

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 16

## Rural Development Update



### *Paper for noting*

#### 1. Purpose

1.1 This report provides an update on activity carried out by the National Park Authority (NPA) under the theme of 'Rural Development'.

#### 2.1 Development Management

##### 2.1.1 Performance

The previous update paper noted the submission of the National Park's second annual Planning Performance Framework (PPF) report to Scottish Government (30<sup>th</sup> Sept 2013).

Feedback on this submission was very positive, confirming that the National Park Authority has demonstrated clear evidence of embracing the culture of performance and service quality envisaged through the PPF approach. It was observed that the Government would like to see some further time savings in application handling but it was noted that particular improvements had been demonstrated through work to drive efficiencies in the determination of applications subject to Section 75 legal agreements.

In terms of statistics on speed of decision making for planning applications, quarterly data continues to be submitted to the SG statisticians to prepare performance results for all Local Authorities and the two National Parks. The use of average determination times against a range of application types is now becoming well established as the key reporting indicator. Our performance against these indicators is separately reported to the Delivery Group. The table below illustrates this performance reporting - relative to the Scottish Average as a benchmark. The colour coding is designed to give a clear visual flag of when the Park's performance is above, below or close to the Scottish average.

STATS	Q1 - 2012/2013			Q2 - 2012/2013			Q3 - 2012/2013			Q4 - 2012/2013		
	No. of Applications	Average No. of weeks taken	Scottish Average	No. of Applications	Average No. of weeks taken	Scottish Average	No. of Applications	Average No. of weeks taken	Scottish Average	No. of Applications	Average No. of weeks taken	Scottish Average
Major	0	0	59.7	1	34.9	66.7	0	0	36.2	0	0	37.2
Local Non-Householder	24	12.6	17.2	38	15.2	15.4	48	12.3	15.5	39	21.1	16.4
Local Householder	30	8.1	8	13	9.2	8	21	8.6	8.2	25	9.1	8
EIA	0	0	93.2	0	0	34.7	1	18	58	2	36.1	50.9
Other	17	13.8	9.7	28	14.3	9.4	18	9.2	9.8	16	20	10.8
Subject to a Legal Agreement	0	0	82.7	1	1.9	71.6	0	0	68.5	5	81.3	68.5
<b>Total Number</b>	<b>71</b>			<b>81</b>			<b>88</b>			<b>87</b>		

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STATS	Q1 - 2013/2014			Q2 - 2013/2014			Q3 - 2013/2014			Q4 - 2013/2014		
	No. of Applications	Average No. of weeks taken	Scottish Average	No. of Applications	Average No. of weeks taken	Scottish Average	No. of Applications	Average No. of weeks taken	Scottish Average	No. of Applications	Average No. of weeks taken	Scottish Average
Major	0	0	3 3.2	1	26.3	34						
Local Non-Householder	34	15	14.8	29	9.7	12.9						
Local Householder	13	7.3	7.6	25	7.7	7.9						
EIA	1	16.7	47.6	0	0	47.2						
Other	8	10.4	9	5	10.4	9.5						
Subject to a Legal Agreement	2	65.3	84.8	1	26.3	58						
<b>Total Number</b>	<b>58</b>			<b>61</b>			<b>0</b>			<b>0</b>		

At the time of writing the Q2 statistics remain the most up to date published figures but the Q3 results should be published imminently. The Q2 figures continued the positive trend set through Q1 toward an improving set of results - but with a lower number of applications being determined overall in comparison with the latter part of the 2012/13 reporting year. However, the Q3 period (October to December 2013) will evidence a noticeable change which will be reflected in figures when they are published. The number of applications determined returned to around the 85 level - a 40% increase relative to Q2 and 45% relative to Q1).

In addition, Q3 saw the Development Management team under unprecedented pressure to determine a significant number of applications for run of river hydro power schemes (14 such applications were 'live' across the National Park at the start of Q3) to a deadline of 31st December – not a statutory planning performance deadline but one placed on developers by OFGEM (the energy regulator).

Only operators who could demonstrate having a planning consent in place by that date would be eligible to benefit from a higher rate 'feed in tariff' on implementation of the scheme. This brought considerable pressure to bear on the DM team to support the viability of the proposals by meeting this deadline. Diversion of our limited staff resource to priority determine these applications – and thereby assist support the sustainable growth of the renewable energy sector in Scotland – had an inevitable impact on the performance of other applications in the period and a downturn of average times is anticipated in most areas. Eight of the 10 hydro applications determined in the period were EIA development. These were complex cases where it was vital to ensure that that no significant landscape or ecological impacts would occur and it should be noted that the full team performance – including the wider team, with specialist input being essential from our landscape and ecological advisors - was outstanding. One of these cases also involved the negotiation and conclusion of a section 75 legal agreement to secure important landscape management gains.

