

DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2013-2014

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FOREWORD

Moving forward into our second decade as a National Park, we continue to build on the great contributions of many organisations and enjoy greater collaboration across a wide range of partners, local businesses and our communities.

The outcome of this engagement has led to significant benefits for the economy, the environment and for our residents and visitors.

This annual report highlights some of these great examples of how partnership working has supported our shared vision for success of the National Park.

Within our focus area of **Conservation** we are proud to have developed our new strategy for nature conservation '*Wild Park 2020*'.

Our aspiration to deliver a National Park **Visitor Experience** that compares with the best in the world is being realised through a number of diverse projects and initiatives, including significant upgrading of our visitor facilities in our most popular visitor destinations. Progress on the implementation of our *5 Lochs Management Plan* resulted in the development of one of our busiest areas in the Trossachs, Loch Lubnaig and Loch Lubnaig Beag, both of which are now being run and managed by a local land-owner and business.

Within **Rural Development**, a major consultation to inform the preparation of our new Local Development Plan – known as **LIVE Park** has started and will influence planning policy from 2016 and create a 20 year vision for **Living, Investing, Visiting and Experiencing** the National Park.

In August 2013 Loch Lomond played host to the Great Scottish Swim which saw over 1,900 swimmers taking part. The event was a huge success, generating significant economic impact to the local area and supporting the delivery of our Visitor Experience strategy.

Challenging times continue to demand that we adapt and innovate and we are confident that Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority is well-placed to continue to do this for the benefit of everyone with an interest in this very special part of the world.

Fiona Logan
Chief Executive Officer

Linda McKay
Convener

National Park Authority Board Meeting
Monday 16 June 2014

INTRODUCTION

Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park was created in July 2002 under the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 to safeguard an area of outstanding and diverse landscapes, habitats and communities, parts of which were coming under severe visitor and recreational pressures.

The ethos of National Park Authorities in Scotland is collaboration across public and private organisations.

We are a local delivery body governed by a predominantly elected board, with a national remit.

The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 sets out four National Park aims, to:

- Conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area
- Promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area
- Promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public
- Promote sustainable social and economic development of the area's communities.

Throughout 2013/14 we continued to make significant progress on our three outcomes of Conservation, Visitor Experience and Rural Development, and our various activities and key achievements within these areas are highlighted throughout this Annual Report.

THE NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

As a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB), the Park Authority is directly funded by the Scottish Government and is accountable to Scottish Ministers and the Scottish Parliament.

The National Park Authority's role is to coordinate the delivery of the four statutory aims to secure a sustainable future for this very special part of Scotland;

- To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area
- To promote the sustainable use of the natural resources of the area
- To promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public
- To promote sustainable social and economic development of the communities of the area.

The National Park Authority is governed by a Board of 17 Members (see page xx), who are either appointed by the Scottish Government following competitive recruitment, elected by local residents or nominated by the four local authorities within the Park - West Dunbartonshire, Argyll & Bute, Stirling and Perth & Kinross.

This Annual Report is a summary of the National Park Authority's activity between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014. It includes some of the main achievements under our three areas of work into which we encapsulate the four National Park aims, all supported by an effective and efficient Corporate Services function.

OUR TEAMS FLOW CHART

Conservation

An internationally renowned landscape where the natural beauty, ecology and the cultural heritage are positively managed and enhanced for future generations.

Visitor Experience

A high quality, authentic experience for visitors, with many opportunities to appreciate and enjoy the natural and cultural heritage, within an internationally-renowned landscape that compares to the best on offer around the world.

Rural Development

In the National Park, businesses and communities thrive and people live and work sustainably in a high quality environment.

Corporate Services

Ensuring effective, efficient and innovative use of our resources to deliver the National Park Authority's services to the highest standard.

THE NATIONAL PARK PARTNERSHIP PLAN 2012-2017

The National Park Partnership Plan describes the vision and outcomes for the whole National Park area and requires contributions from many different organisations. Delivery of the outcomes within the Partnership Plan is the responsibility of all the organisations that operate in the Park and the Plan is underpinned by a set of Individual Partnership Agreements with key public sector organisations.

