

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 8

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 2017.

2. Context

- 2.1 The 2016/17 Annual Report and Accounts (on the agenda) and the Delivery Group reports provide greater detail on specific highlights and progress for the year to March 2017 and final progress achievements against the 2016-17 Annual Operational Plan objectives.

3. Chief Executive Office Update

- 3.1 The Chief Executive and Convener welcomed an early meeting on 2nd March with the Cabinet Secretary, Roseanna Cunningham and look forward to hosting a visit to the Park during the summer period.
- 3.2 The Chief Executive continues to attend Scottish Government digital themed meetings, events and cohorts, ensuring the Park Authority and RAFF partners are well placed to take full advantage of all the economic, social and environmental opportunities offered by digital transformation of public services.
- 3.3 The Chief Executive hosted a visit from VisitScotland and other UK wide tourist organisations. This provided the opportunity to showcase the great work of the Park Authority to improve the visitor experience and support tourism growth.
- 3.4 The Chief Executive has carried out 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. A launch event for the first partnership deal took place during late May in London which will provide all National Parks staff with outdoor clothing for the next 5 years.
- 3.5 An Executive joint meeting with Stirling Council took place during March, progressing significant policy discussions, collaborative working and sharing best practice.

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4. Conservation & Land Use Update

- 4.1 Proposals for the 2017 mid-term review of Wild Park 2020 have been discussed with partners on the Wild Park 2020 Delivery and Monitoring Group. The intention is to review progress since 2014 in relation to the 25 year Outcomes of Wild Park 2020, identify any alterations in priorities that emerge in the new NPPP and identify and new projects or partners for any areas of delivery that need more focus.
- 4.2 The Callander Landscape Partnership project has received considerable Conservation & Land Use input for the production of the Landscape Conservation Action Plan and resolving HLF queries about the landscape case for the project boundary. Our work has included hosting a student work placement to contribute geodiversity information and recommendations for the Stage 2 bid and developing a Dark Skies project to help meet the HLF request for a strengthened conservation emphasis in the Stage 2 submission.
- 4.3 Development proposals at Balmaha, Luss, West Riverside and the EIA scoping for the Cononish gold mine are among the numerous new large cases that have received significant Conservation Team input recently and will continue to do so in the near future. Ensuring the successful restoration of hydro schemes remains a priority conservation task.
- 4.4 We presented to the annual conference of the Association of Environmental and Ecological Clerks of Works in Glasgow. We also accepted an invitation from the Chartered Institute of Ecologists and Environmental Managers to contribute to a review process of accreditation of ecological clerks of works being undertaken nationally by the Chartered Institute of Ecologists and Environmental Managers. The extensive use of ecological and landscape clerks of works that we have been promoting for hydro and other technically demanding developments in the Park has put us into a leading position as a planning authority for this approach, so we have seized these opportunities to boost the profile of the Park Authority in these technical circles.
- 4.5 The SSE and Scottish Power-led “Changing The View” and “VISTA” projects are progressing steadily with Park Authority assistance. Technically feasible options for mitigating the landscape impacts of major power transmission lines in the National Park have been reviewed. A workshop was hosted in Carrochan in May for SSE and Scottish Power to provide feedback to wider stakeholders. Further technical work and discussion with landowners is needed but major options still under consideration for bids to OFGEM include:
 - Rerouting some or all of the Three Lochs Way away from power lines

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- Undergrounding some cables in areas where geology, land form , land use and infrastructure such as roads and railway lines would not be obstacles
- Short sections of realignment using new, smaller but more closely spaced pylons
- Native woodland establishment to screen pylons & power lines from nearby paths and visitor hot spots
- Forest restructuring to reduce the visual impact of wayleaves.

