

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 15



Visitor Experience Update

Paper for noting

1. Purpose

1.1 To update Board Members on current Visitor Experience projects.

2. Visitor Experience

2.1 Infrastructure

2.1.1 Signage

The final two threshold signs at Gartmore and Killin will be installed over the next month. The first phase of village welcome signs is underway with installation at three villages planned over the next three months. The redeveloped information and interpretation signage in Balloch began with the removal of any remaining old style signage at the end of February and the 16 new signs going in over the month of March. The signage will help orientate visitors, highlight attractions in Balloch and encourage visitors to explore the wider Park.

2.2 Scenic Routes

2.2.1 The NPA is now actively managing the delivery of the three pilot projects funded by Scottish Government. Following the announcement of competition winning designs, the projects have been going through the consenting and procurement process.

2.2.2 Falls of Falloch

Falls of Falloch project is currently under contract and the installation itself is being manufactured off-site for delivery and installation week commencing 24th March. Project completion at Falls of Falloch will be by 31st March with one week of post contract snagging anticipated.

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2.2.3 Loch Lubnaig

The Loch Lubnaig installation was tendered with returns delivered on 24th February. We are expecting that the contract will be awarded by the end of this week (7th March) and the contract period will run for four weeks from then.

2.2.4 Inveruglas

The Inveruglas installation is being value engineered to get it within budget and this process has been extended into next financial year. Tender returns will be by 28th March and the anticipated contract period is 7th April to 31st May 2014. It is hoped that the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment will formally open the site in Summer 2014. In the interim, path works and site clearance works have commenced on the Inveruglas site to reduce the amount of works being priced by tender bidders to assist in getting the project on budget.

2.2.5 Lighthouse Exhibition

An exhibition of all 15 shortlisted entries is now installed at the Lighthouse in Glasgow with the support of Architecture and Design Scotland and was formally opened by Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead on 19th February. The event was widely attended and the exhibition is open to the public until 31st March 2014. The NPA will prepare a report on experiences of the Scenic Routes pilot project to be presented to Scottish Government and that information will be fed into the next round of Scenic Routes pilot projects in the Cairngorms National Park and at Banavie near Fort William (Scottish Canals). It will also help inform the development of a national strategy to guide the development of sites across Scotland.

2.3 Pontoon Loch Lomond Shores

- 2.3.1 The installation of a new pontoon at Loch Lomond Shores to stimulate the private sector to develop increased waterbus services is now underway with the contract for dredging works in Drumkinnon Bay and pontoon fabrication now let. This new infrastructure will generate business investment, revenue creation and a significant number of additional visitors experiencing and bringing expenditure to Loch Lomond Shores and destinations around Loch Lomond. The operational plan for the pontoon to accommodate cruise and waterbus operations is being developed. The plan is for full operation of the new facility in season 2015 although there may be testing of services in 2014.

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2.4 Business Development

2.4.1 Loch Lomond Shores

The Bird of Prey Centre, which opened in October of last year on a site sub leased from the NPA, has quickly become a popular visitor attraction at Loch Lomond Shores, achieving its previous location's annual visitor numbers in one month and quickly becoming the number one visitor attraction in Balloch according to Trip Advisor. A ropes course provider has submitted a planning application for another NPA managed site at LLS and is on track to open as a new attraction during 2014.

2.4.2 Loch Lomond Waterbus

Waterbus services will commence from the end of March for the season. The RSPB wildlife cruise with guided visit to Inversnaid reserve developed for the Year of Natural Scotland will continue again this year due to its success last year and we are working with RSPB to explore other wildlife boat and guided walk options that could be attractive to visitors. Services on Loch Katrine will also be promoted linked the Loch Lomond service to Inversnaid.

2.4.3 Tourism Businesses Conference

We are holding an annual conference for our tourism businesses in the Park on the 18th of March. We hope the conference like previous years will provide an invaluable opportunity for businesses to network, share ideas and hear from best practice speakers as well as about tourism developments in the Park. The focus will be on making the most of our assets in the Park. Speakers will include Mike Dennison from Sustrans who will talk about some of challenges and opportunities for an Electric Bike Network in the Park and the Manager of the Grant Arms hotel talking about how the hotel has positioned itself in the wildlife tourism market.

2.4.4 National Park Destination Group

The DG has been supporting a group of food and drink businesses from in and around the Park in developing a three year plan to raise awareness of and improve the food and drink offer.