The second year of the Park Partnership Plan saw successful delivery of actions which included the delivery of an intensive programme for the control of non-native species, improved threshold signage, continuing support for the National Park Community Partnership, delivery of a successful programme of events to support the *Year of Natural Scotland* and awarding planning consent for a high volume of small scale hydro schemes.

NATIONAL PARKS DELIVERING SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS FOR SCOTLAND

Although they are unique in their own right, both of Scotland's National Parks share the same four statutory aims and many common outcomes. Both National Park Authorities contribute to the Scottish Government's purpose of creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through increasing sustainable economic growth. Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority continued to support delivery of the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework. In 2013-14 Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park contributed directly to 10 of the Government's 16 strategic outcomes.

Our achievements demonstrate the contribution we make to the Scottish Government's purpose and relevant strategic outcomes, as illustrated in the table below and throughout this report.

Scottish Government Strategic Outcome table to be inserted...

CONSERVATION

The underpinning theme of the National Park Authority's Conservation activity has been our successes in **collaborative working**.

This is best demonstrated in the fantastic commitment of our wide range of partners to the development and delivery of our new nature conservation strategy 'Wild Park 2020'. Approved by our Board in March, the Wild Park 2020 campaign will be launched publicly in the summer of 2014. Through Wild Park 2020, we aim to highlight the importance of the Park for wildlife and the exemplary work already being undertaken in this leading location for nature conservation in Scotland. Our focus will be on delivering the 'Wild Challenges' agreed with our partners as required to make a step-change for Conservation outcomes in the Park.

Our working relationship with **land managers** is key to the delivery of such aims.

In this year, we progressed a number of Whole Farm and Whole Estate Plans with the aim of improving business's economic and environmental sustainability. One completed plan has resulted in a planning application for a new campsite, the installation of a biomass boiler and a programme of work to improve the biodiversity on the holding.

We were grateful to secure funding from the Scottish Government's Green Stimulus Fund to undertake desk-top and ground-truthing surveys of the extent and condition of the peatlands within the Park. Our ultimate aim

is to work with land managers to restore any degraded peatlands to enhance their value as important habitats and stores for carbon and floodwaters.

We also worked successfully with the landowners of some of the Park's historic designed landscapes to restore characteristic features such as parkland tree planting at Drymen and at Callander.

We have been successful too in providing local **communities** and **volunteers** with opportunities to engage in practical Conservation.

Seven local volunteers have been trained up to control invasive non-native plants (Japanese knotweed, Himalyan balsalm, skunk cabbage and giant hogweed) in over 50 locations in the upper Tay catchment. Feedback from land managers and communities shows that significant progress is being made, but this is a long-term commitment and it may take up to a further five years to eradicate these invasive species. We are supporting the River Forth Fisheries Trust and encouraging the Loch Lomond Fisheries Trust to take this same approach.

We know from the Callander Charette that there is community desire for Callander to be the 'Outdoor Capital of the National Park' and the 'Gateway to the Highlands'. We instigated further discussion with the Callander community groups and other stakeholders about the possibility of the Heritage Lottery Fund's Landscape Partnership programme helping to deliver these aims. We plan to support a feasibility study in the year ahead.

Lastly, we continue to build effective partnerships with our **public and third sector partners**.

Design for current and future construction works on the A82 and A83 involved close collaborative work with Transport Scotland and their contractors. Our expertise in landscape, ecology, outdoor recreation and tourism has been vital in shaping these high profile tourist and transport route projects.

Adding value to these projects, we supported Friends of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs and Friends of the West Highland Line in projects to remove tree and shrub growth where it was inhibiting the views from our road and rail networks.

We are increasingly involved in working with SEPA and Local Authorities to develop flood management plans and the measures to safeguard and improve the ecological status of water-bodies in the Park.

