

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 8



## Organisational Update

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### *Paper for information*

#### 1. Purpose

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

#### 2. Context

- 2.1 The Delivery Group reports, provide greater detail on specific progress for the Quarter 2 to September 2016 and achievements against the 2016-17 Annual Operational Plan objectives.

#### 3. Chief Executive Office Update

- 3.1 The Chief Executive continues to attend digital themed meetings, events and cohorts in Scottish Government ensuring the Park Authority is well placed to take full advantage of all the economic, social and environmental opportunities offered by the digital age.
- 3.2 The Chief Executive and Convener recently hosted a visit from the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism & External Affairs, this provided the opportunity to showcase the great work of the Tourism Team and collaboration with private businesses.
- 3.3 Several liaison meetings with key stakeholders have taken place over the past quarter, high level discussions around partner working took place.
- 3.4 National Parks Partnership Ltd held their Board meeting at National Park Headquarters, branding and design was the main focus for this meeting, the group were taken on a brief tour of some of the Park Authority's scenic routes installations.

#### 4. Conservation & Land Use Update

- 4.1 We continue to work with identified holdings through the Integrated Land Management plan project to facilitate delivery of National Park and Wild Park outcomes through positive land management.

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- 4.2 We continue to work with Deer Management Groups throughout the Park and develop the potential Habitat Impact Assessment project. SNH have recently published their report to Scottish Government on the effectiveness of deer management in Scotland. Our positive work with Deer Management Groups is recognised in the report, however, the report overall recognises that current approaches to deer management across Scotland have variable success in addressing the challenges presented and one of the main findings by SNH is that they are not confident that present approaches to deer management will be effective in sustaining and improving the natural heritage in a reasonable timescale.
- 4.3 At the RSPB Loch Lomond nature reserve, encouraging numbers of geese have been arriving at the most well-used net bay roost area. Weekly counts are underway and counts of more than 200 Greenland white fronted geese with a large proportion of juveniles, as well as in excess of 3000 pink footed geese have been recorded already this winter. The first phase of a new path from the visitor hub is currently being constructed. Subject to funding, phase 2 will start in 2017. When all phases are complete, it will form a 900m circular walk.
- 4.4 In the Great Trossachs Forest NNR, a two week programme of planting by volunteers coordinated by the TGTF project officer has been completed. Park Authority staff and volunteers participated in the work. 6 ha of sub-montane woodland, comprised mainly of dwarf birch and willow supplied via a separate programme run by Highland Birchwoods, have been planted on a ridge of high ground between Loch Katrine and Glen Finglas inside an existing large deer-fenced enclosure. Although relatively small in extent, this is a very exciting project in restoring some of a habitat type that has largely vanished across Scotland.
- 4.5 The recently completed Wild Challenge Action Plans that were signed off in August are currently being professionally designed and formatted to make them suitable for sharing more widely and posting on our website.
- 4.6 In our conservation work through planning, we have succeeded in getting a colony of Japanese knotweed removed from land used for a car park extension at the Cormonachan community woodland. Achieving an appropriate and legally sound conservation outcome for roosting bats whilst avoiding excessive cost or bureaucracy for property owners is often difficult but we have recently been thanked by a developer's agent for our help and sensible approach in dealing with a potential bat roost in a dilapidated farm building.

## 5. Visitor Experience Update

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- 5.1 The 2015 year long visitor survey has been analysed and is being summarised for sharing with businesses and partner organisations with comparisons to the 2011 visitor survey. A graphical quick reference guide will be produced with highlights and priorities for action. A more detailed version will be available online. The survey showed a 30% increase in Food and Drink as a reason to visit the Park, 87% of visitors rating their experience as 8 out of 10 or higher, and a significant shift to researching and booking accommodation and activities online. Walking and sightseeing remained the most popular activities. Areas for improvement included the weather, connectivity (wifi and mobile internet) and toilets (volume and quality) although concern around toilet provision has reduced since 2011.

85% of visitors arrived by car, however car travel around the Park dropped to 62% with a significant proportion of visitors choosing walking and water transport as their preferred method of transport. Connectivity and more sustainable transport promotion and provision are key priorities but can only be improved in partnership with agencies and the industry. The survey results will inform Visitor Experience priorities for the next Tourism Strategy.

- 5.2 With support from Scottish Enterprise's Destination Development Fund, further research is being carried out in 2017 including a volume and value study of tourism economy of the Park and a non-visitor survey. The results of these studies will be available after summer 2017 and will complement the results of the visitor survey, providing valuable insights for Visitor Experience policy development and for businesses in the Park.