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The visitor survey we undertook in 2011 highlighted that only 11% of people were attracted by the food and drink offer and 28% wanted to see the food offer improved. The Group plan to hold an event to encourage the use of local suppliers and were working on a programme of events for 2015 which is Scotland's Year of Food and Drink.

2.5 Events – 2014

2.5.1 Great Scottish Swim

Great Scottish Swim will take place on Saturday 23th August. The first swim last year was a fantastic success and already over 850 people have signed up for this year. The target is to increase participation by 15% on last year to approximately 2,200. Over the next couple of months the focus will be on marketing and promotion, with the National Park and West Dunbartonshire Council working together to involve local businesses, communities and schools in the event, including a master class by the elite athletes on the day before the main competition.

2.5.2 Cultural Artist in Residence in the National Park

Following the three month residency by Artist Steve Messam, we were presented with three options of temporary installations to choose from. After consulting across the organisation on each of the options, we chose the work entitled "Whistles". Each of the three options have been uploaded to the Board Microsite for viewing. The "Whistles" project involves placing replica steam train whistles from the locomotives that carried tourists along the old train line from Callander to Glenogle (now a cycle route) and activating them in sequence along the track within 10 seconds, giving the impression of the sound travelling at speed along the route. The project is scalable in that it could cover a distance from Callander to Glenogle or a shorter distance from Strathyre to Glennogle. The current budget from Creative Scotland would accommodate the shorter distance, however we are keen to see the longer more impactful distance realised. As a result we are making a further application to Creative Scotland for additional capital from a fund that is well suited to this project. If successful, the installation will happen during summer 2014, if not we will proceed with the shorter distance in late spring 2014.

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2.5.3 The John Muir Conference 2014

As part of our John Muir celebrations this year, we are joint hosting the John Muir Conference which will happen on 12th and 13th of May. The conference combines study tours to both National Parks and a number of sites owned or managed by our partners in SNH, The John Muir Trust and the National Trust for Scotland on day one, and a full conference at the Perth Concert hall on the second day. The conference is an opportunity to showcase the outstanding work of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park across Conservation, Visitor Management and Rural Development.

The key question the conference asks is “Is world famous Scot John Muir and his legacy relevant today?”. Speakers include Jonathan Jarvis, Director of National Parks Service in the USA, George Monbiot, conservation writer and campaigner and Nigel Dudley from the International Union for Conservation of Nature who will debate the key question from their own perspectives. We are encouraging all partner organisations to attend and contribute to the conference including all National Parks in the UK and have partnered with National Parks UK who will be hosting their national workshop in Perth on the 14th May. For more information contact the Visitor Experience team, the conference website is www.johnmuir100.com.

2.5.4 Park Wide Events

We are in the process of producing a park wide events publication similar to 2013's Year of Natural Scotland programme including a map of events around the Park. The Events Steering Group will shortly present the Executive with proposed National Park Authority attendance at events across the Park including the use of the mobile exhibition unit.

3. Visitor Management

3.1 **Recreation and Access**

3.1.1 East Loch Lomond Camping Byelaws

A report for Ministers on the first three years of camping byelaws being in operation on East Loch Lomond has been finalised and is presented as a separate paper on this agenda.

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3.1.2 Police Projects

The Draft annual Operation Ironworks Evaluation report was presented to the NPA in January 2014. Police Scotland have received feedback on the contents from the NPA and will present the final report in due course.

Police activity under Ironworks in 2013.

Division Area	Core hours commitment	NP funded additional hours	ESP hours	Special Constable hours	Other units
Forth Valley	3650	306	92	57	32
Argyll & West Dunbartonshire	1972	323			
Tayside	207		122		58

The National Park funded police officer provided an additional 97 hrs of delivery under Ironworks as well as dealing with wildlife and environmental crime and assisting with the delivery of multi-agency operations within the National Park allied to the prevention, detection and reduction of rural crime.

3.1.3 National Park's Mountain Paths Project

The Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT) stage 1 Heritage Lottery Fund joint bid to develop a National Park's mountain path project was not approved for funding by the UK Committee. It was very well received by the HLF Board and prioritised 7th on a list of 17 projects put forward, but unfortunately there was only sufficient funding for 5 projects on this round. COAT have convened a meeting to determine the next step, with options including; resubmitting a revised joint bid, or separating the project into 2 HLF Scotland bids from the individual National Park's.

