

National Park Authority Board Meeting

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Scotland's National Parks: The Mountains and The People Project

Paper for noting

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The following paper provides an overview and update on The Mountains and The People project which is one of the priority projects identified in the National Park Partnership Plan; and Outdoor Recreation Plan 2012- 2017. The project has just received confirmation of funding of £3.2 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund making it the largest outdoor recreation and environmental improvement project to be delivered by the two national parks.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The National Park Partnership Plan 2012 – 2017 identifies 2015 as the target date for the implementation of a programme of measures to tackle upland path erosion on key routes in the National Park. This action is directly linked to Policy VE 3 Recreation and Access;

“The National Park should provide high quality recreation and access opportunities that offer something for everyone. Access should be complimentary with conservation policies to ensure that the natural and cultural heritage is not degraded by over-use...”

- 2.2 In 2011 the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority and the Cairngorms National Park Authority met with the Cairngorms Outdoors Access Trust (COAT) to first discuss the potential for a partnership approach to protecting the mountains of Scotland's National Parks.
- 2.3 Since then the project has progressed through initial scoping and development stages to a successful stage 2 Heritage Lottery Fund bid in May 2015, securing £3.2million from the UK Lottery fund in London. Funding was also agreed with the two national parks, SNH and Forestry Commission Scotland taking the total project to just over £6million.
- 2.4 The focus for the project is more than mountain path repairs and includes opportunities for engagement through skills training, volunteering, educational and promotional work to actively involve the people of Scotland in caring for their upland landscapes and habitats. The project helps in the achievement of all four National Park aims.

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2.5 The development of the project has involved a significant amount of work including a detailed paths audit and activity plan in preparation for the stage 1 HLF bid, and business plan, conservation plan and interpretation plan for the stage 2 submission.

3. Project Partners and Contributions

3.1 The two National Park Authorities alongside Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission Scotland are the key funding partners. With COAT taking the lead role in funding applications and project delivery. COAT has expertise in this type of project activity, including attracting funding and delivering training and contract works in a mountain environment.

3.2 The involvement of landowners has been key to progressing the project as many of the paths cross private land. Forestry Commission Scotland manage the forest estate which has sections of paths such as those up Ben Venue, Ben Lomond, Ben Ledi, Ben A'an and Beinn Narnain; whilst others cross estates such as Ardvorlich and Inverlochlaraig.

3.3 COAT is also seeking to attract support from other charitable institutions and corporate sponsorship as well as utilising income generated from car park based voluntary contributions.

3.4 The total project budget is £6,124,927 over 5 years. The breakdown of contributions is detailed below and includes both cash and in-kind.

Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority	£525,000
Cairngorms National Park Authority	£275,000
Scottish Natural Heritage	£200,000
Forestry Commission Scotland	£525,000
Scottish Mountaineering Trust	£25,000
In kind partner contributions	£242,750
COAT generated income	£612,177
Charitable trusts	£260,000
Private sector/donations	£200,000
Heritage Lottery Fund (UK)	£3,260,000
Total Income	£6,124,927

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3.5 An essential part of making the project a success is involving others and COAT will be making contact with a number of organisations and interest groups within The Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park who may have an interest in the project. This may be as funders or in-kind contributors, as delivery partners or simply as supporters of the project.

4. The Project programmes

4.1 The Mountains and The People project is more than just being about improving paths in upland areas. It is about training and education, involving volunteers and community groups, events and activities and in particular it is about engaging with those who currently only view the mountains from afar.

4.2 The project will carry out a suite of integrated programmes with the overarching objective of involving the people of Scotland in the enhancement and protection of the wild and special qualities of the mountains within Scotland's National Parks.

4.3 The project comprises 6 distinct and exciting programmes of activities outlined below.

- **The Upland Path Programme** – The infrastructure element of the project will upgrade, enhance and repair prioritised mountain routes in both National Parks using both intensive and light touch path repair techniques. These include some of the worst path erosion problems in Scotland. A total of 23 routes will be improved in Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park including Ben Ledi, Ben A'an, Ben Dubhcraig, Ben Lomond, Ben Venue and Ben Narnain in the Arrochar Alps.
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- **The Training Programme** will run skills training courses (7 months) in the south Loch Lomond and Cairngorms areas to accredit younger people with the skills necessary to take up employment opportunities generated through the project and elsewhere. The programme will look to train 48 people during the project.
- **The Conservation Volunteer Programme** will encourage volunteers from the major centres of population to carry out practical conservation work supporting

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the mountain paths programme, including basic construction work, maintenance and habitat management.

- **The Adopt A Path Programme** will involve volunteers in monitoring paths across both National Parks. This will engage users directly in providing feedback on route conditions and help inform the aftercare of the mountains.
- **The Education Programme** will co-ordinate education and learning opportunities to involve schools, colleges and universities in learning about the mountain environment, what's involved in the care, monitoring and management of upland paths in both National Parks.
- **The Visitor Information Programme** will liaise with both National Parks visitor services to ensure the visitors and the wider public are made aware of what's involved in looking after and managing the upland path resource. This will be through provision of information for events, walks, visitor infrastructure, web and social media.

5. Project Management and Governance

- 5.1 The project will be led and managed by COAT who are the responsible organisation for all funding applications and associated terms.
- 5.2 COAT is a charity and has operated in the wider Cairngorms area since 2008 (originally established as the Upper Deeside Access Trust) and was set up to develop and deliver outdoor access projects on behalf of the Cairngorms National Park stakeholders. In 2012 it changed its Articles of Association to enable it to work across both National Parks. The governance arrangements for COAT include a Board of Directors with Peter Ord as Chairperson; and a supporting Management Steering Group made up of the main funders and a small staff team headed up by CEO Dougie Baird.
- 5.3 The National Park Authorities project management and governance requirements will form part of the conditions in the grant agreement between the two authorities and COAT. These are currently being finalised prior to the projects commencement.

6. Promotion and Celebration

- 6.1 The Mountains and The People project announced the successful Lottery funding at midnight on 4 June 2015, and has since attracted a significant amount of interest from the media and the public. The work now begins to get the project underway with early actions including project staff team recruitment, setting up the project steering group, letting of the first path repair contracts and spreading the good news.

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6.2 This is a five year project which provides opportunities to promote the good work which will help in the achievement of all four National Park aims as well as part of our Your Park vision to make the National Park a place for all to enjoy.

7. Recommendation

The Board are asked to **note** the contents of this paper.

Author: Bridget Jones, Head of Visitor Management;
Claire Travis, Visitor Operations Manager
Executive Sponsor: Gordon Watson, CEO