

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 9



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 June and September.

2. Context

- 2.1 The Delivery Group reports, provide greater detail on specific progress for the Quarter 1 to June 2016 and achievements against the 2016-17 Annual Operational Plan objectives.

3. Chief Executive Office Update

- 3.1 The Chief Executive has attended several digital themed meetings, events and cohorts in Scottish Government ensuring the Park Authority is well placed to take full advantage of all the economic, social and environmental opportunities offered by the digital age.
- 3.2 The Convener and the Director of Conservation & Visitor Operations attended a 'Post EU Referendum Stakeholder' event which brought together leaders from policy areas, public bodies and key stakeholders from across RAFF to explore some actions necessary to prepare for the impending exit from Europe to ensure collaboration and delivery across the portfolio is continued and not affected by recent decisions.
- 3.3 The Chief Executive recently attended the National Parks UK Ltd AGM in Broads National Park Authority and received activity updates from each of the National Parks in addition to a progress report on National Parks Partnership UK.

4. Conservation & Land Use Update

- 4.1 We have made initial contact with holdings identified for this year as being in key strategic areas for delivery of National Park and Wild Park outcomes through positive land management. Four of these holdings have registered interest and initial face-to-face meetings are currently being held to discuss opportunities for these businesses and the National Park to work together to develop pro-active Integrated Land Management plans.

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 9

Organisational Update

- 4.2 We have made contact with four of the Deer Management Groups within the park to discuss a potential collaborative project within Deer Management Groups for carrying out Habitat Impact Assessments. We have had a good response from members and are now considering the most appropriate of the options available to us for funding to enable the project to progress. The project will allow land managers to gather amongst other things browsing impact data, on a maximum of three yearly cycles, to allow for informed herbivore grazing density decisions to be made.
- 4.3 We have carried out work in collaboration with SNH and land managers to clear an area of rhododendron on Hells Glen SSSI. This has been a combination of direct removal work on one ownership, SNH supporting consultant costs for a grant application on a larger area and FES continuing work on their ownership.
- 4.4 At the RSPB Loch Lomond nature reserve, infrastructure improvements have continued. A new stock handling unit has been installed near the end of the Aber path. Two key bridges that were acquired in a near-dilapidated state have been restored, allowing full operational access for conservation management into a central part of the reserve at Snipe Flats. Two further replacement bridges are planned for later this year to improve pedestrian access across the Aber burn into the Aber Bog. Less encouraging, a small patch of the invasive New Zealand pygmyweed *Crassula helmsii* has been found at Ring Point; the first record we know of it in the Park. Action has been taken to remove it and relevant organisations alerted to look out for further occurrences.
- 4.5 We have continued to work with Scottish & Southern Energy and Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission Plc. on their VIEW/ VISTA project bid, including promotion of the Park in an SSE video and articles in the SNH quarterly e-newsletter and the Park Authority's tourism business e-newsletter.
- 4.6 The first Wild Park 2020 Forum event was held at Carrochan in June and was very successful and well-received by partners. Four Wild Challenge Action Plans were signed off by partners at the WP2020 Delivery and Monitoring Group meeting in August.
- 4.7 Conservation gains have been achieved at several development sites by securing planning conditions for Japanese knotweed control, including at the Drovers inn and native tree planting at several small developments. Discussions are underway to retain the glacial moraine feature at Gart Lodge near Callander. We have also been advising on the planning applications for hill path repairs under the Mountains and the People Project in order to ensure maximum gains for upland habitats and landscapes. Conservation support for the development of new hydro schemes in the

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 9

Organisational Update

National Park has continued to focus on the discharge of planning conditions, both pre-commencement and during construction. In particular we have been ensuring attention to detail during reinstatement works at various sites to ensure against local landscape character loss.

5. Visitor Experience Update

- 5.1 In partnership with Love Loch Lomond (LLL) and Friends of Loch Lomond (FOL) and the Trossachs we have successfully secured Destination Development Funding from a new Scottish Enterprise competitive programme. This was a credit to our developing partnership with LLL and FOL, as only 4 out of 10 destinations with accepted expressions of interest were successful. The c£50,000 additional funding secured by the Park Authority will be used to undertake research for monitoring the visitor experience impacts of Your Park and for tourism volume and value for monitoring for the next NPPP. It will also be used to engage businesses to develop new products and develop event capacity over the next two years.
- 5.2 Café Mocha at Luss Pier Shop opened for business in June. This achieved for the first time an outlet for information and ticket sales, including offering card payments, for all waterbus services from Luss pier.
- 5.3 The events programme for 2016 met our target of 60,000 visitors at core events and included another successful Great Scottish Swim with an additional 10km and swim run event taking place to extend programme to the Friday night.
- 5.4 Feedback from operators was positive about the waterbus services this season. The pilot waterbus service from the pontoon at Loch Lomond Shores to Inchmurrin and Inchcailloch this summer worked well for visitors and the operator and it is planned that this can be extended next year.