Over the year, we also worked closely with:

- RSPB Scotland and SNH to produce the first five-year management plan for the new RSPB Loch Lomond Nature Reserve near Gartocharn;
- Forestry Commission Scotland and the River Forth Fisheries Trust on water vole conservation in the Trossachs through control of non-native North American mink;
- Scottish Wildlife Trust in support of the Savings Scotland's Red Squirrels Project which is showing a retreat of invasive grey squirrels and recolonisation by reds in locations such as Strathyre and the Trossachs.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

VISITOR MANAGEMENT

Education, outreach and inclusion

Scotland's National Parks provide a fantastic opportunity to deliver the Curriculum for Excellence through outdoor learning. During the 2013/14 year the National Park supported 118 outdoor learning and outreach engagement visits to the Park, delivering over 850 hours of staff time. We engaged with 2,551 children and young people and 618 adults. 82 schools and 36 groups were supported; including eight additional support needs schools and equalities groups. Around one third of all engagement was offered to schools and groups

from within the National Park. We worked in partnership to support an additional six other educational programmes such as Safety 4 Kidz, supporting nearly 1,000 children and young people.

John Muir Award

This year has been the start of a strong partnership with the John Muir Trust. The project joint funds a part time member of staff to work across the National Park, alongside Rangers and other delivery organisations, increasing our capacity to broaden the understanding and participation in the John Muir Award. Rangers supported seven schools to achieve their awards in the National Park with 120 hours of their time supporting 162 young people to achieve their 'Discovery' level award, including three additional support needs group.

Educational Travel Grant

The Educational Travel Grant awarded £6k of funding to enable 27 schools and groups to visit the National Park on 34 occasions; supporting 17 schools, 10 outreach groups and a total of 1,259 individuals to engage with the National Park who would otherwise not been able to afford the transport costs.

Career Long Professional Learning

Six partnership Career Long Professional Learning events were delivered, supporting 123 teachers and senior leaders to increase their capacity to use the National Park as a learning resource to deliver the Curriculum for Excellence.

Visitor management plans

The 5 Lochs visitor management targets for the year were either complete or on track. The highlight for the year was the successful delivery of the first infrastructure development at the two Loch Lubnaig sites; completed in November 2013. The new facilities included toilets, kiosk, camping area and parking including over-night motorhome bays. The new tenants were ready to operate from the start of the 2014 season.

The three year report to ministers was completed for the East Loch Lomond camping byelaws and highlighted the transformation of the area to what is now enjoyed by families and visitors as well as helping local business development.

Maintaining the Park

Countryside facilities

The National Parks many and varied paths, car parks, picnic sites, piers and pontoons were maintained, repaired and upgraded to ensure a safe and enjoyable visitor experience. A combination of in-house maintenance by the Ranger Service and external contractors dealt with a variety of actions including vegetation management, litter picking, bin emptying, tree works, landscaping and regular site inspections across all our managed sites.

Scottish Scenic Routes

The Scottish Government committed funds to the development of pilot architectural interventions along Scottish Scenic Routes. £370k was secured by LLTNPA to deliver the first 3 pilot scenic viewpoints at;

- Inveruglas
- Falls of Falloch
- Loch Lubnaig Beag

The first of three Scottish Scenic Routes installations was completed at the Falls of Falloch. Construction of the installation at Loch Lubnaig Beag was completed in May 2014. The concept design for final installation for Inveruglas was completed and construction will begin later in 2014. The installations provide unusual viewing platforms at places of natural beauty adding to the visitors experience of the National Park.

Outdoor Recreation Plan

The Outdoor Recreation Plan was approved by the National Park Board in June 2013. It outlines commitments and intentions held by all stakeholders that will enhance outdoor recreation opportunities across the Park over the next five years.

Actions completed include;

- Purchase of two mobility scooters for use in the Park and two trial events successfully delivered as part of the Park obility project
- Lochearnhead to St Fillan's old railway project – installation of Glen Tarken bridge –led by the community with support from the National Park.
- Signage and gates installed on the Wee Wood north link core path at Gartmore
- National Park grant aided Helensburgh and District Access Trust £12k to upgrade the Arrochar–Three Lochs Way footpath link.

A Heritage Lottery Fund joint bid with Cairngorms National Park Authority was developed to tackle erosion of the two National Park's mountain paths, unfortunately the project was not successful but was very well received by the Heritage Lottery Fund Board and a revised joint bid was submitted with a decision expected in July 2014.