## 6. Visitor Management Update

- 6.1 The Mountains and The People project celebrated with partners on 27th October the completion of the first training course in Loch Lomond and The Trossachs, with 8 trainees receiving their certificates. Work is progressing on the mountain path repair contracts with Ben Ledi currently under way and sections completed on the Cobbler, Ben Lomond and Stob Binean.
- 6.2 The Park Authority's local access forum had a productive meeting in St Fillan's on 4 October assessing and providing advice on the recently constructed shared use path linking towards Comrie in the east, and the next phases heading west, all delivered by the St Fillan's Community Development Trust.
- 6.3 We have supported 1,505 John Muir Awards since April 2016, and managed to support 21.7% of these awards with young people from social inclusion background.

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We also delivered John Muir Award Leader training in Carrochan for 19 practitioners.

- 6.4 We have confirmed 7 teachers from WDC and Stirling to participate in the next Teaching in Nature career long professional learning programme and the first collaborative group planning day was held on 12th November. Teachers left the session full of ideas and information about how to incorporate Outdoor Learning within their school setting.
- 6.5 Supporting the delivery of the Curriculum for Excellence, we have developed and promoted our new National Park Geography resources at Scottish Association of Geography Teachers Conference, where we had a stand together with The Mountains and the People Project, and flyers for the online resources.
- 6.6 Volunteering activity has continued since the summer with over 3,590 hours of work undertaken through our practical conservation tasks, which included supporting the RSPB with site maintenance at Loch Lomond, Ben Vorlich path maintenance with The Mountains and The People and tree removal with Woodland Trust Scotland.
- 6.7 Our Volunteer Rangers have finished off the season with an amazing 5320 hours of delivery. They supported partners to deliver a wide range of events, including use of the Mobile Visitor Centre at the Balmaha Braw, and support for FCS for their Light up the Forest events. The VRs are now continuing to help us with our interviews of a new set of recruits, welcoming with a friendly face and providing information on what it's like to be a VR.
- 6.8 Since the introduction of our new powers one Fixed Penalty Notice for fly tipping has been issued and payment of the fine was received within the 14 day payment period.
- 6.9 As part of our commitment to SGs [Developing the Young Workforce \(DYW\) Strategy](#) and our [Social Impact Pledge](#), we have started to deliver our volunteering opportunities for Young People. This has involved running a volunteer taster session for pupil ambassadors from Balfron High School, to allow them to return to school and encourage their peers to come out with us regularly. More taster sessions are planned for the New Year for a wider range of pupils from across the National Park.
- 6.10 The Ranger Service began its winter programme of activity in October with the team focussing on practical conservation and site maintenance projects and preparation for the 2017 visitor management season. Other core areas of activity included:

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- Land based patrolling and camping byelaw enforcement on East Loch Lomond through October
- Water based patrolling and byelaw enforcement on Loch Lomond
- Management of the boat launching and visitor facilities at Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway and Milarrochy Bay
- Management of Balmaha Visitor Centre daily through October and weekends through November and December
- Support for the Education Outreach Programme
- Delivery of the Ranger events and activities programme in October

### 7. Rural Development Update

- 7.1 Tuesday 8th November marked the 18th annual Scottish Planning Awards ceremony. It celebrates achievements in planning, right from the detail of processing through to the bigger picture of creating places which will become the legacy of our professionalism. This year it attracted a record high number of applications – over 60 in total of which 32 were shortlisted. Two of the Park Authority's projects were shortlisted – our Built Heritage Repair Grant Scheme and the Local Development Plan, with the Plan receiving an award in the 'Plan' category. The judges complimented "the simplicity, clarity and graphic style adopted for the local development plan" and felt that the plan pushed the agenda in terms of setting a precedent for plan making. To receive a further award, from the Minister for Local Government, for the LIVE Park approach to planning is a fantastic achievement.



