

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 11

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 December and February 2017.

2. Context

- 2.1 The Delivery Group reports provide greater detail on specific progress for the Quarter 3 to December 2016 and achievements against the 2016-17 Annual Operational Plan objectives.

3. Chief Executive Office Update

- 3.1 The Chief Executive continues to attend Scottish Government digital themed meetings, events and cohorts in Scottish Government ensuring the Park Authority and RAFE partners are well placed to take full advantage of all the economic, social and environmental opportunities offered by digital transformation of public services.
- 3.2 The Chief Executive hosted a visit from Green Party MSPs, Ross Greer and Mark Ruskell. This provided the opportunity to showcase the great work of the Park Authority and its conservation aims.
- 3.3 Several liaison meetings with Community Councils have taken place over the past quarter, providing high level updates on Your Park, these have been very well received.
- 3.4 A number of media interviews took place over the past quarter, focussing on Your Park and rural economy.
- 3.5 The Chief Executive has agreed to take on the lead role representing all UK National Parks on the National Parks Partnership Ltd Management Board. Good progress is being made to finalise commercial partnerships benefiting all UK National Parks.

4. Conservation & Land Use Update

- 4.1 We have received confirmation that four land managers whom we supported last year, have successfully been awarded a total of £270,000 funding to support land management projects in the National Park. The funding has been awarded through

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the Scottish Government's Agri-Environment Climate Scheme to support projects over the next five years that protect our natural heritage, improve water quality, manage flood risk and adapt to climate change.

- 4.2 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. We are currently finalising plans for three holdings with which we have been involved with this year and starting discussions with an additional six holdings for the year 2017/18.
- 4.3 Having worked closely with colleagues in SNH we have successfully secured an important change to the application requirements for the Scottish Government's Agri-Environment Climate Scheme capital option for Upland Habitat Impact Assessment for Deer Management. This change will make the capital option more accessible to deer managers and has resulted in us being able to take forward the project. We are now working with a number of deer managers to make an application for funding for habitat monitoring over a five year period, this will then allow for the creation of a detailed evidence base on the condition of upland habitats and by consequence an informed foundation on which to base herbivore management and control.
- 4.4 A further £8 million of national funding has been announced for practical peatland restoration in Scotland through SNH and Peatland Action. Peatland restoration is one of the key projects helping to deliver the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity and contribute to Scottish Government Climate Change Action Plan targets. The aim of the project is to restore a further 8,000 ha of peatland across Scotland during the 2017/18 year and we are working closely with Peatland Action to be in a position to work in partnership with land managers and deliver further work in the Park.
- 4.5 Our Natural Heritage Grant Scheme has to date supported five applications for works including landscape scale rhododendron removal and control, supporting communities with training and equipment for invasive non-native species eradication and also Loch Lomond Fisheries Trust with the 'Powan in the Classroom' project. This project was recently successfully launched at the Sealife Centre with seven schools in attendance, hatcheries and eggs are due to be delivered to schools in the coming weeks.

Our focused promotion of the Natural Heritage Grant Scheme targeting support towards small scale tree plantings has been well received with two successful applications to date and a number of notes of interest have also been received for this project for the next financial year.

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- 4.6 On the 25th March we will be hosting a RAFE Partnership Land Management Forum with the purpose of bringing together key public bodies working in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. It is hoped that this new group will facilitate an efficient, cross-partnership approach to the planning and delivery of land management advice and projects within the National Park to provide joined up customer (land manager) support across the Park.
- 4.7 Along with the other partners RSPB Scotland and SNH, we have contributed to the Annual Review of the RSPB Loch Lomond nature reserve management programme, noting generally strong progress and very good leverage of funding for project delivery from other sources despite very tight budgets within the three partner organisations. At the Great Trossachs Forest NNR steering group, we have been discussing how a new Memorandum of Understanding could be drawn up between the partners to continue the effectiveness of the joint working beyond 2017 when the current HLF funded partnership and Project Manager post expire.
- 4.8 We have agreed with the operating company BEAR and Transport Scotland to help them produce a landscape strategy for maintenance of Trunk roads in the National Park. The shared objectives are improved co-ordination and maximising the landscape and nature conservation gains that they can deliver through their maintenance programme.
- 4.9 We have worked with SNH and their consultants to complete the Wild Land Descriptions for the two national Wild Land Areas that fall in the National Park. These have recently been published by SNH and provide a baseline for assessing any future changes that may affect the wild land qualities of these areas.