RESPECT the Park

Operation Ironworks

Operation Ironworks completed its sixth year of coordinated partnership working, but this year with one police force, Police Scotland, under the new centralised structure. The season proved to be challenging with increased numbers of visitors to the Park as a result of the prolonged periods of warmer weather particularly in July. Over 6,000 police officer hours were worked on Ironworks duties, 158 by National Park Special Constables and 169 by Police Scotland Special Constables. Only two serious incidents took place, at Loch Earn and Loch Lubnaig, which were dealt with swiftly and bail conditions granted preventing the accused from entering the Park area.

National Park Police Officer

The National Park funded Police Officer post continues to provide an important link between the Park Authority and Police Scotland. As well as being involved in Operation Ironworks and wildlife crime work within the National Park training has been provided for the Ranger Service on note taking, wildlife crime and angling and the law.

Ranger Service

Visitor Management on land and water was the service priority for the summer. July was an exceptionally busy month with the prolonged good weather bringing many visitors.

The strategies the Ranger Service has for dealing with busy weekends were tested, including byelaw enforcement, and the service was able to operate effectively. Whilst busy periods inevitably stretch resources, the feedback from visitors was good. This year greater emphasis was placed on ensuring patrolling took place when the Park was busiest. The staggered start to seasonal contracts and the re-prioritisation of patrolling on quieter days meant that Rangers carried out almost 1,600 patrols this season and spent 9,000 hours patrolling. National Park Rangers worked closely with Police Scotland during the season and particularly in July to ensure that issues relating to byelaws, anti-social behaviour and public safety were reported and addressed by the appropriate organisation.

VOLUNTEERING

As ever, the number of people keen to come out and volunteer with the National Park is fantastic. This year our volunteers gave over 9,000 hours to support the delivery of the National Park aims. Involving volunteers in the our not only gives them an opportunity to develop an increased understanding and awareness of the National Park Authority and what we do, but also to give something back to an area they love. During 2013/14 we continued developing our volunteer Ranger role and the ongoing delivery of the practical conservation volunteer role, with a specific focus on working with partners.

Volunteer Rangers

Throughout the year, volunteer Rangers were out and about inspiring visitors to enjoy the National Park. They contributed 4,000 hours in 2013/14 and were also involved in supporting the delivery of events and education. We recruited an additional 25 volunteer Rangers during October and November taking our total to 64, trained and committed volunteers.

Conservation volunteers

The National Park's longest running and most popular volunteer opportunity has continued to engage a large number of people in practical conservation tasks. Volunteers get involved in a wide variety of activities led by the National Park and partner organisations.

Volunteers support the delivery of a wide range of Park Partnership Plan actions, such as maintaining of recreation provision, species management and outdoor learning. Partnership led opportunities continue to develop with Woodland Trust Scotland leading National Park volunteers in delivering the Great Trossachs Forest Project and partnership developing with Forestry Commission Scotland and RSPB. Throughout 2013/14 volunteers gave over 4,900 hours and supported over 180 events, an equivalent of over 700 volunteer days.

TOURISM

We have been working with partners and businesses to deliver the actions set in our Tourism Strategy 2012-2017 working towards our vision of:

“A high quality, authentic experience for visitors with many opportunities to appreciate and enjoy the natural and cultural heritage within an internationally renowned landscape that compares to the best on offer around the world.”

Growing business leadership

We continue to support the group of businesses from across the Park that have come together to form a National Park Destination Group.

This industry group has worked closely with us, providing an industry voice, a commercial view on tourism development proposals and helped to grow a shared vision between public and private sector for improving the visitor experience.

National Park Tourism Businesses Conference

To encourage business leadership and collaborative working we held our annual conference for tourism businesses in March 2014 at our headquarters at Carrochan. The focus was making the most of the assets in the Park particularly the opportunities in wildlife tourism. The conference included good practice examples and opportunities for businesses to share their ideas and an opportunity for 100 businesses who attended to network, share innovations and encourage collaborative working.