- 4.6 We have contributed to an informative review of work completed in phase 1 of the SEPA-led Strathard Initiative trialling the “ecosystems approach”. We are currently working with the other partners on proposals for the delivery of the phase 2 programme. The idea of pursuing an HLF Landscape partnership bid has been considered but is not currently favoured due to the timescale and complexity of developing such a bid and the opportunity to pursue some project elements this year via other sources. These include continued use of peatland restoration funds and Forest Enterprise operational budgets for piloting large timber dams and brash dams in one small sub-catchment.
- 4.7 This year’s programme of black grouse surveys in the Park has been completed, with Park Authority staff leading volunteers to cover four of the six locations identified as priorities for 2017. RSPB were able to cover the other two. The surveys for the Glen Dochart wader project have been progressing well, with two of the three survey visits completed by Park Authority and RSPB staff. Each visit requires seven competent surveyors positioned simultaneously on site at sunrise. In contrast, the more flexible water vole survey programme over the summer is being delivered on the ground almost entirely by volunteers but with significant Water Vole Project Officer and Park Authority staff time for planning and coordination.
- 4.8 We have now completed our most recent peatland restoration project working in partnership with Peatland Action and Auchlyne & Suie Estate and have restored over 100 hectares of degraded peatland with over 18 kilometres of peat hags re-profiled and over 150 peat dams created. The restoration work completed with a successful demonstration day hosted by the Estate in partnership with ourselves, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) to conclude the works.
- 4.9 We have recently hosted our first successful land owner lunch forum in partnership with Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) and we chose to use the first session to invite comments and discussion on the draft new NPPP which was well received with some enthusiastic input. The group have intimated a wish to continue the forum and encourage greater uptake and interest from other landowners throughout the Park.

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5. Visitor Experience Update

- 5.1 As part of the Scottish Enterprise Destination Development fund we are carrying out two new visitor research studies. One is focussed on non-visitors to the National Park to gain a better understanding of what prevents certain visitor types from coming, and what would encourage people to stay longer and explore more. The other will look at activity tourism and the experiences of those visiting for outdoor recreation. This will help identify improvements and opportunities for tourism businesses. This work will be carried out over the summer season with results available in the autumn.
- 5.2 Plans for the European Championships 2018 inaugural games are well underway with the National Park hosting the open water swimming element at Loch Lomond. A cultural programme is being developed to maximise the opportunity to promote the National Park to a new audience which will include festivities in Balloch and a National Park presence at the games hub in George Square in Glasgow.
- 5.3 The refurbishment of our Luss Cabin Toilets, which was completed in early March, has proved extremely successful. This investment makes them easier to clean and maintain, as well as providing a better experience for their large number of users.
- 5.4 Litter continues to be a major problem across the National Park. The Estates Team are looking to work more closely with our Local Authority partners to try and improve the services that are provided on our own and wider sites, especially targeting the particular hot-spots of Luss and Balmaha. With less Local Authority resource available this is particularly challenging and the Park Authority are often wrongly seen as the responsible body for a number of locations, which is leading to us dealing with a higher volume of complaints.

6. Visitor Management Update

- 6.1 The Mountains and the People path works programme continues with a new bridge installation underway over the Allt Gleann Auchreoch as part of the hill access to Beinn Dubhcraig and contracts underway on Beinn Ime and the Bealach na Mhain to Beinn Narnain route. The second training course started in May as part of the Mountains and the People project, 5 of the first round of trainees have secured work with path building contractors.
- 6.2 We are trying out some new digital technology using Google trekker to provide information on our path network via Streetview, making it easier for the public to plan their visits and be inspired by what we have to offer. The pilot is being

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progressed by our volunteers and if successful will roll out over the wider network of paths.