6. Visitor Management Update

- 6.1 Development of the systems and process required to use our Fixed Penalty Notice powers under the Environmental Protection Act has enabled 39 members of the Ranger Service and 2 other staff to be trained as authorised officers. Use of the powers went live for National Parks Week at the end of July.
- 6.2 Support to Backbone and hard to reach communities continues through: 3 Backbone Ranger led visits to the National Park, engagement with the Cycle Residential, where the team ran a NPPP session and support for the Women Engaging in Natural heritage group visit to the National Park.

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 9

Organisational Update

- 6.3 The summer term also saw the successful delivery of 2 Junior Ranger programmes with 22 Young People completing the activities in McLaren and Balfron High Schools. Summary report and pupil evaluation has been produced for key funding partners.
- 6.4 In terms of Volunteering activity, the summer season has been very busy with over 2,460 hours of work undertaken through our practical conservation tasks, which included supporting the Mountains and the People volunteer work parties, and stone pitching work with WTS at Glen Finglas as part of the Great Trossachs Forest. Our Volunteer Rangers have been really active at a wide range of events over the season also, delivering over 3847 hours. Events included utilising the Mobile Visitor Centre at Trossachs Summer Festival, Benmore Bioblitz and Callander Highland games.
- 6.5 We have had a particular focus on developing volunteering opportunities for Young People. This has involved asking pupils from our Junior Ranger programmes and from Stirling High School a range of questions, such as what skills they are looking to develop and what types of activity they would be interested in. We are also piloting support for a pupil from the Vale of Leven Academy who has additional support needs; he is excelling in the world of practical conservation projects and we have a programme of activity planned in for him for the remainder of the year.
- 6.6 The Ranger Service began its summer programme of activity in April with a total of 31 seasonal staff joining the team. Core areas of activity included:
- Land based visitor management patrolling across the park and camping byelaw enforcement on East Loch Lomond
 - Water based patrolling and byelaw enforcement on Loch Lomond
 - Management of the boat launching and visitor facilities at Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway and Milarrochy Bay
 - Management of Balmaha Visitor Centre
 - Support for the Education Outreach Programme
 - Support for the Events and Activities Programme

The Ranger Service also successfully conducted the first of 2 patrolling deployment trials planned for 2016 as part of preparations for the commencement of the Your Park camping management byelaws in March 2017.

7. Rural Development Update

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 9

Organisational Update

- 7.1 During this period, much of the activity has focused on delivery projects; for example, seeking to secure partner support for active travel improvements in Callander and Balloch, working with local authorities to ensure a focus on improvements in our communities, providing support through the Community Partnership to Strathard and Callander communities to commence the review of their Community Action Plans. The caseload of planning applications remains high as well as a focus on monitoring hydro developments with our conservation team to ensure reinstatement work is being progressed to the required standard. The following provides a brief summary of key updates.
- 7.2 Following the successful Balloch Charrette earlier in the year, working closely with partner organisations West Dunbartonshire Council and Scottish Enterprise, the final report was published in June with 5 priority project areas identified with lead public bodies identified:
- Balloch Castle and Country Park
 - West Riverside Development Site
 - Events
 - Car Parking Management
 - Public Realm Improvements to create Village and Station Squares
- Early work has commenced to scope out the work identified in each project.
- 7.3 The examination of LIVE Park: Proposed Local Development Plan continued during this period – the conclusion of this process is outlined in a separate report.
- 7.4 The annual Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning's shortlist was announced in June with the Park Authority's two submissions being shortlisted for awards. These were for the design and approach to the LIVE Park: Proposed Local Development Plan and our Built Heritage Repair Grant Scheme. This is more great recognition to our successful approach to both our Local Development Plan preparation and for our heritage led regeneration programme which is now in its fourth year.
- 7.5 The Built Heritage Repair Grant Scheme again has proved popular with 61 enquiries which resulted in 26 applications from across the National Park which including a range of properties from businesses to residential and community buildings.
- 7.6 In July our annual Planning Performance Framework was submitted to Scottish Government. Members will recall that this is a review of our planning performance against key 'markers' identified by the Government for which all 34 Scottish Planning Authorities are assessed against. It is an important document to demonstrate the work our planning service delivers for the National Park but also to

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 9

Organisational Update

ensure ongoing service improvements are identified with associated actions that are reviewed in future years. It was interesting to note that while there was a jump in planning applications determined during the last financial year, the National average was one of slight decline.