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Approval Rates	2012/2013	2012/2013	2012/2013	2012/2013
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
National Park	100%	100%	96.50%	97.50%
Scottish Average	92.70%	93.00%	92.90%	92.30%

Approval Rates	2013/2014	2013/2014	2013/2014	2013/2014
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
National Park	95%	96.8%		
Scottish Average	94.30%	94.2%		

The table above confirms that the National Park continues to consistently approve a higher proportion of applications than the Scottish average. This is attributed to our ongoing commitment to engagement in pre-application discussions which have the combined effect of (a) deflecting non-starter proposals at an early stage and, (b) improving the quality of applications and proposals by negotiation. This approach enables us to make the most of our limited staff resource by avoiding contesting time consuming appeals following a refusal of planning permission. On the subject of appeals it should, however, be noted that our Local Review Body currently have two cases for consideration scheduled to be heard in March.

### 2.1.2 Notable Casework

The over-riding workload for the latter part of 2013 was the upsurge in applications for run of river Hydro power applications – as referred to earlier in the ‘performance’ section of this paper. As explained, this placed the DM team under considerable pressure – although it should be noted that the volume of this type of application has returned an elevated planning fee income for the year to date – currently around 50% ‘up’ on a typical year.

Around 5 hydro applications continue under consideration at this time. December also saw a permission granted for a restaurant/bar and a 22 bedroom budget hotel in Balloch.

The application for a sand and gravel quarry at Succoth currently remains live and locally contentious.

### 2.1.3 Service Delivery

The PPF annual report submission as highlighted earlier in this paper is the key document for setting planning service improvement tasks for the year ahead. Officers in the DM team are currently working on updating and streamlining procedures around the consultation process with our internal specialist advisors (landscape, ecology, access etc). This is building upon the good practice which has been established through the recent pressured working on the run-of-river-hydro applications – and includes weekly priority setting meetings.

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Our commitment to e-planning continues with a slow but steady increase in the number of applications submitted online, currently 67% for the Q3 period 2013/2014. The Scottish average for all local Authorities is around 49%.

### 2.2 Forward Planning

#### 2.2.1 Local Development Plan: Main Issues Report

The Main Issues report is subject to a separate Board Paper.

The MIR, subject to Board approval, will go out for full public consultation in April for a period of 10 weeks. Members will be kept fully informed of the programme and updates on the micro site going forward.

#### 2.2.2 Blairmore Charette

The Blairmore Charette has proved a great success with a number of local consultation meetings with the last on the 18<sup>th</sup> January. This has led to an agreement on a preferred option to encourage increased visitors into Blairmore. The Scottish Government have since agreed to fund the community's business case to enable the action plan.

#### 2.2.3 Rural Housing Enabler

LINK Housing Association have been working with officers preparing a potential list of housing opportunities that they are exploring where in Argyll and Bute Council's area there is a particular need or opportunity. The focus has been to complement existing programmes, or work identifying local housing needs, so they are focusing on Kilmun, Strone and Luss areas at the moment. These opportunities are being reported to Argyll and Bute Council as the strategic housing authority for prioritisation in future funding allocations.

More recently the National Park has exchanged contracts with Rural Stirling Housing Association to deliver the equivalent rural housing enabler service in the east sector of the National Park. This will operate on an identical basis as the west sector and will focus on the identification of local development opportunities to attract more public/private sector housing investment into the Park to help meet the acute shortfall in affordable housing provision.

#### 2.2.4 LEADER Update

#### **Withdrawal of Expression of Interest**

At the December 2014 Board meeting, members agreed to withdraw the NP Expression of Interest subject to reassurance from the Scottish Government.

In response to our letter seeking assurances of SG support of the proposed sub LAG (and associated arrangements); a letter was received on 14 February, 2014. The letter gave broad support and key points on LDS development:

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- *“we will work with all parties to ensure that the outcomes sought in the agreement are pursued and included in the respective LDSs”*
- *“I would hope that both Local Development Strategies contain elements that allow for focused interventions across the National Park Area that are aligned to aspirations of the National Park Authority and its partners.”*

With regards to implementation, the letter states that SG would be able to work with the NPA on ensuring that cooperation arrangements are ‘light touch’ and encouraged our attendance at the March 2014 conference which will discuss future LEADER models.

The letter from Scottish Government provides as much support and reassurance as could reasonably be expected and, in line with the previous decision of the Board, officers intend to formally withdraw the Expression of Interest for a Park area LAG.

### **Development of Local Development Strategies for the 2014-20 LEADER Programme**

As members will be aware, the next phase of LEADER is currently under development in line with the Scottish Government (SG) guidelines and timetable. NPA Officers are working with Argyll & the Islands and Forth Valley & Lomond LAGs as they draft the Local Development Strategies (LDS) that will govern their investment objectives for the 2014-20 programme.

