

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 8



## Your Park: Camping Development Strategy

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### *Paper for decision*

#### 1. Purpose

- 1.1. On 26<sup>th</sup> January 2016 the Minister for the Environment, Climate Change & Land Reform, confirmed approval of the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Camping Management Byelaws 2017, with modifications. In making this decision, the Minister noted and welcomed the Park Authority's commitment that 300 camping spaces would be made available within the Camping Management Zones by the time the byelaws become operational on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017.
- 1.2. The Camping Development Strategy ('the Strategy') attached to this report sets out how it is proposed that this undertaking will be delivered, not only by providing 300 places for camping within the Camping Management Zones by the time the byelaws come into operation on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017, but also how the Park Authority will invest in facilities within 2017 and in subsequent years. This report seeks the approval of the Board for the proposed amount and location of provision and the priorities for investment set out in the Strategy and to authorise officers to implement the specific investment priorities recommended to be in place for 2017 .
- 1.3. The new Camping Management Zones include the amended East Loch Lomond Camping Management Zone. In order for the new byelaws to operate the Park Authority must begin the process of publishing statutory notices both to notify the public of the new byelaws and to begin the process of revoking the current East Loch Lomond Camping Management Byelaws, which is being replaced. This report also requests that Members agree that officers commence this process.

#### 2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- 2.1 Approve the Camping Development Strategy attached as Appendix 1 to this report, and specifically;
  - a) Approve the overall provision of camping places proposed across the four Camping Management Zones for 2017,
  - b) Approve the recommended priorities for investment in camping facilities for the 2017 season and agree the priorities indicated for beyond 2017,
  - c) Authorise officers to proceed with the implementation of camping facilities recommended to be delivered for the 2017 season, and;
- 2.2 Approve the commencement of the formal process to;
  - a) Revoke the existing East Loch Lomond Camping Byelaws

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- b) Notify the public of the new Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Camping Management Byelaws 2017 coming into operation on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017.

### 3. Background

- 3.1. Following the decision by the Minister for the Environment, Climate Change & Land Reform in January 2016 to approve the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Camping Byelaws, the Park Authority Board approved a report at its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2016, authorising officers to proceed with preparations to implement the byelaw coming into operation by 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017. Members also agreed that officers should conclude proposals setting out how camping opportunities will be provided within the four Camping Management Zones to meet the undertaking by the Park Authority that 300 places would be available when the byelaw becomes operational.
- 3.2. Within the letter which the Park Authority submitted to Scottish Ministers seeking approval for the byelaw and the Camping Management Zones, the following undertaking was made:

*“Within these proposals we are committing to delivering 300 camping places in the first year of the byelaws operating, with more to be added in subsequent years. We ...will ensure that within the proposed Management Zones there are a good range of sustainable informal camping opportunities.*

*The proposed byelaws are essential to enable us to deliver:*

- 1. *A permit system to allow informal camping within defined areas of the Management Zones*
- 2. *Campsites with low-cost bookable pitches and basic facilities*

*A camping permit scheme will provide the opportunity for sustainable levels of informal camping within a Camping Management Zone. Involving limited investment of time and money upfront, this allows us to provide sustainable levels of provision up to a defined maximum number, centrally administered with a small administration charge.*

*In addition, within suitable locations, we will develop basic low-cost campsites for visitors looking for a slightly more managed facility whilst retaining the feel of a wilder camping experience.*

- 3.3. Since these decisions were made, significant work has been undertaken to prepare a Camping Development Strategy that supports the key outcomes of the Your Park project and provides the vastly improved camping experience in those areas, focussed on the Camping Management Zones covering less than 4% of the Park, the

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Strategy sets out how the Park Authority will provide better managed camping opportunities where previously high camping volumes coupled with irresponsible and antisocial camping were degrading the Park's environment and creating a very poor visitor experience. The Camping Management Zones were defined to reflect those areas where camping impacts have been most significant and which are easily accessed from public roads.