Improving the Visitor Experience

Our tourism strategy identifies areas of opportunity to improve our visitor experience and we have been working proactively with businesses to grasp these opportunities.

Food & drink

Working with the National Park Destination Group, in partnership with Love Loch Lomond and with support from Scottish Enterprise we have encouraged an industry led three year plan to raise awareness of and improve our food and drink offer in the National Park. The group plans to hold events to promote the use of local suppliers and is working on projects for 2015 Scotland's Year of Food & Drink. [Photo](#)

Cycling % walking

We commissioned a study to assess our tourism cycling offer and formulated recommendations for growing cycling tourism in the Park. Over 120 businesses and partners including the Forestry Commission and Great Trossachs Forest contributed their views and ideas. The recommendations for improvements will make it easier for visitors, from families to more extreme sports cyclists, to explore the Park and will be implemented in 2014.

The new long distance walking route, the John Muir Way, led by Scottish Natural Heritage, was completed. We provided support to the first two sections of this magnificent 134 mile route from Helensburgh to John Muir's birthplace in Dunbar part of which runs through the Park. The new route provides another great opportunity for encouraging cycling and walking in the Park and its surrounding areas. . **Photo**

New infrastructure for Waterbus services

In partnership with Scottish Enterprise works began on the installation of a new pontoon in Drumkinnon Bay. This project is to stimulate the private sector to develop increased waterbus services, generating business investment and revenue creation and more visitors experiencing the destinations around Loch Lomond. **Photo**

New signature event "The Great Scottish Swim"

We led a successful bid to bring the Great Scottish Swim to Loch Lomond in August 2013 in partnership with West Dumbarton Council and Event Scotland. Over 1,900 people participated and the event generated significant economic impact to the local area with more than 50% of participants coming from out with Scotland. **Photo To be inserted**

Year of Natural Scotland 2013

We had a strategic role in the national delivery of the Year of Natural Scotland. We delivered a range of activities and events to maximise the impact of the year for the National Park, which included:

- Working with Visit Scotland to deliver a promotional campaign promoting the Park and hosting familiarisation trips for more than 20 journalists and travel writers
- National Park's week "Get Active" event which was hugely successful, attracting 6,000 people to get out and try something new in the outdoors such as kayaking, rock climbing, biking and archery.

We have been collaborating with Nacionale Vitae Activia . -whose work aims to create an intense and long-lasting emotional tie with the landscape - to produce *Island Drift* a fine art photographic work which used moving and static light sources and multiple camera positions to produce digital images. This work will be presented as an exhibition in 2014.

Photo to be inserted

- We supported an Artist in Residence project with help from Creative Scotland. Our invitation to take inspiration from John Muir and look at the Park from a different angle resulted in huge interest and 45 artists submitting proposals. Steve Messam, the chosen artist has developed proposals for an exciting temporary installation.
- A guide to events and activities in the National Park distributed to visitor information centres and businesses.

Loch Lomond Shores

We worked with Scottish Enterprise on a number of projects to help develop Loch Lomond Shores as a gateway destination. These included a new visitor attraction which has been created at a site developed in partnership with Scottish Enterprise and leased to the Bird of Prey Centre to provide another family friendly experience in the Park.

Interpretive and information signage

The roll out of National Park brand and signage across the Park continued with:

- a programme of National Park interpretation in each of the Visit Scotland visitor information centres in the Park to encourage visitors to explore the area
- The first phase of developing welcome signage for the towns and villages in the Park has begun with a plan to roll this out in partnership with local communities over the next five years to reflect the welcome visitors can expect in the Park.

We worked with Scotland TranServ, Transport Scotland and the Friends of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs to take advantage of maintenance and drainage works taking place on Stonymollan roundabout to carry out improvements to fill in and colour the flying geese, as well as plant trees and shrubs. This project completed the original design and now provides an impressive welcome to the National Park for visitors and residents alike. **Photo to be inserted**

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Our aim is to become a leading edge Planning Authority in Scotland, providing excellent service and high quality advice to assist service users and all our stakeholders.

Over the last year, we have continued to create a customer focused service for all our stakeholders. This includes an emphasis on public engagement, community involvement and increased collaborative working with our key partners.