#### **Key dates are:-**

20.3.14	Scottish Government LEADER conference (Glasgow)
31.3.14	Submit first draft LDS to Scottish Government
April 2014	Business Plan guidance issues by Scottish Government
May/June 2014	Submit second draft LDS and draft Business Plan to Scottish Government
30.9.14	Submit final LDS and Business Plan to Scottish Government LAG Liaison

NPA Officers continue to liaise with the LAG Chairs and Officers of both LEADER Programmes. This has included attendance at LAG-led sessions on LDS development for both programmes (Forth Valley & Lomond on 20/2/14, Argyll & the Islands on 23/1/14) and informal liaison with programme staff (mainly phone and email based). Each LAG is pursuing their LDS differently, with Forth Valley & Lomond developing drafts in-house and Argyll & the Islands recently engaging a consultant. It is our understanding that the arrangements for the sub LAG and the administration for the Park area will be finalised during the Business Planning stage (April to Sept 2014). The most pressing opportunity of the LDS development stage is alignment of LEADER 2014-20 Programme objectives with NP context and opportunities.

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### LDS National Park Section

In lieu of dedicated Park consultation activities, and in recognition of the agreement that each LDS will contain an identical National Park section, work is focusing on creating a list of strategic priorities for the Park area which reflects the NPPP, Community Action Plans and the priorities of key partners (Community Partnership, Countryside Trust, FOLLAT and Park Destination Groups). This list will be used to inform alignment of emerging LDS objectives and will form the basis of the identical section that will appear in both LDSs under the 'Cooperation' section.

### 2.3 Community Development

#### 2.3.1 Community Grant Scheme

Grant letters were sent in December 2013 to the 16 successful applications (listed below). There were two unsuccessful applications, Ardentenny CC and Balloch & Haldane CC. Details of the successful projects were publicised through social media.

- Ardentenny CT Administration Grant
- Arrochar & Tarbet CDT Administration Grant
- BLS CT Administration Grant
- Benmore and Kilmun CDT Administration Grant and Project Grant (eradicating Japanese Knotweed)
- Buchanan CC Administration and Project Grant (improving the Memorial Hall)
- Callander CDT Administration and Project Grant (Interpretation Board)
- Croftamie CT Administration Grant
- Drymen CDT Ent. Co Administration and Project Grant (bench renovations)
- Gartmore CT Administration and Project Grant (Gartmore Village Hall landscaping)
- Killin and Ardeonaig Trust Administration Grant
- Kilmarnock CT Administration and Project Grant (heritage display counters)
- Lochgoil CDT & CC Administration and Project Grant (Village Hall Library refurbishment)
- Sandbank CDT Administration Grant
- St. Fillans Administration and Project Grant (lawn and brush cutting equipment)
- Strachur Administration Grant
- Strathfillan Project Grant (Tyndrum Village Hall repairs and improvements)

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### 2.3.2 Community Empowerment (Scotland) Draft Bill

A response to the Draft Bill consultation was submitted on 31<sup>st</sup> January to the Scottish Government. The Bill proposes a new way for communities to take on public sector assets and looks to strengthen the role of communities in public service delivery. The Bill also includes proposals for the Common Good and dangerous and defective buildings. Other consultation topics included wider policy proposals (not yet in Bill form) on 'Right to Buy', Community Planning, allotment legislation and local business rate relief schemes. The LLTNPA response focused on the proposals within the draft legislation, highlighted the progress already made in the National Park, emphasised the need for continued community support, and raised the importance of balancing asset transfers against wider public interest and potential for NPA to work with third parties to operate its own assets. The response endorsed the spirit of the CNPA feedback on Community Planning arrangements within National Parks, (was coordinated with the Cairngorm National Park Authority), and sought further discussion with the Scottish Government.

### 2.3.3 St Fillans to Lochearnhead Cycle Path

Following the completion of Phase 1 of the Project (the Glen Tarken bridge installation) both the community groups are keen to maintain the momentum of the project and as a consequence work has now started on the next 2 phases. Phase 2 is based on a £70,000 funding bid for 2014/15 to undertake the Design of the entire 13.5 km route and will include negotiations with the 19 Landlords. Phase 3 is based on £975,000 for 2015/16 which will encompass the complete path reconstruction to recognised standards. The works will include the repair of the remaining bridges, tree removal, shrub clearance and ditch repairs, with Sustrans as the proposed principle funder. There are ongoing discussions with Paths Groups, SG and SNH to review the Path network to the east of St Fillans. Particular attention is needed regarding the Pilgrim Way which has been proposed by SNH as a National Development under the forthcoming National Planning Framework 3. The Communities are planning to hold a formal opening of the Glen Tarken Bridge on the 9<sup>th</sup> May, senior representation from LLTNPA will be invited.