### 4. The Camping Development Strategy

Your Park Vision

- 4.1. The Camping Development Strategy outlines our plans to realise the vision for camping and enjoying recreation opportunities as set out in the National Park Partnership Plan 2012-17, which states:

*"The National Park is a place for visitors to enjoy.*

*[There will be] lots of different activities for everyone on and around the Park's many Lochs.....*

*There will be a variety of high quality campsites where people from all backgrounds can pitch their tents without degrading the environment....*

*Motorhomes have places to stop that provide the right facilities all across the Park...*

*All are provided at reasonable cost."*

- 4.2. The transformation of the experience of these heavily used lochshore areas is fundamental to realising the National Park's wider ambition to provide an outstanding outdoor recreation experience alongside improving the range and quality of access opportunities and facilities which support recreation activities. The update report on the National Park Outdoor Recreation Plan, provided elsewhere on this agenda, demonstrates the unprecedented number of projects and scale of investment (now reaching £5m) that is being made in the National Park to promote and improve access and recreation opportunities.
- 4.3. The accessibility of these high quality recreation experiences for so much of the Scottish population means there is also an excellent opportunity to contribute to improving health outcomes by encouraging more people to get active in the outdoors. The growing popularity of many outdoor recreation activities will also benefit the local tourism economy as more people visit and stay in the area.

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- 4.4. By addressing many of the negative aspects associated with irresponsible camping it is aimed that the popularity of the area will increase, the experience will be improved, the environment will be protected, creating confidence for local communities, landowners and businesses to consider providing more camping and accommodation opportunities. In turn this will support the enjoyment of outdoor recreation in the Park, and increase the benefits to the local economy.

### Your Park Consultation

- 4.5. When the Your Park consultation was conducted it was key to seek views on where the Park Authority should seek to prioritise camping provision. A series of proposed 'areas of opportunity' were set out in the consultation and comments invited.
- 4.6. The main points made in the responses were to ensure that any new provision was well managed and supervised, particularly in areas which currently suffer from issues. Facilities should be designed to include toilets and a water supply and retain a wild feel avoiding over-crowding. The response to the overarching question of whether the National Park Authority should be investing in improving camping provision was 79% in favour. The support for the suggested priority areas for improved provision was 70% in favour.
- 4.7. The outcome of this part of the consultation has contributed towards the preparation of our proposals and priorities for investment.

### Approach to Identifying Camping Areas

- 4.8. The Camping Development Strategy seeks to achieve the vision for camping by providing low cost, informal opportunities to camp through a mix of informal campsites and by identifying areas within the Camping Management Zones where it will be possible to camp through the issuing of camping permits. Some of these permit areas will have access to basic services like toilets and parking.
- 4.9. Wherever possible, opportunities to accommodate motorhomes are also identified. Opportunities are limited in number within each site due to the desire to meet a range of visitor needs from within constrained sites. The National Park Authority will continue to work with businesses and landowners in the Park to encourage more opportunities to meet needs in suitable locations.
- 4.10. Within the National Park area as a whole, there are currently more than 20 formal sites providing for camping and between them they have more than 700 tent pitches. Within the four Camping Management Zones there are already 11 campsites that offer camping for tents, providing a total of 504 pitches. There is significant variation in the availability of camping pitches across the Camping Management Zones and the

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prioritisation of provision has sought to address those areas where there are fewer existing camping pitches available. For example, there are currently no formal campsites at all in the Trossachs West Camping Management Zone.

- 4.11. The intention is that this investment, coupled with the operation of the camping byelaws to deal with the issues associated with irresponsible and unsustainable levels of camping, will build confidence in Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park as a place that is safe and enjoyable to come and camp. By improving the camping experience, this will increase its popularity overall and encourage other providers to develop various types of camping and accommodation related to outdoor experiences of the National Park.
- 4.12. The Camping Development Strategy sets out the overall approach that has been taken to identifying suitable sites which will provide a well managed camping experience. As well as sites being attractive and already popular for camping, a key consideration is that they can also be safely accessed by car from the public road. In a number of areas the nature of the public road is a significant constraint, either because of poor sight lines or where traffic speeds are high on busy trunk roads. Poor or unsafe vehicle access has been a significant constraint in some parts of the Camping Management Zones meaning some locations have not been promoted as camping opportunities.
- 4.13. Care has also been taken to ensure camping opportunities are well connected to other recreation opportunities in an area. Many areas are popular to camp for fishing, while others are located along long distance routes or close to popular mountain paths.
- 4.14. Members will see from Section 4 of the Camping Development Strategy that there is a good distribution of camping opportunities being provided, in excess of the 300 places which were a commitment to Scottish Ministers.

