

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 12



Visitor Experience Update

Paper for noting

1. Purpose

1.1 To update Board Members on current Visitor Experience activity.

2. Visitor Experience

2.1 Scenic Routes

2.1.1 The three pilot projects funded by Scottish Government are progressing towards completion with two due for opening on 25 June and Inveruglas expected towards the end of the year.

The Falls of Falloch installation is now complete adding a new dimension to viewing the spectacular waterfall on the river Falloch. There will be a ministerial opening by Richard Lochhead on 25 June 2014. Minor works are scheduled to smarten up the parking area and install promotional signage.

Construction of the Loch Lubnaig viewing platform is due to complete on 4 June, creating an interesting aspect to day visitor's enjoyment of the loch.

The Inveruglas installation has undergone re-engineering and tendering, the implementation program is currently being prepared to minimise impacts during the summer season.

2.1.2 Strathclyde University Installation

Final year architect students, with funding from the NPA, have designed and built a viewing structure as part of their final year projects. The installation has been placed at the eastern end of Loch Doine adding an alternative and reflective view of the surrounding landscape.

2.2 Business Development

2.2.1 Pontoon Lomond Shores

The installation of the pontoon to stimulate the private sector to develop increased waterbus services, generating business investment and visitor expenditure, is underway. The dredging and piling works have now been completed. A stone causeway still in place at beach at Duncan Mills slipway, this will allow crane access for launch of Pontoon. The pontoon and bridge to the boardwalk at Lomond Shores will be installed in the last week in June. A pilot operation of cruise services will be

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 12

Visitor Experience Update

operated from the pontoon by Sweeny's Cruises from beginning of July to the end of September. This will allow testing of the facility prior to full operation for 2015. No ticket offices or other facilities will be installed on the Boardwalk until the operational needs and issues are assessed this season. Expressions of interest for waterbus operations will be invited this summer for next season.

2.2.2 Loch Lomond Shores

Our plans to lease a site to Treezone continue, the timescale is now for an opening of the new attraction for beginning of season 2015.

2.2.3 Loch Lomond Waterbus

Waterbus services have now commenced. This year saw the launch of the new "Two Lochs Tour". This joint working between the operators on Loch Lomond and on Loch Katrine has been facilitated through the joint working on waterbus services. The two lochs tour realises a key objective of encouraging travel between Loch Lomond and Loch Katrine as part of a sustainable tourism experience.

We have agreed to support the RSPB and Cruise Loch Lomond pilot a wildlife cruise with guided visit to Inchailloch, this is being promoted over three dates in the summer to test the market for a new packaged wildlife experience. This project builds on the cruise and RSPB trip to Inversnaid which is now offered weekly

2.2.4 Tourism Businesses Conference

We held our annual conference for our tourism businesses in the Park on the 18th of March. The focus was on making the most of our assets in the Park. Speakers included Mike Dennison from Sustrans, who presented on the opportunities for an Electric Bike Network in the Park and the Manager of the Grant Arms Hotel, who presented about how the hotel has positioned itself in the wildlife tourism market. CEO Fiona Logan gave an overview of developments in the Park. 100 businesses attended and feedback on the presentations and networking opportunities was very positive.

2.2.5 National Park Destination Group

The Group has been leading a group of businesses from in and around the Park developing a three year plan to raise awareness of and enhance our food and drink offer. A three year strategy and action plan has been developed and the first "Meet the Suppliers" event for food tourism businesses will take place at Ardoch House on 11th November.

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 12

Visitor Experience Update

2.2.6 Working with Glasgow Airport

The Destination Group has taken advantage of an exciting opportunity to work with Glasgow Airport on the design of an experience of the National Park in the welcome area in arrivals at the airport. The aim is to install, in time for the Commonwealth Games, a taste of sights and sounds of the National Park for visitors and residents as they arrive in the airport. This will be a fantastic opportunity to promote visits to the National Park and to highlight how close is it to Glasgow airport..

2.2.7 Developing the Tourism Cycling Offer

A business engagement event was held with bike hire and other businesses and partners with an interest in developing the cycling tourism event in April as part of the finalising of our strategy and action plan for developing cycling tourism offer.

2.3 Events – 2014

2.3.1 Celebrating John Muir

The John Muir Conference

The John Muir Conference was held on 12 and 13th May at Perth Concert Hall. This was our key project with partners to celebrate the legacy of John Muir by considering the management of protected areas in the 21st century. Report as appendix.

John Muir Way and Festival Finale

The John Muir Way was officially opened on the 21st of April. Two sections run through the Park and it now provides another long distance route to encourage exploring the Park by walking or cycling and is a jumping off point to explore other activities at Loch Lomond. The John Muir Festival to celebrate the opening of the Way finished with a finale at Lomond Shores on Saturday the 26th of April. The National Park was represented by Fiona Logan and Linda Mackay at a reception at Lomond Shores with The Minster Paul Wheelhouse, CEO of SNH and CEO of Creative Scotland.

