

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 10

Organisational Update



Paper for information

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides a summary overview of the activities, progress on corporate matters and operational highlights between March and May.

2. Context

- 2.1 The Delivery Group reports, published on the Board microsite, provide greater detail on specific progress for the year ended March (January to March) and achievements against the 2015-16 Annual Operational Plan objectives.
- 2.2 The Annual Report also provides an excellent review and highlights from the year.

3. Chief Executive Office Update

- 3.1 The Chief Executive was asked to give evidence to the panel making recommendations to then Cabinet Secretary Alex Neil as part of the Scottish Government's review of the planning system. This was an important opportunity to highlight our successes, suggest improvements and support CNPA in the changes they are seeking.
- 3.2 The Chief Executive attended the 'RAFE Leading Together' event which brought together leaders from policy areas, public bodies and key stakeholders from across RAFE to explore some of the Delivery Board's work over the last year to improve collaboration and delivery across the portfolio.
- 3.3 The Chief Executive has been out and about in our communities including the recent Cowal Areas network, meetings of the Trossachs and Arrochar & Tarbert community councils, as well as working with our volunteers on rhododendron clearance on West Loch Lomond.

4. Conservation & Land Use Update

- 4.1 Following successful bids to the Peatland Action fund we have now completed upland peatland restoration works on two sites across 57 hectares within the Park, which includes 35.5 km of re-profiling of hags and gullies as well as bare peat pan restoration.

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- 4.2 We have now finalised three Integrated Land Management plans for holdings and have subsequently supported one of the holdings with a whole farm application to the new Scottish Government Agri-Environment Climate Scheme to deliver amongst other options moorland management aims, options for the benefit of designated habitats and species and the creation of a water margin to contribute towards diffuse pollution targets.

We have also supported applications to continue management for the existing Glen Dochart Waders project as well as holdings within the Callander Black Grouse project area.

- 4.3 At the RSPB Loch Lomond nature reserve, the newly completed Visitor Hub and a residential volunteering programme will be formally launched on 20 June. These will allow us to expand the scope for people to experience the reserve and its wildlife. Plans are also now in place for repairing & replacing two key bridges on the Reserve to improve the scope for conservation management. Subject to securing matching funding, these works are scheduled for late summer 2016. We have also worked with our RSPB and Police Scotland colleagues to protect some rare little ringed plovers from disturbance during the Drymen show.
- 4.4 Public engagement work for the SEPA-led Strathard Ecosystems Services project continued with an event for local businesses in May that we helped to host. We also assisted Forest Research with some field work looking at the potential for brash dams and woodland management options that would contribute to the project.
- 4.5 Conservation support for the development of new hydro schemes in the National Park has continued to focus on the discharge of planning conditions, both pre-commencement and during construction. Casework, often requiring site visits, has been undertaken since March for a number of schemes including Chaorach, Ben More, Donich, Burn of Ample, Keltie, Kendrum and Ben Glas.
- 4.6 Other development-related casework that we have advised on with a focus on retaining scenic quality has included the Cononish ore-processing application, changes to road signs at Stonymollan and the A85 at loch Earn and improvements to a section of the A83 local diversion route in Glen Croe.

5. Visitor Experience Update

- 5.1 A new National Park natural heritage leaflet with SNH is being promoted in the National Park. An updated Explore the Park leaflet is complete and 70,000 copies are now being used to promote the National Park. Updates to visitor-facing web

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pages are on-going. New visitor-facing content is almost complete and awaiting new website for launch.

- 5.2 The marketing and tender process for the Luss Pier Shop was completed and the winning tenderer, St Mocha Café Balmaha, has been agreed with the head landlord, Luss Estates. This is expected to open from early June, and includes public toilet provision on the pier through a 30p token system. The winning tenderer provided an offer that fits with our aims for high quality local food and drink provision.

Café Lochan are operating the toilets at Firkin Point for us this season and it is hoped that they will be able to operate a small kiosk from the building shortly, offering hot drinks and a small range of snacks subject to obtaining relevant permissions. In addition to improving the visitor experience at this busy site this is also contributing to reducing our operating costs.

The marketing process for our Rowardennan building is now underway with the aim of securing an operator and any required consents for Spring 2017. In addition it is hoped that a pop-up operator will be secured for part of the 2016 season.