### Priorities for Investment for 2017

- 4.15. To provide a good range of camping opportunities, proposed investment is focussed in those locations where higher numbers of camping opportunities can be provided or where sites lend themselves to providing more managed campsite facilities. The presence of existing managed campsites within the Camping Management Zones also means that we have focused attention on areas where there are gaps in provision and in areas where there is potential to increase camping activity.
- 4.16. The investment of public money in facilities needs to ensure the maximum benefits to delivering the best camping experience for visitors to the Park. For this reason it is proposed to take a phased approach to investing in sites. This means that in locations

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that may be potentially suited to providing basic managed campsites, a first step of providing a permit area with services allows the popularity and use of the site to be monitored, before making further investment. Any on-site services like toilet blocks will be designed as self contained units which can be transferred to another site if necessary.

4.17. Initial investment in permit areas with services can:

- Allow for vehicle parking
- Provide toilets
- Reduce environmental impact of camping
- Help make larger permit numbers more manageable and sustainable
- Help assess the potential for full campsite provision based on initial usage

4.18. The priorities for investment have also been influenced by a range of technical factors such as site availability, physical constraints and environmental sensitivities, site popularity and the presence of visitor management issues.

4.19. The introduction of camping facilities is expected to require a number of permissions as physical works are involved. The approval of the Camping Development Strategy represents the agreement of overall provision and priorities for improvements of facilities. More detailed plans will require to be designed and may in some cases require planning permission. The agreement of priorities does not presume the outcome of any planning application processes. Where planning applications are required, consultations will be undertaken and planning issues considered in the normal way before an application is determined.

4.20. The Camping Development Strategy identifies the following priorities for delivery in 2017:

### Campsites

#### **West Trossachs**

Loch Chon - Indicative Construction Cost - £250,000

### Permit Areas with Facilities

#### **North Trossachs**

South Loch Earn - Indicative Cost - £180,000

Three Lochs Forest Drive (Loch Achray) - Indicative Cost - £180,000

#### **West Loch Lomond**

Inveruglas - Indicative Cost - £110,000

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It should be noted that other areas camping opportunities are being provided where there are already some facilities in place. This includes a new campsite at Rowardennan in East Loch Lomond and providing for camping with permits at the Park Authority's existing visitor site at Firkin Point on West Loch Lomond.

- 4.21. Members are asked to agree these priorities which will be progressed utilising budgets already allocated to the Your Park project for this year.

Investment beyond 2017

- 4.22. It is proposed that investment in facilities will continue beyond the 2017 season and the Camping Development Strategy identifies priorities in each of the Camping Management Zones. Some locations will require further detailed investigation to identify the most appropriate site or type of investment. The use and popularity of campsites and permit areas will be monitored during 2017 to help inform future investment decisions.

- 4.23. Members are asked to agree that the priorities for investment beyond 2017 set out in the Camping Development Strategy should continue to be investigated by officers and kept under review as part of decisions over budget allocation in future financial years.

Partnership Working

- 4.24. The delivery of the Camping Development Strategy has been a product of significant partnership working. Many of the camping opportunities identified are on the National Forest Estate and are the result of significant collaborative working with Forest Enterprise Scotland. There has also been significant assistance and advice provided by roads authorities, particularly Transport Scotland in relation to trunk roads and the management of laybys, as well as local roads authorities. The new campsite at Rowardennan has been delivered by the Scottish Youth Hostel Association.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 4.25. A statutory requirement exists under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 that all public sector bodies in Scotland undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for all new qualifying strategies, plans and programmes. The SEA process is designed to ensure that consideration is given in addressing any likely significant environmental effects of new strategies, plans and programmes and to seek ways to minimise significant negative effects through avoidance or mitigation and identify significant positive environmental effects.

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4.26. Undertaking the SEA process alongside the development of Your Park has ensured that the maximum benefits for the environment have been achieved across the project as it has developed. Alternatives and therefore mitigation has not been found necessary, as 'Your Park' has been an evolving piece of work and the objectives and interventions within the initiative have generated significant positive effects on the environment. The SEA documentation produced to date can be made available to Members on request.

### Signage

4.27. An essential part of the project is ensuring that there is sufficient signage in place to ensure that visitors are both aware that they are entering into a Camping Management Zones where byelaws apply and also that they are directed to those areas that are permitted for camping. Work is well advanced to design and identify suitable locations for signage and there is excellent partnership working taking place with roads authorities to support the implementation of roadside signage.

### Monitoring

4.28. In approving the byelaws, Scottish Ministers asked for an annual update on the implementation of the byelaws and a formal report reviewing the operation of the byelaws no later than three years after implementation. To deliver against that Ministerial request and in order to learn from the project the impact of the new camping management measures will be monitored and evaluated. This will include reviewing what works, and what modifications have to be made to deliver the best outcome for the Park, and critically whether the instances of environmental damage and irresponsible behaviour are being reduced whilst improving the overall camping experience.