### 2.3.4 Activity under Service Level Agreement with LLTNP Community Partnership

#### Community Action Plans

Round 1 - Community Action Plans (complete) – Gartmore, Lochgoil, Callander, Benmore & Kilmun and Drymen.

Round 2 - Community Action Plans – Arrochar, Tarbet & Ardlui complete, Balquhiddy, Lochearnhead and Strathyre and Strathfillan at design; Sandbank being finalised.

Round 3 - Community Action Plans – Balloch & Haldane – community engagement ended with Open Event on 1 Feb now at design; Buchanan – community agent recruited, community consultation underway; Kilmarnock – community consultation underway; Strachur – steering group recruitment underway.

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A part-time Community Development Worker has been recruited on a fixed-term contract until 31 December 2014 to support community action planning activity. The CP intends on carrying out a review/mapping outcomes exercise of community action planning within the Park in 2014.

### Skills Partnership

The Skills Partnership was formally launched on 11 December by Minister for Youth Employment, Angela Constance at an event in Callander Youth Project. Food provided at the event was locally sourced and prepared by chef Tom Lewis and young people from Forth Valley College and McLaren High School in Callander. The students had participated in a four week Skills Partnership mentoring programme with Tom Lewis prior to the launch. A new Skills Partnership brand identity was developed by Stand Design Agency and a website is under development with support from University of the West of Scotland. Two additional sector training events were held in December– one with young people from McLaren High School looking at outdoor recreation – cycling; the other looking at best practice from the Cumbrian Hill Farmers Succession Scheme and how this model could be applied to farming businesses in the National Park.

Three new staff have been recruited to take the project from development through to delivery in 2014. A part-time Youth Co-ordinator will work with schools, colleges and youth groups promoting the opportunities within the three key sectors and a part-time Business Co-ordinator will work with businesses across the Park to identify training and employment opportunities. These posts will be supported by a part-time Project Assistant. One of the project's first priorities will be to establish a pilot programme of six shared apprenticeships within the Park in collaboration with People 1<sup>st</sup> (sector skills council for Tourism and Hospitality).

## 2.4 Built Heritage

### 2.4.1 CARS

#### Priority Projects

31-33 Main Street Former Desirables Building) - Grant offers have been accepted for the restoration of traditional awnings at the Crafted Merchant (former Desirables Shop) and the Shell Centre with work due for completion by end of March 2014.

#### Small Grants

Of the eligible applications received for 2012/2013, the final year of the scheme:

- 11 projects have completed
- 4 are on site and due for completion by mid March.

#### Shop Front Improvement Grant Scheme

A grant offer has been accepted by the owners of James Pringle Weavers Shop (Edinburgh Woollen Mill) on Ancaster Square for the repair and restoration of the shopfront. Work is due to be completed by end of March 2014.



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### Callander Bridge (Red Bridge)

Unfortunately, after lengthy positive discussions, Stirling Council withdrew support for the restoration of the Callander Bridge lamp standards due to other priorities.

### Skills Outreach

While it was hoped to provide a second Traditional Skills Outreach Day for McLaren High School S5 pupils, this has not been possible due to timing issues.

### 2.4.2 Built Heritage Repair Grant (BHRG)

The BHRG was launched on 14 August 2013 reinforcing the National Park's commitment to the historic built environment.

14 grant offers were made and 9 accepted in the following locations:-

- Balquhider - repair to listed, former Old Library Tearoom
- Kilmun Pier - re-pointing of listed former Post Office House
- Kilmun - replace unsympathetic windows with timber sash and case windows in one of the listed "Tea Caddies"
- Callander - new signage for listed building in Bridgend
- Gartmore - window and chimney repairs in Main Street
- Tarbet - chimney repairs to listed former gate house
- Killin - repair of lade to listed mill
- Glen Dochart - roof repairs to two traditional dwellings at Portnellan

All projects to be completed by 31 March 2014.

### 2.4.3 BGS Stone and Slate Survey - continued

BGS completed a Building Stone and Slate Survey of the Callander Conservation Area in 2011 and a similar survey is now underway for the buildings added to the conservation area as a result of the extensions in August & Oct 2011. This is due to be completed by end of March 2014.

### 2.4.4 St Kessogs

Stirling Council has received three expressions of interest from commercial operators and discussions are ongoing while the property continues to be marketed. Preference will be given to a commercial use in the building however if this does not materialise the community will be given an option. The community has received permission from the Council for summer use of the premises. (VisitScotland will be relocating in March 2014 to the ground floor of the NPA Callander office).

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### 3. Recommendation

3.1 Members are invited to note the contents of this report.

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