We have begun trialling pop-up activities at Milarrochy Bay, testing the market in advance of potentially marketing the site for a full-time operator from 2017.

- 5.3 Our 2015/16 visitor survey is now complete and a summary of results is being produced. On most measures the visitor experience is improving, food and drink as part of the reason to visit has increased significantly from 11% to 44%, highlighting the success of our plan to raise the profile of the National Park food and drink offer.

Lack of digital connectivity was the biggest issue for visitors.

The survey of waterbus users will be undertaken again this year as will surveys of various sites and camping to establish baseline information for Your Park.

- 5.4 Excitingly Clyde Cruises has agreed to pilot a waterbus service from the pontoon at Loch Lomond Shores to Inchmurrin and Inchcailloch this summer.

Positively all the boat operators have contributed a total of £1,600 towards specific marketing of waterbus services.

A planning application has been approved for a new pontoon at Balmaha and discussions have begun to develop new services using this new drop off point.

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At the same time the Oak Tree Inn is in negotiations to lease our Solar Boat to offer accessible short trips from Balmaha.

6. Visitor Management Update

- 6.1 The Mountains and the People project, an Outdoor Recreation Plan priority, continues to progress well. Work has continued to assemble the staff team with Training Officer Kieran Fogarty starting in January and Education & Volunteering Officer Rosie Winch starting in February. Trainee recruitment saw 126 applications which were whittled down to a final 8 trainees who started in April. Path work has been completed on Ben A'an and started on Ben Lomond, with a helicopter lift of materials, and The Cobbler. Staff at the May 10:02 got an opportunity to hear about the project from Tom Wallace as well as meet the trainees.
- 6.2 Support for community led Active Travel projects has continued with progress being made towards completion of phase 2 of the St Fillans to Lochearnhead project, which is the section from St Fillans to Tynreoch. The Active Travel study between Balloch and Gartocharn is progressing well, with Kilmarnock Development Trust leading on commissioning a consultant.
- 6.3 The Education resources have been updated in Balmaha Visitor Centre with a host of new John Muir legacy resources, which have been developed and are available for the public and groups to use. This includes John Muir satchels, beards, walking sticks and a wide range of activities for visitors to deepen their understanding of John Muir and the National Park.
- 6.4 The interpretation panels for the Outdoor Education Centres have been completed and they are very warmly received, ensuring that anyone using outdoor centres within the National Park get a clear understanding of the National Park and its key messages.
- 6.5 In terms of Volunteering activity, Quarter 4 has been a really busy period with an astounding 2,181 hours contributed to supporting conservation and maintenance tasks across the National Park. We received 61 requests for support, with the vast majority of these being from our partners and 22 from our Ranger Service.
- 6.6 Recruitment of Seasonal Rangers has gone well this year and we welcomed 27 additions to our team starting in late March who supported visitors over the Easter weekend and this will continue on into the summer season.

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6.7 The Park Authority Events and Activities Programme has been agreed for the 2016/17 season, and we have a wide range of support planned. From attendance at the Royal Highland Show to support for the Trossachs Summer Festival, staff and volunteers will be in attendance to share our key messages and engage with the public.

7. Rural Development Update



7.1 A four day Charrette was successfully undertaken in Balloch during February and March in partnership with West Dunbartonshire Council, Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Government. This had a strong focus on delivery of the key local development plan sites and identified actions for progressing these including; West Riverside, Pier end area next to the Maid of the Loch, East Riverside path, Balloch Castle and Country Park, Station Square and a new Village Square creating enhanced public space around the Main Street shopping area and Moss O'Balloch. Significant efforts were made to engage people in the charrette with social media, particularly facebook, used to connect with working age people and families, supported by tailored youth engagement sessions with schools and youth groups.

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This approach worked extremely well and was particularly successful in reaching the 35-44 age group. Our engagement approach has received good recognition with Scottish Government asking us to share this recently with other Scottish planning authorities.