4.29. A Stakeholder Forum has been set up; its membership includes representation across the key organisations and groups who have an interest in the difference the Your Park measures will make. This forum will meet at least twice yearly and will provide an opportunity to keep key partners and stakeholders informed of progress on the planning and implementation of the new camping byelaws, which begin on 1st March 2017. The forum will also provide an open line of communication between partners, stakeholders and the National Park Authority to ensure that a wide range of perspectives feed into the management and monitoring of the byelaws.

## 5. Camping Management Byelaws: Statutory Notices.

5.1. In order to conclude the statutory processes for the new Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Camping Management Byelaws to come into operation on 1st March 2017 there are two final steps required.

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Completing the confirmation process for the new 2017 byelaws

- 5.2. The final steps required by the statute are to publish a public notice informing the public of the confirmation of the new byelaws and when they will come into operation. The notice should appear in all the relevant local newspapers and copies of the byelaws made available in libraries and Park Authority offices. Copies of the byelaws are also to be sent to the respective local authorities.

Revoking the East Loch Lomond Camping Management Byelaws 2011

- 5.3. As the existing East Loch Lomond byelaws are being replaced steps need to be taken to revoke them using the process detailed in the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (the "1973 Act"), which applies to the Park Authority by virtue of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 (the "2000 Act"). This involves the following steps:
- a public notice is placed in the newspaper local to the area to which the byelaws apply stating the intention to revoke the East Loch Lomond byelaws by resolution, at least one month prior to the date for revocation.
  - the Park Authority must take into account any objections made in response to the public notice, before deciding whether to revoke the East Loch Lomond byelaws.
  - the National Park Board considers the recommendation to approve the resolution to revoke the East Loch Lomond byelaws (subject to the consideration of any objections).
  - the East Loch Lomond byelaws are revoked on the day that the resolution is passed or another later date as specified in the resolution.
- 5.4. There is no requirement for the Park Authority to obtain the Scottish Ministers' confirmation of revocation (as in the case of making byelaws) prior to taking such a decision. Once the notices have been placed and the period for objections expired, a recommendation regarding revocation will be brought back to the Board for final approval. The public notice for revocation will be published in the Stirling Observer alongside the notice for the new byelaws in order that the reason and timing for revocation is clear to the public.
- 5.5. Members are therefore requested to authorise officers to commence the processes described above.

## 6. Conclusion

- 6.1. The production of the Camping Management Strategy represents a significant and essential element of delivering the Your Park vision. The project seeks to protect our

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busiest and most heavily used lochshores while still providing for a high quality camping experience alongside other forms of access and recreation.

- 6.2. The Camping Development Strategy presents the detail of the Authority's commitment to provide for 300 camping places by the time the camping byelaws are introduced on 1st March 2017. It also represents the commitment of the Park Authority to invest in improving facilities, particularly in those areas where higher numbers of campers are being accommodated. In areas where there are fewer existing campsite facilities, there will be more access to toilets and parking. The amount of camping will be managed to minimise impacts on the environment which can occur with overuse. The operation of camping permits will also help change behaviours and help promote more responsible camping with less litter and abuse of the environment, particularly from irresponsible firelighting and damage to vegetation.
- 6.3. By concentrating on providing basic facilities and transforming some of the most heavily used lochshores, it is hoped that this will encourage other landowners, businesses and community groups to consider providing camping and motorhome facilities in appropriate locations in the wider National Park area. The significant investment that is being made to improve access, develop and enhance long distance routes and to support a range of outdoor recreation activities will attract more people to be active in the Park. This will stimulate demand and therefore opportunities to provide different types of accommodation including campsites, motorhome stop-offs and other types of outdoor accommodation such as camping pods and bunkhouse facilities.
- 6.4. The National Park Authority will therefore not only focus on providing excellent camping experiences, but will look to facilitate and encourage others to provide imaginative, affordable provision in attractive locations that offer a truly authentic and unforgettable National Park experience.

**Authors:** Carlo D'Emidio, Capital Projects Manager  
Charlotte Wallace, Volunteering, Education and Engagement Manager  
Anna MacLean, Head of Communications  
**Executive Sponsor:** Gordon Watson, CEO  
Simon Jones, Director of Conservation and Visitor Operations

Appendix 1: Camping Development Strategy