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- 7.2 The Adoption of the Local Development Plan, following the Board's approval at the October meeting, was progressed with the Plan as modified published on the 18th November. Formal adoption will be at the end of the 28 day period (which ends on the 9th December), unless Scottish Ministers direct otherwise.
- 7.3 The Built Heritage Repair Grant scheme continues to attract a lot of interest and we have made 7 grant awards, with 4 in new locations for this scheme now in its fourth year - Aberfoyle, Kinlochard, Blairmore and Croftamie. One restoration project has already been successfully completed in Callander and a community led project at Blairmore Hall is well underway.
- 7.4 The annual Community Grant scheme was launched in September with some slight changes to the project support element. The focus is on supporting ambitious projects identified within Community Action Plans, but recognising that some feasibility and development support may also be required. This may mean supporting a smaller number of projects but helping to establish a 'pipeline' of projects that will help over time improve our communities. We are providing more focussed development support through our Community Development Officers and have introduced an initial 'Expressions of Interest' stage. This will help consider and flesh out ideas for eligibility and allows us to guide potential applications more effectively in this regard.
- 7.5 13 Expressions of interest were received for the project support element, 5 of which we are inviting to compile a full application with our support. What is most encouraging is that for the most part for the ideas we cannot support financially immediately, there are good opportunities for future working with the groups to find other support to help take the ideas forward. The deadline for the admin grant and for those who have been invited to apply for the project grant remains the 12th December.

## 8 Corporate Update

### 8.1 Marketing and Communications

- 8.1.1 A strong promotion of the three year progress report on the Outdoor Recreation Plan in October achieved significant coverage (including an extensive piece in The Herald) of the 450 miles of new routes opened up by the plan so far.
- 8.1.2 Preparation for the second iteration of the National Park's Gaelic Language Plan (2017-2022) has been a focus. The high levels aims submitted, were

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approved by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, which has allowed the drafting of the next Plan to continue. If approved by the National Park Authority Board, the draft Plan will be subject to consultation in early 2017.

### 8.2 HR Update

- 8.2.1 In the last paper we reported that our first two Modern Apprentices had joined the organisation we are now 4 months into the apprenticeships and they are proving a real success. The apprenticeship sees the two individuals work with different teams across the corporate services area which will provide them with a good insight of the skills that are required for different roles while also providing them with practical experience in the business environment. The individuals have settled well into the organisation and are proving a real hit with all staff.
- 8.2.2 We have also now completed the recruitment of our Digital Modern Apprentice who joined our Communications team in October. We have been able to provide a unique opportunity to work with both Young Scot and West Dunbartonshire which will allow the individual to learn both from us but also from some of the leading names in business such as the BBC and . We are really excited about this partnership and look forward to building on this relationship.
- 8.2.3 We have successfully recruited a General Communications intern and a Digital intern who both joined the team in October both roles will play a pivotal part in developing communications that engage their intended audience, we look forward to following their progress over the coming months.
- 8.2.4 These appointments deliver great progress towards our Youth Investment Plan, part of our commitment to SGs Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Strategy and our Social Impact Pledge.

### 8.3 Governance Update

- 8.3.1 We continue to develop our Records Management Plan ready to submit it to the Office of the Keeper of the Records of Scotland by the end of February 2017.

### 8.4 Legal Update

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8.4.1 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 original Sheriff's decision. The appeal hearing took place on two days in August and September 2016 in the Sheriff Appeal Court in Edinburgh. The Sheriff Appeal Court has issued a partial judgement that the Sheriff erred in law on a particular point and will sit again on 8th December to consider more of the relevant evidence in detail before issuing its final judgement.

8.4.2 Buchanan Home Farm, Drymen – Tree felling. Intermediate diets took place in Stirling Sheriff Court in August and October 2016 at which the defendant appeared. The trial which had been set for November has now been set for February 2017 with a further intermediate diet in January 2017. As both witnesses from Forestry Commission Scotland are unavailable for the trial in February it is possible that the trial will be postponed again.

### 8.5 Infrastructure/Shared Services Update

8.5.1 The RAFE Delivery Board continues to explore opportunities for partnership working within the themes of Digital, Corporate Planning, Climate Change, Communications and Community Empowerment. At a recent development event for Board members the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution encouraged Boards to be radical in their approach to delivering Public Service Reform.

8.5.2 Implementation of SIP line now complete. As a result of this install all local, national and mobile calls from any of our sites through Microsoft Lync will be non-chargeable. Savings of around 40% on telephony charges are expected.

8.5.3 Whilst our current backup solution is at present meeting our needs there is a need to be pre-emptive with a new or updated back-up solution due to the way technology is changing (cloud, virtual servers, and the need for increased data storage requirements.) During the next 6 months we will be upgrading our current system to the latest version. This will result in the following:

- Modern fit-for-purpose organisational backup solution
- Faster back-ups
- Faster recovery
- More robust technology
- Additional features



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- Potential cost savings on licencing or at least cost neutral with the above advantages incorporated.

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