5. Visitor Experience Update

- 5.1 Thursday 16th March sees the annual Thistle Awards hosted by VisitScotland. These awards recognise and celebrate excellence in Scottish Tourism. A number of National Park businesses have made it to the finals including:
- Portnellan (holiday lodges) Crianlarich
 - Go Ape! Aberfoyle
 - Tom Lewis (Regional Ambassador)
 - Kim Proven and the BLiSS Art Trail – Lochearnhead
 - Argyll Holiday's Ross Coutts (Rising Star Award)

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5.2 The Thistle Awards are traditionally very competitive and can generate strong coverage for the winners. The number of finalists from the Park is an indicator of the high quality visitor experience here.

6. Visitor Management Update

6.1 Recruitment is underway for the second of the Mountains and the People project training courses, led by new training officer Kevin Fairclough. The path works programme has seen the completion of path repair contracts on Ben Venue and Ben Ledi.

6.2 We are working with Stirling Council on their Stirling area bid for European Regional Development Funds to develop active travel hubs in the Trossachs, aiming to develop further provision for low carbon and active travel.

6.3 We have supported 1,779 John Muir Awards since April 2016, and managed to support 22% of these awards with young people from social inclusion background. We also delivered tailored training for outdoor centre staff in February 2017.

6.4 We have continued our support for three MSc students from Strathclyde University, who are working with us to undertake research into a range of topics, which include understanding more about the barriers to engagement with the National Park for disabled communities. The reports are due early in the new financial year.

6.5 The 'Powan in the Classroom' project with the Loch Lomond Fisheries Trust has also been supported by Volunteer Rangers, who have been into schools alongside the Fisheries Trust.

6.6 Our Volunteer Rangers continue to provide support to the organisation, total for the year is now 5,460 hours of delivery. During this period, they supported partners to deliver a wide range of events, including supporting the ranger service with the Mobile Visitor Centre at Arrochar beach litter pick and supporting the RSPB with running morning goose walks.

6.7 We have also recruited and started the induction and training for our 17 new Volunteer Rangers. We ran a successful induction day on the 11th February; supported by our existing Volunteer Rangers our new recruits got a good overview of how to start getting out and active volunteering in the National Park.

6.8 Our Practical Conservation Volunteers have delivered over 5,100 hours this year to date. We have worked with five partners during this period to deliver a wide range of projects including:

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- Bog restoration work with the RSPB
- Working with Lomond Mountain Rescue Team and FCS to clear conifer re-growth and create a new rescue helicopter site at Rowardennan
- Ongoing Rhododendron removal works with the Countryside Trust

6.9 In addition to its traditional winter work programme the Ranger Service has focussed its resources into preparations for the 1st March and introduction of the new camping management byelaws. Key areas of activity included:

- Recruitment of 50 Seasonal Rangers
- Delivery of Ranger training in preparation for the new season
- Development of new work procedures and systems to support the delivery of Your Park
- Practical conservation and site maintenance projects and delivering conservation volunteer tasks
- Water based patrolling and byelaw enforcement on Loch Lomond
- Management of the boat launching and visitor facilities at Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway
- Balmaha Visitor Centre which was open to the public every weekend
- Support for the Education Outreach Programme

7. Rural Development Update

7.1 There continues to be a variety of development activity across the National Park, with a notable increase in affordable housing development. This includes sites that are under construction, such as the LINK Housing Association development in Luss and development being close to being started on site, for example Rural Stirling Housing Association's development of flats in central Callander, as well as other housing applications under consideration. The Cononish Goldmine site continues to be active with an application to extend the temporary bulk processing trial until March 2018 being approved. Renewable energy generation projects are also still very active with a number of hydro schemes still being constructed across the Park and the Killin biomass plant commencing on site.

7.2 The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 is now being implemented in stages as the Board will be aware. It provides communities with more rights over government decision making, service delivery and the management of local assets (land or buildings which are held or occupied by a public body). The regulations which implement this Act, include new responsibilities for the National Park Authority which includes:

