made by the Community Partnership on updating Community Action Plans with Buchanan, Croftamie and Kilmarnock Community Action Plans now in the final publishing stages and the St Fillans community engagement phase has now been completed. Also, the Skills Partnership Park Preview project came to an end with a highly successful event in Cameron House on 29th October where stakeholders from all sectors (government, schools, and local business) met to view the films made by the young people involved in the project. The Young Start project ended on 31st December. Plans to build on this success are being investigated.

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7.5 Built Heritage Repair Grant projects are progressing well with 5 grants paid out this quarter including one for the successful wall restoration of the listed Old School Room in Gartmore. 2 projects are on site with a further 4 due to commence in Q4 covering a wide range of repair and restoration work.

8. Commercial Development Update

8.1 The Director of Estates and Commercial Development has now been appointed on to the board of the National Park Partnerships (NPP). A Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) was chosen as the preferred company structure. NPP have appointed a Development Director and this role commenced on 7th March. The internal launch of the NPP is in London on 16th March.

9. Corporate Update

9.1 Marketing and Communications

9.1.1 The Mountains & The People. The Communications Team at the Park Authority are providing strategic brand consultancy and design services as a contribution in kind to The Mountains & The People project. The logo and brand guidelines were created in January and approved by the Steering Group. Our Communications team are currently supporting the Programme Manager in developing a Communications plans for the project. Working with the partners the five-year project will embed the 'communications at the heart' approach in this landscape scale project.

9.1.2 Website. The new National Park website is progressing well. The site will built around user needs and from our user research phase, three core segments were identified:

- Discoverer/Planner - largely visitors looking for inspiration on things to see and do or information to help them plan a trip to the Park.
- Doing Business - this is someone coming to the website with a specific interaction with the Park in mind - they primarily deal with us on Authority/business affairs.
- Enthusiast - enthusiasts are very passionate about the National Park and are keen to know more about how we are caring for the Park, and even how they can get involved.

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The designs and our functional specification (what features the site will have) have been developed; the next stage is to develop a working 'prototype'. Our target launch date is the end of June.

9.2 HR Update

9.2.1 Hot off the press – we are No: 89 in the top 100 not-for-profit companies to work for. The roll out of individual team results is almost complete and team action plans will be developed over the coming months, with organisation-wide actions plans being produced for Leadership, My Manager, Fair Deal and for the first time, Wellbeing.

9.2.2 We have now submitted our application to become a Living Wage Accredited Employer. This accreditation enables us to be recognised for paying our staff a fair, decent wage. On becoming accredited, we will be awarded the Living Wage Employer Mark which is a fairtrade mark for responsible pay. We should know whether our application has been successful over the next few weeks.

9.3 Legal Update

9.3.1 Affordable Housing Commuted Sum Protocols have now been agreed with all four Councils which have housing authority responsibilities in the National Park.

9.4 Infrastructure/Shared Services Update

9.4.1 Productive discussions and good progress is being made regarding sharing services; particularly with our RAFF partners and Local Authorities. One example is we will have a joint Health and Safety service managed by SEPA alongside the recruitment of a Health and Safety intern which is expected to be a model of good practice and able to be replicated going forward.

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