2.3.2 Great Scottish Swim

Great Scottish Swim will take place on 23th August. The first swim last year was a fantastic success and this year is on target to meet a target of 2000 participants.

2.3.3 The Whistle

“The Whistle” Our artist in residence Steve Messam tested his temporary installation the whistle at an event for the community in Lochearnhead Station in May. The testing required the setting up of nine steam engine whistles at intervals

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 12

Visitor Experience Update

being activated by radio. The successful test has resulted in an application to Creative Scotland for further funding to create a full 18 mile installation and event on the old rail line between Callander and Killin.

3. Visitor Management

3.1 Recreation and Access

3.1.1 Outdoor Recreation Plan (ORP)

Following the community celebrations for the opening of the Glentarken Bridge on the Lochearnhead to St Fillan's old railway line route (see Rural Development Update paper), further funding has been secured from Sustrans towards the next two phases of design and then build, with match funding still to be confirmed by project partners.

The NPA has provided funding to the Strathyre community for a feasibility study for an all abilities shared use path link between Immervoulin Caravan Park and Strathyre Village.

Sportscotland have committed £100k towards a shared use path link between Drymen and Balmaha, £50k towards a similar project between Arrochar and Tarbet, and to the Countryside Trust an award of £22k towards a railway path upgrade in Killin. Match funding is currently being sought by all project partners.

A new mountain bike skills park has been installed on the NPA site in Aberfoyle which will be formally opened on 14 June, initial feedback from users has been very positive.

3.1.2 Police Projects

The Operation Ironworks pre season meeting took place in early April. This is the seventh year of joint working between Police Scotland the NPA and FCS to address disruptive and anti-social visitor behaviour in the Park. Emphasis continues to be placed on building on the successes of the previous year, improving communication between partners and the deployment of resources to address issues as they arise. This may have an added challenge this year with policing requirements also targeted at the Commonwealth Games and Ryder Cup.

The West Dunbartonshire Multi-Agency CONTEST Group met in early May. This is the local group tasked with delivery of the UK Governments counter-terrorism strategy. The NPA is represented on the group along with West Dunbartonshire Council, Argyll & Bute Council, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Scottish

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 12

Visitor Experience Update

Ambulance Service, port and ferry operators, the NHS and Loch Lomond Shores. The group meets quarterly to review the work undertaken under each of the elements of the strategy – Pursue, Prevent, Protect, Prepare.

3.2 Summer Season Operations

3.2.1 Ranger Service

We have a new Ranger Service Manager, Martin Page, who started on 2 June and will be taking forward the management and development of the service.

27 seasonal rangers were recruited on a range of contracts providing flexible deployment over the season through until September. Induction has taken place including: First Aid, sea survival, SOAC, byelaws, conflict resolution, policies and systems of work. They are also getting familiar with the NP area, sites and have been performing well in the first few weeks.

Ranger patrolling activity is underway, consisting of 23 patrol routes and over 200 sites. Priority is given to weekends, public holidays and with a reactive response plan in place in the advent of a good weather forecast for weekends. Engagement with visitors, encouraging responsible behaviour and operation of facilities, byelaw enforcement and liaison with the police as part of Operation Ironworks are the key work areas with a focus on 5 Lochs area, East Loch Lomond, Loch Lomond (and islands) and West Loch Lomond.

The season so far has been relatively quiet with Easter weekend being the busiest time with almost 3500 people visiting the National Park Visitor Centre at Balmaha.

3.2.2 Visitor Facilities

Balmaha Visitor Centre

Is open daily from 9.30am until 4.30pm and an hour later in July/August, staffed by two members of the ranger service and also offering a programme of activities over the coming season.

Millarochy Bay

Rangers are on site daily from 9am into the evenings, subject to the available light. Day visitors, WHW walkers and canoeists and kayakers continue to use the site in high numbers.

Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 12

Visitor Experience Update

The slipway is staffed daily from 8am into the evening. Staff have been dealing with boat registration, daily and annual launch tickets and managing the trailer parking for loch users. Water based byelaw patrols start and finish at the slipway, along with visitor management patrols on the Loch Lomond islands.

Loch Lubnaig

Both sites are open to the public following the extensive improvements. The kiosk (open from 9am until 4pm minimum hours), public toilets, picnic areas and pay and display are operational, with camping temporarily unavailable due to water logging of the site and associated damage to the turf. Work is currently underway to alleviate the problems and get the camping pitches into use. Rangers are monitoring areas around the two sites for any changes in levels of use and camping activity.

Inchcailloch

The ranger base on the island has had a refresh and the annual programme of guided walks has started. Rangers are on the island regularly to provide a welcome to visitors, undertake maintenance tasks and monitor use of the island and campsite. Camping bookings are starting to pick up as the weather improves.

The NPA's other facilities at Luss, Firkin Point, Tarbet, Inveruglas and Rowardennan are operating as in previous seasons providing day visitors with public toilets, car parking and places to enjoy the shores of Loch Lomond.