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- Community Planning – additional duties are now in place for the Authority; namely, co-operating with other partners in carrying out community planning and taking account of Local Outcome Improvement Plans in carrying out its functions;
 - Participation Requests – community groups have rights to request direct involvement in service planning and design. Regulations are expected to be live on or around the 1 April 2017.
 - Asset Transfer Requests – community groups now have the right to request the transfer of ownership of a public asset to the community group. The two main requirements are:
 - to publish and keep updated a register of land owned or leased; and
 - to establish a process for dealing with asset transfer requests from a community transfer body.
- 7.3 Engagement with community planning partners is underway, in tandem with the preparation of the draft National Park Partnership Plan, and new published information or processes have been put in place to ensure the Authority meets the new requirements.
- 7.4 The Marine (Scotland) Act in 2010 introduced new provisions for the management of Scotland's seas and the resulting National Marine Plan sets the wider context for planning within Scotland, including what should be considered when creating local and regional marine plans. The Clyde and Shetland Isles are the first regions to take forward regional marine planning, with the Clyde region including part of the National Park's inshore marine area.
- 7.5 The Clyde Marine Planning Partnership (CMPP) was formally established in February 2016, of which the National Park Authority is a member. The Partnership is in the process of producing a Marine Plan for the Clyde Region. The Marine Plan process will take a similar approach to the stages as carried out for our Local Development Plan. The initial stage is the 'Main Issues Report' stage which will be out for consultation in 2017 and will be followed by a 'Proposed Plan' stage. Once adopted by ministers the Plan will be statutory in nature making the CMPP a statutory consultee in all relevant license applications and Plan related developments. Further updates on this process will be provided at future Board meetings.
- 7.6 The Callander Landscape Partnership is nearing the end of its development phase, with submission due in August and a decision by the Heritage Lottery Fund in December. This community led partnership, of which the Park Authority is currently the lead public body, is an important part of improving Callander as a visitor

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destination, improving the accessibility of the area's heritage and its recreational resources. It will also help deliver on the 2011 Charrette aspiration to be the outdoor capital of the National Park and compliment many other Park Authority or partner's projects – including the Stirling City Deal, Active Travel Improvements and Community Action Planning. The Heritage Lottery Fund has committed over £1.5 million in principle to this five year project with over £500,000 required in match funding. Good early progress has been made to secure match funding, with the Community Hydro Scheme recently confirming £50,000, and the identification of various potential sources of funding.

8. Corporate Update

8.1 Marketing and Communications

8.1.1 The consultation on the Park's draft Gaelic Language Plan (2017-2022) is underway, with promotion to key stakeholders and wider interested parties via both offline and via social media.

8.1.2 Resources have been focused on developing the online and printed materials necessary to promote camping in the National Park ahead of the new byelaws coming into effect in parts of the Park from 1st March. This has involved the development of content for our website, the development of an online booking system for camping permits and National Park campsites, as well as wider stakeholder engagement and awareness raising.

8.1.3 Materials and online content required for the consultation on the draft National Park Partnership Plan 2017-2022 have been prepared. If the draft Plan is approved by Members at its March Board meeting, the 12-week consultation on the draft Plan will begin on 10th April.

8.2 HR Update

8.2.1 We are delighted to advise that the Park Authority has been named as a finalist in the public sector category for Scotland's Top Employers for Working Families Awards. This is a great achievement as the number of entries has doubled this year. The winners will be announced on 9th March 2017.

8.2.2 In preparation for the delivery of Your Park our Seasonal Ranger recruitment for this year has almost doubled. In addition to this and in partnership with West Dunbartonshire Council's 'Working 4 Youth' team we are in the process of recruiting two Seasonal Ranger Modern Apprentices. This will be a

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fantastic opportunity to join the organisation at such an exciting time and continues to 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.

8.2.3 Scottish Government has released the pay policy for 2017/18. Key features are similar to last year's pay policy, with specific measures for supporting the lower paid and requiring employers to pay their staff the Scottish Living Wage.

8.3 Governance Update

8.3.1 We submitted our Records Management Plan to the Office of the Keeper of the Records of Scotland by the deadline of the end of February 2017.

8.4 Legal Update

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 over three days in August, September and December 2016 in the Sheriff Appeal Court in Edinburgh. The Sheriff Appeal Court issued a partial judgement that the original Sheriff erred in law on a particular point. We are now waiting on the Court to issue its final judgement which is not expected until at least mid-March.

8.4.2 Buchanan Home Farm, Drymen – Unauthorised tree felling. Intermediate diets took place in Stirling Sheriff Court in August and October 2016 and in January 2017. The case was adjourned and a new intermediate diet has been set for 18th April 2017 with the trial diet being set for 8th May 2017 to allow the Procurator Fiscal time to consider the Woodland Management Plan provided to the Fiscal by the defence agent. The Fiscal has asked for the Park Authority's view on the Plan and will be setting up a meeting to discuss.

8.5 Infrastructure/Shared Services Update

8.5.1 We are working closely with both Stirling and Argyll & Bute Councils to develop opportunities for increased efficiency in service delivery of visitor sites and car park maintenance. This will address issues including bins, litter picking, grass cutting and other grounds maintenance.

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- 8.5.2 Replacement Backup and Disaster Recovery solution is in final stages of implementation. This upgrade will provide us with a fit for purpose solution for the next five years whilst also giving us the ability to backup to cloud in the future should the need arise.

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