

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 5



National Park Partnership Plan 2017-22

Paper for Approval

1. Purpose

The current National Park Partnership Plan is due to expire in 2017. Work therefore needs to begin now on a new Plan in order to be able to submit to Scottish Ministers for approval by spring 2017. The new Plan will cover the period 2017-22.

The Plan sets out policies for managing the National Park to achieve its statutory aims and provides the strategic context for coordinating both the authority's functions and activities, and importantly also those of other partner bodies operating in the Park. It is a Plan for the place which should be recognised by all those working in the Park and is not the sole responsibility of the National Park Authority to deliver. It is therefore important that the policies and targets that are developed as part of the process are owned by all the organisations working in the Park.

This paper sets some of the key changes to our operating environment which need to be taken into account in preparing the new Plan, and outlines a process and approach for developing the Park Plan during 2016 for the Board to consider. A small Member working group is proposed to oversee the preparation process.

2. Recommendation

Members are requested to:

- a) Agree the proposed process and timescales for developing the new National Park Partnership Plan 2017-22
- b) Agree to the formation and membership of a small Working Group to oversee the preparation process

3. Context

The National Park Partnership Plan is the strategic document for co-ordinating the management of the National Park. The legislation states that *'a National Park Authority must, by such time as the Scottish Ministers may direct, prepare and submit to the Scottish Ministers a plan (a "National Park Plan") setting out its policy for—*

- a) *managing the National Park, and*
- b) *coordinating the exercise of—*
 - i. *the authority's functions in relation to the National Park, and*
 - ii. *the functions of other public bodies and office-holders so far as affecting the National Park, with a view to accomplishing the purpose set out in section 9(1).*

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Section 9(1) states that the general purpose of a National Park authority is to ensure that the National Park aims are collectively achieved in relation to the National Park in a co-ordinated way

Finally Scottish Ministers, a National Park Authority, a local authority and any other public body or office-holder must, in exercising functions so far as affecting a National Park.

4. Update on Key External Environment Changes

While the new National Park Partnership Plan will focus on the issues and opportunities with the Park area itself, it must also respond to the external policy environment affecting National Park interests and responsibilities. Plan preparation is commencing during a period of intense change which presents an excellent opportunity to refresh our agenda and demonstrate the relevance of our work to the delivery of wider Government priorities and outcomes. The following are of particular note for the development of the new Plan.

- *Rural Affairs Food and Environment (RAFE) Delivery Board* - Established following the EnFor Review, it is charged with driving operational and cultural alignment across rural affairs, food and environment outcomes and priorities. Work has already begun on establishing joint strategic objectives and developing shared services.
- *Financial Environment* – With an expected reduction in the block grant based on previous trends and recent UK Government spending review, there is a challenge to do ‘better for less’ and to ‘collectively and effectively use all available capabilities and resources’ across the public sector.
- *Scottish Planning Policy and NPF3/Review of the Planning System* – Both documents were launched in 2014 and impact directly on the expectations of LLTNPA as a planning authority. The review of the planning system may result in changes to how planning processes operate.
- *National Biodiversity Route Map to 2020* - Launched in June 2015, it sets out the work needed to deliver the ‘2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity’. The plan focuses on six ‘Big Steps for Nature’, with a corresponding Delivery Agreement for the Park Authority.
- *Community Empowerment* – The combination of the Community Empowerment Act and Land Reform Bill sets out an agenda with implications and opportunities for communities and many delivery partners to deliver Park outcomes.
- *Land Use Strategy* – A refresh of the national land use strategy has just been launched for consultation. There is an opportunity for the new Plan to provide a regional land use strategy for the National Park to guide land management and conservation priorities.

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- *Climate Change* - The requirements for public body reporting on climate change have been brought into force. The Park Authority is viewed as a 'major player' in the drive 'for the public sector to lead by example'. There is an opportunity to give greater prominence to how the Plan can contribute to carbon management or climate change adaptation.

5. Fit with National Outcomes

As Board members will be aware, the *Scotland Performs National Outcomes* have been placed on a statutory footing with the passing of the Community Empowerment Bill and this approach to national performance has been gaining international recognition. This further emphasises the need to continue strong alignment of Park Authority delivery against the National Outcomes, in both current and future forms.

6. Proposed Approach and Process for Developing the Plan

The new NPPP is not expected to diverge significantly from the existing Plan, continuing to structure around the three key themes of Conservation, Visitor Experience and Rural Development. This has worked well in the current Plan in communicating clearly with partners and clarifying priorities within the organisation. While the current Plan has been successful in delivering significantly for the Park, there are significant projects what will continue into the next Plan period. At this point of considering both the external environment and our new Plan, we have an important and timely opportunity to build on our track record, strengthen our narrative and embed the national outcomes and policy areas. We must also consider the challenges of continuing to deliver good outcomes with fewer resources.

As was the case with the current Plan we will be working in parallel with Cairngorms National Park Authority with the aim of submitting Plans to Scottish Ministers at the same time. Work is already underway to identify common themes and messages which will feature in both Plans which articulate the importance and contribution of both National Parks in achieving significant outcomes for Scotland.

The new Plan is due to be in place in 2017. The table overleaf outlines the main milestones of its development in meeting this deadline, with indicative timescales.

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Milestone	Indicative Timescale
Phase 1 Start-up: Agree position and approach; establish team and initiate project	Dec 2015 –Feb 2016
Phase 2 Pre Consultation stakeholder engagement and discussion papers	March - May 2016
Phase3 Draft Consultation Document & associated assessments	May - Aug 2016
Phase 4 Formal consultation – 12 weeks	Sept – Dec 2016
Phase 5 Finalise National Park Partnership Plan	Jan 2017 - Feb 2017
Phase 6 Submission of finalised National Park Plan to Scottish Ministers	April 2017

7. Proposed Board Process

It is proposed that the Board will have workshop sessions to look at key issues to help inform the development of the draft plan in March /April 2016.

The draft Plan for consultation will then be considered by the Board in August / September 2016, perhaps requiring a special August meeting. Following a 3 month consultation any recommended significant changes will be taken back to the Board for consideration with the aim of achieving submission to Ministers in April 2017.

It is proposed that a Working Group of up to 5 Members is established up to oversee and advise on the management of the Plan preparation and consultation process. The Board are requested to agree the membership of the Group.

8. Proposed Partner Process

The other crucial element for the development of the Plan is the development of the Plan with partner organisations. To mirror the Board process it is proposed that there will also be workshops on the emerging priorities of the Plan with partner organisations. It is critical that senior decision makers from partner organisations attend these workshops so that targets are developed that have buy-in from organisations. Bi-lateral discussions will also take place where applicable.

Wider engagement and communication on the development of the Plan will be developed with learning from the successes and innovations from the recent LIVE Park Local Development Plan process.

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9. Statutory Assessments

As the Plan is prepared we will also be producing the corresponding Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Habitat Regulation Appraisal (HRA) and Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA). The framework and timetable will be developed with the consultation authorities and the development of the statutory assessments will require to be considered as part of the overall plan preparation programme.

10. Conclusion

Members are asked to agree that the commencement of the preparation of the next National Park Partnership plan 2017-22 and approve the timetable set out in this report and the membership of the proposed Working Group to oversee the process.

Authors: Gordon Watson, CEO
Jo Wright, Strategy & Policy Adviser
Executive Sponsor: Gordon Watson, CEO