3.3 Visitor Management Planning

3.3.1 Five Lochs Visitor Management Plan

Phase 2 of the 5 Lochs capital improvements programme is in preparation with outline plans currently being drafted for the upgrade of existing visitor facilities on the shores of Loch Venachar and also parking at Bracklinn Falls.

The 5 Lochs Visitor Management stakeholder group met on the 1st April 2014 to discuss the reviewed 5 Lochs Visitor Management Plan. The timetable of actions for the next 3 years was included and will be finalised shortly.

The A84 and A85 clearway proposals being progressed by Transport Scotland, are currently being assessed, the clearway order will require formal public consultation and TransportScotland have indicated that this will take place at the same time as a number of other clearway orders in other areas of Scotland

3.3.2 East Loch Lomond Visitor Management Plan

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 12

Visitor Experience Update

The East Loch Lomond Visitor Management Group met on the 25th March, discussed priorities for the coming year and the draft visitor management plan.

The focus of the group is moving towards a more proactive enabling role to support the development of opportunities along the east side of Loch Lomond. One important action to help address verge parking issues at Rowardennan has been progressed by Stirling Council by extending the clearway order between the hotel and FCS car park at Rowardennan.

3.3.3 Camping Management

Work is continuing on the development of camping management solutions for the busiest areas of the National Park. The listening phase is underway with attendance at Community Council meetings in the following areas to date:

- Luss and Arden
- Strathard
- Buchanan
- Callander
- Lochgoilhead
- Trossachs

We are currently progressing a programme of engagement with key stakeholders before proposals are prepared for Board consideration in the autumn. This includes attendance at a land management event and meetings with national and local organisations. Significant progress has been made on preparing the evidence and audit findings which includes patrol data from our Ranger Service, images, site surveys, research findings and information from partners.

3.4 Volunteering

3.4.1 Volunteer Rangers

A full day for all volunteer rangers was held on 15th March and attended by 40 NP volunteer rangers with representation from RSPB, WTS and Police Scotland. It included the delivery plan for 2014, H&S, data protection, use of CERVIS and use of the Mobile Visitor Centre.

The volunteer Rangers have been out and about in the park since the 6th April, providing a visible and welcoming presence across the park. This season includes extra routes on public holidays, pairing up the Balloch walking routes/water bus and additional cycle routes. The uptake has been good, the new volunteer rangers have

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 12

Visitor Experience Update

integrated well and show great enthusiasm. The East Loch Lomond and West Loch Lomond routes are the most popular routes and are nearly at capacity for the season, with space on Trossachs and Breadalbane remaining.

3.4.2 Conservation Volunteers

Our conservation volunteers have been spread across the park area and continue to support a wide variety of tasks. During March and April 2014, the volunteers were engaged in supporting thirty nine requests, within these requests were assisting the Ranger Service with wetland bird surveys, West Highland Way maintenance work around Manse Bay and Bienglas, and tree transplanting at Loch Lubnaig. There also requests supported from Ardentiny community to help out at Glenfinnart Gardens and from RSPB and Woodland Trust Scotland to support development of the Loch Lomond Reserve and the Great Trossachs Forest project.

Make a Difference Day Loch Lomond was delivered on 19th March and attended by 18 business volunteers and 2 NP volunteers, activities included tree planting at Carrick and path maintenance at NTS Ben Lomond.

3.5 Education and Inclusion

3.5.1 The John Muir Award Partnership

Tailored John Muir Award training provided, with a National Parks focus for internal Ranger staff. 495 Awards were achieved in the National Park in 2013.

Tender documents have been prepared to develop a John Muir App with work due to start in the summer.

An event was held at Carrochan to celebrate Ardfern Learning Centre pupils completing their John Muir Award. Senior staff from the JMT and Angus Allan from the NP Board supported the event and recognised the pupils achievements.

3.5.2 Outdoor Learning Delivery

A range of delivery opportunities have been supported including Bellahouston Academy and Mallaig High School geography field trip visits to the National Park.

3.5.3 Moorland Indicators of Climate Change Initiative

The project involves students assisting with real scientific research, to answer the question: Are upland moorlands storing carbon (good for climate change) or releasing carbon (bad for climate change)? Pupils from Vale of Leven Academy explored the moorland on Conic Hill with National Park Rangers and Volunteer Rangers and collected a range of environmental data. The school have adopted this

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 12

Visitor Experience Update

site which is part of the UK National Parks peatland restoration project, and will carry out visits annually to monitor trends and changes to the site overtime.

3.5.4 Inclusion

Ongoing work is underway with Inclusive Cairngorms to raise understanding and awareness of our Equalities requirements, and embed this practice within the LLTNPA. This is supported through our internal Equalities and Diversity group.

Author: Mairi Bell, Head of Visitor Experience and
Bridget Jones, Head of Visitor Management

Executive Sponsor: Gordon Watson, Director of Operations