- 7.2 The examination of LIVE Park: Proposed Local Development Plan is now well underway with two Reporters appointed by the Scottish Government undertaking this work.
- 7.3 Our entry to the UK Planning Excellence Awards 2016 'Excellence in Plan Making Practice' for our LIVEPark Local Development Plan was shortlisted as a finalist. Whilst none of the Scottish entries received awards, it is a significant achievement to have been a shortlisted entrant, of which the team are very proud.
- 7.4 The Built Heritage Grant Scheme, which encourages the repair and restoration of traditional buildings, was launched at the beginning of May. The deadline for applications is the 6th of July and several initial inquiries have already been made.
- 7.5 Development activity in terms of the number of planning applications and the implementation of these remains busy, continuing the trend of the previous year. Careful monitoring of the hydro schemes under construction and in the final stages of pre-start discharge of conditions is continuing. The more notable decisions during this period have included the approval of five affordable homes in Luss – this is the culmination of a significant amount of partnership working with Luss Estates Company, Argyll & Bute Council and LINK Housing Association – and the approval of a temporary processing trial at the Cononish Gold/Silver mine near Tyndrum. The preparations for this project are already at an advanced stage with the processing expected to have started in early June.
- 7.6 The Callander Landscape Partnership Project reached its first milestone with the formal project development phase commencing. We are delighted the project officer has now started which will bring real focus on getting the detail of the individual projects established for the submission for the delivery funding next year.

8. Commercial Development Update

- 8.1 The National Park Partnerships (NPP) website was launched in May and members are encouraged to visit the new site at www.nationalparks.co.uk. Good progress has been made to identify relevant business sectors and key contacts within target organisations.

9. Corporate Update

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9.1 Marketing and Communications

- 9.1.1 Work has begun to extend the 'LIVE Park' approach to engaging people in Planning to the Development Management and Communities element of our Rural Development and Planning function.
- 9.1.2 Communications representatives from across the Rural Affairs, Food and the Environment (RAFE) organisations have been working closely together to facilitate better coordinated communications.

9.2 HR Update

- 9.2.1 Now that we have 3 years' worth of results we have taken the decision to participate in the Best Companies survey every 2 years instead of annually. This does not mean that employee engagement is any less important and the expectation is that teams will still work towards the targets they set and we will have a little more time to achieve and celebrate our actions before we undertake the next survey.
- 9.2.2 We are delighted to advise that the Park Authority has recently been accredited as a Living Wage Employer recognising that we pay our staff a fair, decent wage. In addition to this, we have also achieved the Healthy Working Lives Bronze Award recognising that through staff engagement the Park Authority is aware of and is addressing health, safety and wellbeing issues at work. Both of these can be added to the growing list of benefits working for the Park Authority.

9.3 Governance Update

- 9.3.1 The programme to review all Standing Orders and Terms of Reference for the Board and its sub groups has been completed.
- 9.3.2 We continue to meet our statutory deadlines for responding to information requests and reviews.

9.4 Legal Update

- 9.4.1 The provisional Tree Preservation Order (TPO) for the Bicycle Tree, Dorothy's Field, Brig O' Turk was confirmed by the Planning and Access Committee in

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March and is now in place. The Tree Preservation Order protects the tree in the event of any future change in land use in the surrounding area.

9.4.2 Renyana Stahl Anstalt v LLTNPA – appeal against access enforcement notice at Drumlean Estate, Aberfoyle. An appeal has been lodged by the Park Authority against the Sheriff's decision. The appeal hearing will take place at the end of August 2016 in the Sheriff Appeal Court.

9.4.3 Willow's Edge, Balmaha Road, Drymen. Alexander Macdonald, the landowner pled Not Guilty when the case called in Stirling Sheriff Court for an Intermediate Diet in August 2015. A notional trial diet which was due to take place in March 2016 did not proceed and the Procurator Fiscal's office issued a statement to the effect that no further action would be taken in relation to the charges. The statement stressed that the decision not to proceed did not affect the Section 168 Tree Replanting Notice which we had issued requiring replanting of the area where the trees were felled by the end of May 2016. Replanting has since commenced.

9.5 Infrastructure/Shared Services Update

9.5.1 Good progress continues to be made with exploring shared services and enhanced partnership working. West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC) is now providing our Internal Audit Services. We are recruiting 2 Modern Apprenticeships in Business Administration as part of our Developing the Young Workforce agenda under WDC's Modern Apprenticeship contract and our Health and Safety Intern, working with SEPA starts in June.

Implementation of a SIP line (trunking is a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and streaming media service based on the **Session Initiation Protocol**) is now at an advanced stage and expected to be complete by Mid-June. On completion of this solution we are anticipating a 40% reduction of telephony call charges.

We are supporting Cairngorms National Park Authority in final stages of installing MS Lync.

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