The National Park is a special place of national significance. Its world-famous landscapes and internationally recognized ecology need to be conserved and enhanced in order to achieve sustainable development. We continue to work collaboratively to deliver Conservation, Visitor Experience and Rural Development outcomes. In doing this, there have been a whole range of successes; from the way we have efficiently processed a heavy workload of planning applications, delivered innovative community engagement and supported significant capacity building within communities. More detail is provided below.

Supporting community projects, both through our advisory and funding role continues to make a real difference.

Forward Planning

The Local Plan has played a positive role attracting inward investors to key strategic sites

A major consultation to inform the preparation of our new Local Development Plan – to be known as **LIVE Park** – was approved by our Board in March for a 10 week period. This will update and replace our current Local Plan. Significant design led engagement with a whole range of partner organizations, our communities, businesses and landowner was undertaken throughout 2013/14 along with extensive research into key development issues. **[add images or drawings from MIR]**

Over the last year we have negotiated:-

- a commuted sums protocol with Stirling Council and currently negotiating similar agreements with other partner Local Housing Authorities.
- contracted with Link Housing Association and Rural Stirling Housing Association to enable new, small scale affordable housing projects, which attracted partner funding

Two entries were shortlisted from our suite of Supplementary Planning Guidance that supports our Local Plan. Callander Development & Flooding was shortlisted in the **2013 Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning**. Our Sustainable Design guidance was awarded a commendation. [\[insert photo from awards\]](#)

Following the 2011 Callander charrette one of the priorities was to improve **Callander Ancaster Square** works which were completed in March. [\[insert photo from Paul Saunders' images\]](#)

Our first **Built Heritage Repair Grant Scheme** delivered support for works ranging from replacement of louvered windows with double-glazed timber sash and case, lime pointing, to new traditional style signage and the repair of a mill lade on nine traditional buildings.

The successful projects were located across the Park in Kilmun, Gartmore, Callander, Killin, Glen Dochart, Tarbet and Balquhiddy and included six listed buildings. The £20,000 Built Heritage Repair Grant fund for 2013/14 delivered projects to a value of £66,809. [\[add photos from completed projects – before/after?\]](#)

CALLANDER CONSERVATION AREA REGENERATION SCHEME to be added

The final year of Callander Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme was its busiest yet, delivering 21 projects to a total value of £305,720. This included projects covering slate roof replacement, renewing lead work and cast iron rainwater goods, traditional sash and case window repairs, rebuilding of chimneys and re-pointing of stone work. [\[use images instead of this?\]](#) Extensive refurbishment was carried out at the James Pringle Weavers shop front in Ancaster Square, a particularly prominent building, and traditional awning repairs were carried out at two other shops.

Communities

Under the **Community Grant Scheme** 15 awards were made with a total of £20,121 being awarded. Projects supported included:

- Renovating all the benches in Drymen Square
- Repairs and improvements at Tyndrum Village Hall

Throughout 2013-14 we offered support through our ongoing service level agreement providing funds and in-kind resources to the **Community Partnership**. Achievements include:

- Completion of Community Action Plans for Arrochar, Tarbet & Ardlui, Balquhiddy, Lochearnhead & Strathyre, Strathfillan, and Sandbank
- The Skills Partnership was launched by ?? name? Minister for Youth Employment and three new staff were recruited to deliver the project

This year also saw more dedicated development and grant support awarded to ambitious, community-led initiatives. Highlights include **Paths in the Park**: which saw installation of a new 100+ foot 'Bailey' bridge at Glentarken – the missing link in the St Fillans to Lochearnhead cycling and walking path.

Argyll Mausoleum: The completion and opening of the new visitor facility – the first phase of the £1m project to conserve and create access to what has recently been called 'Rosslyn Chapel of the West'.

The refurbishment work is well underway with the completion of the visitor shelter, path upgrades and opening of the visitor centre. Work to the mausoleum is ongoing.

[Diana - photo of shelter](#)

Development Management performance

Development Management influences development proposals to meet the Park Aims. It is the key mechanism for balancing competing interests and making planning decisions. The Park determined 325 applications in 2013.