- 6.3 The new section of shared use cycle path, forming part of the Pilgrims Way and linking Tyndrum to Dalrigh has been completed by the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs Countryside Trust. It creates a new loop with the West Highland Way and adds to the local path network for community and visitor benefit.
- 6.4 Teaching in Nature – In April we held a successful second collaborative planning day for 4 teachers who are participating in the Teaching in Nature Career Long Professional Learning programme (in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage). The teachers from Stirling and West Dunbartonshire schools spent a day on Inchcailloch learning about place responsive outdoor learning and how the island can support their class topics.
- 6.5 In addition, two teachers from the 2015/16 Teaching in Nature Programme were awarded with their certificates for gaining Professional Recognition in Outdoor Learning from the General Teaching Council for Scotland.
- 6.6 The Ranger supported education programme is very popular and has now been fully booked until the end of the school term in July, with the last few remaining dates in August and September also already booked showing the value placed by teachers for this support.
- 6.7 Since the start of April, through volunteer projects, we have supported 6 partners; including the RSPB with events and infrastructure maintenance, SNH with work digging up invasive species in the Endrick catchment and Buchanan Estate spraying Giant Hogweed.
- 6.8 In addition to the ongoing Volunteer Ranger routes, our VRs have started their new visitor engagement duties at Milarrochy Bay and Balmaha Visitor Centre, with Milarrochy Bay in particular being popular with good levels of sign up and volunteers giving it a try.
- 6.9 In April, volunteers have dedicated over 1,300 hours to delivering the National Park priorities.
- 6.10 We continue to link our volunteer projects to our key priorities for the organisation. As such we have had volunteers helping with litter picks within camping management zones, or helping to successfully deliver Black Grouse surveys.
- 6.11 The Ranger Service completed over 450 land based visitor management patrols across the park from 1st March to the 30th May. The key focus of the patrols has

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been to enhance the experience for visitors to the park and in support of the new camping management byelaws raising awareness, educate and gain compliance from visitors planning to camp.

- 6.12 Following a busy start to the year dealing with boat registrations, boat maintenance hazard buoy repair work the Loch Lomond based Ranger Team began their water based patrolling with 47 patrols completed during April and May. The team also managed the launch facilities at Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway 7 days a week with extended opening hours from the 1st April.
- 6.13 Balmaha Visitor Centre (BVC) changed to summer opening hours on the 1st April with Rangers and Volunteer Rangers providing information, advice and support to visitors. Early indications are that it will be a record breaking season at BVC with over 38,000 visitors to the centre during April and May.

7. Rural Development Update

- 7.1 Average figures for planning applications remain high with 167 applications registered between 1st Jan and 31st May – which is an indication for a busy workload going forward. A number of ‘major’ applications are expected this year as evidenced by our preliminary technical responses to the emerging mixed use proposal for West Riverside & Woodbank House sites in Balloch; the Environmental Impact Assessment ‘Scoping Opinion’ issued in May and the formal pre-application consultation currently underway for a proposed gold mine and associated infrastructure (a revision to previous permissions) at Cononish. Similarly, the formal pre-application consultation period has almost concluded for a proposed residential development and public car park on allocated sites identified in the Local Development Plan at Gartness Road, Drymen.
- 7.2 On the ground, there continues to be a variety of development taking place such as initial works for affordable housing in Succoth by Dunbritton Housing Association. 5 hydro schemes are under construction throughout the Park with progress being monitored. Ground works are currently underway for Callander’s new Cemetery and Phase 2 of the Mountains and the People Project has commenced. Ripple Retreat, the respite facility for children suffering from cancer and their families on the south shore of Loch Venacher, opened its doors in May. Its innovative and sustainable design has created a landmark building that is sympathetic to the local landscape character of this area of the Park.
- 7.3 The Local Development Plan Action Programme was adopted by the Planning and Access Committee in March. This is a live document that identifies, tracks and coordinates the actions needed to deliver the development strategy set out in the

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Plan. Supplementary planning guidance on housing and for the two rural development frameworks for West Loch Lomondside and South Buchanan was approved in May by the Planning & Access Committee and has been submitted to the Scottish Ministers before being formally adopted. A successful stakeholder session with local planning agents was held to discuss the new housing and climate friendly design policies of the Plan. Further sessions are being planned for community and government organisations.

- 7.4 Continued effort has been made to support the activities of partner organisations and communities with work that progresses placemaking priorities established in the Plan in a number of our key communities;
- Callander - finalising masterplanning guidance, including feasibility work for the new road bridge, the active travel project being led by Sustrans/Stirling Council,
 - Arrochar - support to the Arrochar Forum including preparation of initial concept designs for viewing platform incorporating eye catching public art and the communities pontoon project), and,
 - Balloch - Public realm enhancement project led by Sustrans focussing on Main Street and Station Square and the Council's feasibility study for potential future uses for Balloch Castle which is under preparation.
- 7.5 There has been continued engagement with Community Planning Partnerships that cover the Park at senior executive and officer level. This is to influence the development of the Local Outcome Improvement Plans that are being developed and that are to be in place by October 2017 as well as to ensure good strategic alignment with the new National Park Partnership Plan.
- 7.6 New Community Action plans have been published for Strathard and St Fillans, with Callander's nearing completion. Gartmore, Lochgoil and Trossachs' communities have commenced the process to prepare new Community Action Plans with the Community Partnership'. The Community Partnership is providing direct support to communities for this work, which forms part of the annual service level agreement with the Park Authority.
- 7.7 The Community Partnership is reviewing the process to prepare Community Action Plans on order to enhance their role and better influence Local Outcome Improvement Plans and develop stronger links with the National Park Local Development Plan. New tools such as the Place Standard (a tool used to evaluate the quality of a place developed and promoted by Scottish Government, NHS Health