- 7.7 Development activity in terms of the number of planning applications and the implementation of these continues to be busy. Key decisions during this period was in Balmaha - the Former Highland Way hotel site re-development – this key central site in Balmaha has a long planning history. This approval ensures a high quality tourism development which will expand the accommodation offer as well as restaurant and a smokehouse. The final scheme amendment for the Finnartmore affordable housing site in Kilmun was also approved which now means this development by Fyne Homes can be completed. This project has been progressed over a number of years, requiring significant planning input and it is great to have reached the point when the first tenants are expected to move into their new homes in August.

8 Commercial Development Update

- 8.1 The latest National Parks Partnerships 'leads' chart has 67 active discussions with businesses from a wide range of sectors. These include food and drink, retail and automotive. We hope that a number of the 'Hot' leads will turn into sponsorship deals in the not too distant future.

9 Corporate Update

9.1 Marketing and Communications

- 9.1.1 The Park Authority's new website launched in August 2016. The site has been completely redesigned, is now 'responsive', has more focused content and clearer navigation. Early indications (from analytics data) are that the site is performing well with all key metrics up year-on-year.
- 9.1.2 The updated 'Respect Your Park' campaign was launched in July to coincide with National Parks Week. The campaign aims to ensure people understand how to show respect for the environment and for other people, so that everyone who comes to the National Park can make the most of the outdoors. Activity to raise awareness of the 'Respect Your Park' messages included in-store activity with Go Outdoors stores in Scotland, a full page feature in the Daily Record, online activity and updated educational materials for the Ranger Service and local stop off points to distribute to visitors.

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 9

Organisational Update

9.1.3 Following the success of the LIVE Park community engagement work at the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning 2015, we were invited to take part in a two-day workshop that the Scottish Government has set up in response to the independent Review of Planning in Scotland. These workshops will inform a white paper due later in 2016, with a view to updated planning legislation going through the Scottish Parliament in 2017.

9.2 HR Update

9.2.1 As part of our Invest in Youth Action Plan, our first two Modern Apprentices joined us in August 2016 to begin their 2 year apprenticeship in Business Administration which will see them achieve a Level 3 SVQ. In addition to this we have recruited a Creative Digital Modern Apprentice to join our Communications team who will also be working towards a Level 3 SVQ, supported by Young Scot. The recruitment of our Modern Apprentices has been achieved in partnership with West Dunbartonshire Council who we will work closely with throughout the period of the apprenticeship. It doesn't stop there though as our Communications teams are also recruiting two graduate interns for general and digital Communications for one year. This is huge progress for the Park Authority that has been embraced by all staff who are determined to show our Modern Apprentices and Interns that the Park Authority is truly an employer of choice.

9.2.2 A few months ago the new look HR System 'My Park Life' was launched providing staff with a more user friendly self-service experience and increased functionality. Initial feedback has been positive and additional functions will be rolled out once the system is fully embedded. This was a real team effort to create a system which is much more visibly appealing while ensuring that it feels like part of our business.

9.3 Governance Update

9.3.1 As expected we have received an invitation from the Office of the Keeper of the Records of Scotland to submit our Records Management Plan to them by the end of February 2017.

9.4 Legal Update

9.4.1 Renyana Stahl Anstalt v LLTNPA – appeal against access enforcement notice at Drumlean Estate, Aberfoyle. An appeal has been lodged by the Park

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 9

Organisational Update

Authority against the Sheriff's decision. The appeal hearing took place on two days in August and September 2016 in the Sheriff Appeal Court. We await the outcome.

- 9.4.2 Buchanan Home Farm, Drymen – Tree felling. An intermediate diet took place in Stirling Sheriff Court in August 2016 at which the defendant appeared. A further intermediate diet was set in October 2016 and the trial is currently set for November 2016.

9.5 Infrastructure/Shared Services Update

- 9.5.1 The RAFE Delivery Board continues to explore opportunities for partnership working within the themes of Digital, Corporate Planning, Climate Change, Communications and Community Empowerment.

West Dunbartonshire Council are providing our waste management and general buildings maintenance work and we are exploring opportunities for ICT support to increase our resilience.

Implementation of a SIP line (trunking is a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and streaming media service based on the **Session Initiation Protocol**) is now complete. As a result of this install all local, national and mobile calls from any of our sites will be non-chargeable. On decommissioning of our legacy ISDN lines a 40% reduction of telephony call charges is expected

We are upgrading our backup solution for both National Parks. While our current solution is at present meeting our needs there is a need to be pre-emptive with a new or updated back-up solution due to the way technology is changing (cloud, virtual servers, and the need for increased data storage requirements).

We continue to engage in discussions with CAPITA regarding current pricing and services that can be provided to both National Parks via SWAN network.

Authors: Managers & Executive
Executive Sponsor: Gordon Watson, CEO