We are now in our second year of working with the Scottish Governments 'Planning Performance Framework' (PPF) as the key tool for monitoring our performance (and that of the other 33 Planning Authorities of Scotland). This approach has become successfully embedded and seeks to capture a more rounded picture of planning performance, taking account of the quality of service delivery, rather than focusing so heavily on speed of decision. The new approach incorporates a shift toward average determination times across the range of application types.

Our second performance report was submitted to the Scottish Government in October 2013 and received a favorable feedback report. It was acknowledged that overall the National Park performs strongly against the 15 'Key Performance Markers' that the Government has identified. In particular it was noted that the National Park planners make effective use of tools such as 'processing agreements' to give improved certainty to the timescales for determining more complex applications. Our work to improve efficiencies in determining applications which require to be subject 'planning legal agreements' was also acknowledged

From October until the end of 2013 the National Park Authority came under significant pressure to determine a number of complex applications to a deadline of 31 December. These were applications for run of river hydro power schemes. Through November and December there were 15 'live' hydro applications within the Park area. These applications required expert consideration to ensure that any potential landscape and ecological impacts were avoided or mitigated. Nine of the 15 applications were subject to the Environmental Impact Assessment process, requiring detailed consideration of landscape and ecological aspects..

At the time, we revised our scheme of delegated authority to facilitate capacity to manage both volume and the complex nature of planning applications which involve Environmental Impact Assessments .

The performance of the National Park Authority to determine as many of these applications as possible within the timescale was exceptional and is to be regarded as a significant contribution toward supporting the development of the renewable energy sector in Scotland, while at the same time ensuring that all necessary environmental safeguards and mitigation measures are secured.

Charts - plus - hydro photos

Pre-application advice service

Our comprehensive pre-application advisory service is continuing to prove successful, focusing on providing constructive advice at an early stage. Our planning application approval rate of 96% for 2013 remains one of the highest levels across the whole of Scotland.

The pre-application service is a key tool to achieve the following additional aims:

- Better quality of applications at submission, with all required supporting information having been flagged early
- Improved certainty for applicants on likely outcome and timescales
- Fewer appeals/local reviews.

E-planning

The online system continues to prove successful with 64% of applications submitted online for 2013.

This percentage maintains our position among the top performing Scottish Planning Authorities in terms of online interaction. Nevertheless, we aspire to further increase usage and usability at every opportunity.

	Applications received	Fee income (Financial Year)	Online applications	Pre-applications received
2010	317	£127k	42%	270
2011	307	£113k	49%	306
2012	378	£195k	62%	324
2013	325	£292k	64%	277

Renewables and hydro power

As highlighted in the Planning performance section of the report, run-of-river hydro developments featured significantly in the National Park Authority application and pre-application workload through 2013. 17 applications for hydro schemes were received in 2013 and 10 were determined by 31st December. A total of 19 proposals were subject to pre-application discussion and/or EIA screening.

These applications contributed to the significant increase in fee income that was evident across 2013 in comparison with previous years.

See Sam table – fees plus hydro photos.

Our Local Plan policies support small-scale hydro schemes where there will be no significant adverse impacts on landscape or ecology of the river system.

Supplementary Planning Guidance on renewables has been revised and a consultative draft was approved at the Planning and Access Committee in February 2013. The guidance advises that within the Park renewable energy from hydro schemes is most likely to be from run-of-river schemes, with a generating capacity of up to 2MW. The guide to Best Practice & Mitigation, included as an Appendix, is aimed at providing detailed advice on design, siting, reinstatement and mitigation measures. It will also signpost and provide links to related guidance and information sources.

National Park Authority officers work closely with hydro developers to ensure that the construction methods comply with good practice techniques in order to ensure the impact of the development is minimized and restoration of the landscape takes place as quickly as possible. We are also piloting improved alignment of the consultation and consenting processes with SEPA who have a separate licensing duty for construction work within a watercourse.