3.1.4 The Arrochar – Tarbet shared cycleway

Funding applications have been submitted to Sustrans Community Links programme, Sportscotland Active Places fund and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) for infrastructural improvements to the community link. The project features in the NPA Outdoor Recreation Plan and (subject to funding) we hope to improve the A83 footway and support active travel between the communities.

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3.1.5 Outdoor Recreation Plan (ORP)

The Recreation and Access team have prioritised specific actions from the plan for 2014 including; investigating public moorings on Loch Lomond, Balloch Community Sport Hub, an access / ingress point on Loch Katrine, and preparatory work to improve active travel links between:

- Balloch – Gartocharn
- Drymen – Croftamie
- Drymen – Balmaha
- St. Fillans - Lochearnhead

3.1.6 Loch Lomond & Trossachs Access Forum

Expressions of interest have been received for membership of the next forum. The new forum is reduced in size to 12 members plus a Board member. Selection is underway and the new forum will meet for the first time in April. A training session for new members will also take place.

3.1.7 Ranger Service

Recruitment of seasonal ranger staff is ongoing. Interviews were held in late February and the calibre of candidates has generally been very good. A variety of contracts of different length and number of hours will be offered to enable the ranger service to deliver its priorities during the season. Work is ongoing preparing the summer delivery plan for the service.

3.2 Visitor Management Planning

3.2.1 Five Lochs Visitor Management Plan (Lubnaig Site Improvements)

The car parks have been open to the public since they were completed last year. There has been a steady use of the sites by sightseers making the most of the improved visitor experience. Due to the timing of the handover the operator has postponed the opening of the toilets and kiosk as reported in the last paper. The site will be fully functional from March onwards.

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3.2.2 Five Lochs Visitor Management Plan

A review of the first year's actions from the Visitor Management Plan has been completed. Of the identified actions 75% of these were delivered fully within the first full year of the project. The remaining 25% were started and two additional actions were brought forward by a year.

Vehicle management proposals to address serious safety concerns on the A84 & A85 trunk roads have been progressed. Following informal consultation by the NPA a formal request has been made to Transport Scotland to promote formal clearway status for these two roads to reduce the incidence of unsafe roadside and verge parking. The safety issues associated with other roads in the area will be discussed more fully during the coming year with a view to identifying a practical solution.

The field next to Anie Straight has had the fence reinstated following years of systematic abuse. The access issues have been addressed with the inclusion of a path as part of the project. The farmer will be utilising this field as per previous use to graze livestock.

3.3 Volunteering

3.3.1 Volunteer Rangers

From November 2013 until Mid February 2014, 21 volunteer rangers were involved in winter working groups focusing on preparing for delivery over the coming months. 65 volunteer rangers will be delivering visitor inspiration and engagement, supporting education and assisting with events for the 2014 summer season. Volunteer Rangers will be utilised further this season through the use of the Mobile Exhibition Unit.

3.3.2 Conservation Volunteer Delivery

Conservation volunteers supported the delivery of recreational facilities maintenance, biodiversity enhancement and improvement of community grounds, with a total of 1291 hours, incorporating 45 project days.

Partnership support began on 28th February, at Glen Finglas with Euan Hills, WTS site ranger leading. This support is scheduled for every eight weeks adding an estimated 500hrs of volunteering opportunities per annum.

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3.4 Education and Inclusion

3.4.1 The John Muir Award Partnership

Post continues to focus on developing awareness and capacity to further the use of the John Muir Award in the National Park through partnership meetings and promotion. A tailored John Muir Award training event was provided for staff in Ardmay, Ardroy and Ardentinny Outdoor Education Centres. Follow up visits from local Rangers will take place to build relationships and increase awareness of NP and its special qualities with centre staff (and visiting groups). John Muir Award training was provided for National Park Rangers to clarify and support their role in the Award. Conserve Audit Plans to build an accurate picture of conservation activities in LLTNP and help report for Wildpark 2020 have been finalised and are in place for 2014/2015.

3.4.2 Outdoor Learning Conference

Both Scottish National Parks Outdoor Learning support and resources were promoted at an Education Scotland Conference supporting outdoor learning in Secondary Schools held in Kilmarnock. A market place at the event will allowed practitioners to meet with outdoor partners and find out more about the range of resources available to further support outdoor learning.

3.4.3 Learning Resources web pages

Further development of the National Parks Learning web pages has incorporated a new John Muir Award button and resources to support Geography teachers to deliver the new Added Value Units as part of the new National 4 & 5 exams.

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