Development on the ground

It has been encouraging to see a range of new developments completed and under construction right across the Park. This activity is an important indicator of a growing resurgence of confidence in the construction industry. Notable schemes commenced include a mixed use (residential and retail) development at Balloch riverside, 14 dwelling houses at the former Youth Hostel site in Killin, the Bridge of Lochay Hotel site for seven holiday chalets, an ever increasing number of hydro scheme developments. The development at the former garage site in Killin also finished and is now occupied providing 12 affordable housing units.

Ed photo :Killin

CORPORATE SERVICES

Board and committees

2013-14 was another busy year for the National Park Authority's Board. As in previous years, the Board has considered a number of high-profile issues, projects and strategies throughout the year.

In March 2014, National Park Board members reappointed Linda McKay as Convener for a further three-year term.

The work of the Board is supported and developed by its four standing committees: Planning & Access, Audit (both of which are required by statute), Strategy and the Delivery Group.

The Planning & Access Committee is responsible for determining planning applications in categories identified by the Scheme of Delegation for Planning.

Six members of the Planning & Access Committee are also members of the Local Review Body (LRB), which acts as an appeal body for applications determined at officer level. The Park Authority held two appeals in 2013-14.

The Audit Committee meets quarterly and is responsible for providing scrutiny and constructive challenge to Park Authority risk management, governance and internal control processes. The Audit Committee also has responsibility for approving the Annual Report and Accounts for signature by the Accountable Officer. The joint internal audit programme for both National Park Authorities continued during 2012-13. Where content of audits overlapped, one report for was presented to both Audit Committees continuing to enhance opportunities for joint good practice to be shared and efficiencies made.

The Delivery Group is responsible for overseeing the delivery of the Park Authority's core objectives, financial performance and staff resource management. Quarterly reports were presented to this group highlighting performance against the Corporate Plan, financial and business performance targets.

Further information about all our Board Members is summarised on pages ? to ?

Corporate Performance

The organisation handles a number of complaints and information requests each year. The number of complaints and information requests is broadly similar over the last two financial years – notably however there was an increase in the number of Subject Access Requests received in terms of the Data Protection Act 1998.

	2012/13	2013/14
Complaints	35	35
Subject Access Requests	1	5
Environmental Information Requests	26	26
Freedom of Information Requests	39	30

Communications

Interest in the work of the National Park Authority across Scotland and the wider UK continued throughout 2013-14. Our presence in local, national and international media was frequent and generally very positive. The use of social media was targeted to good effect. Our key identified audiences of Park residents, visitors, Scottish Government, partner organisations and our own staff were all kept abreast of a wide variety of stories, issues and announcements through a broad range of channels.

The Park continued to receive excellent TV coverage throughout the year with film crews from news and documentaries all making their way to Loch Lomond. We facilitated the making of Paul Murton's series 'Grand

Tours of the Scottish Islands' and Caroline Quentin's 'National Parks' series featuring Loch Lomond & the Trossachs as well as the Great Scottish Swim, which was held at Loch Lomond for the first time, attracting major media coverage in the run up to and after the actual event.

Digital presence

Our digital presence continued to expand and reach even wider with the Park's website attracting 350,000 unique visitors during course of the year. The growth in website 'hits' as well as increased engagement through the use of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube stands the Park in good stead going forward as we continue to develop our digital output and target our audiences with relevant, appealing content.

Gaelic Language Plan

The Park's commitment to the Gaelic language through the implementation of our Gaelic Language Plan has continued throughout the year. We again offered staff and board members Gaelic Language training and our bespoke leaflet which explains the Gaelic origins of several place names within the Park remains as one of our most popular amongst visitors to the Park.

Events

2013's Royal Highland Show provided the Park with an opportunity to reach a number of audiences and we were particularly well-represented along with our partner organisations including Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, SEPA, Animal Health and, of course, our sister National Park in the Cairngorms. This year we were delighted that our Minister, Paul Wheelhouse personally recognised the excellent work of our Volunteer Rangers at the Royal Highland Show in June.

The first Great Scottish Swim on the shores of Loch Lomond was hugely successful and will hopefully become an annual event in the National Park calendar.

Preparations are well underway for the John Muir Festival, the Year of Homecoming and particularly the John Muir Conference, the preparations for which are being led by the National Parks.