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Scotland and Architecture and Design Scotland) will be trialled to help facilitate this. Engagement with the Scottish Government Improvement Service, as well as national place standard leads, has been undertaken to help aid understanding of the tool and how it can be used within the National Park when working with both communities and developers.

- 7.8 As highlighted in the Conservation update, significant progress is being made towards the Stage 2 Heritage Lottery Fund submission for the Callander Landscape Partnership in August.

8. Corporate Update

8.1 Marketing and Communications

- 8.1.1 The consultation on the draft National Park Partnership Plan 2018-2023 is underway. The launch of the consultation held was at Callander Youth Project (CYP) and featured Modern Apprentices from both the National Park Authority and CYP to highlight the importance of the Rural Development outcome RD3, that *“population decline is addressed by attracting and retaining more skilled working age and young people within the National Park”*. A series of blogs and videos have been produced to bring the outcomes and priorities in the draft Plan to life.
- 8.1.2 The ongoing development of communications and materials to support the Your Park project has been a priority. Updating our website content, responding to feedback and continuing to improve information available to visitors, both online and in person remains a focus. A series of short videos has been created to explain how the byelaws work, why they are needed and the different camping opportunities there are in the Park.
- 8.1.3 Ongoing promotion of the work going on in the National Park has included media coverage of Thistle Award nominees from across the Park, £16,500 of National Park community grant scheme funding awards, £5,000 raised for local Mountain Rescue teams by National Park Authority staff, reminders about the importance of keeping dogs under control during lambing season, promotion of eight of the National Park's 'Wee Hills with Big Views' that can be enjoyed by people of all levels of fitness and experience.

8.2 HR Update

- 8.2.1 Following Scottish Government approval of the Pay Remit proposals for 2017/18 we are delighted to report that we have successfully concluded

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formal negotiations with UNISON allowing proposals to be implemented in June.

- 8.2.2 Over the past few months we have been working with South Downs National Park who is co-ordinating, on behalf of all the other National Parks, an E-learning solution. We launched our site in May to coincide with national “Learning at Work” week and feedback to date has been really positive. This allows us to access over 150 courses covering required learning such as Health and Safety as well as a wide variety of optional learning for personal development. A great example of partnership working that will benefit all staff.

8.3 Governance Update

- 8.3.1 The volume of information requests and complaints has gone up with increased interest in camping management within the National Park. We await the response of the Keeper of the Records for Scotland to our Records Management Plan. Following the local elections planning has begun on how best to integrate new Board members who will join in Autumn 2017.

8.4 Legal Update

- 8.4.1 *Renyana Stahl Anstalt v LLTNPA* – appeal against access enforcement notice at Drumlean Estate, Aberfoyle. The appeal which was lodged by the Park Authority with the Sheriff Appeal Court in Edinburgh against the original Sheriff’s decision was successful. However the Estate has now been given leave to appeal to the Inner House of the Court of Session. The Park Authority intends to defend the appeal which is on only one aspect of the Sheriff Appeal Court’s decision. This will not be heard for some months.
- 8.4.2 Buchanan Home Farm, Drymen – Unauthorised tree felling. A notional trial diet has been set for 24th July 2017; this later date has been set to allow time for the Reporter in the Planning and Environmental Appeals Division (DPEA) of the Scottish Government to consider the appeal by the defendant against the S.168 Tree Replacement Notice served by us.
- 8.4.3 Luss Visitor Centre – recovery of possession. The case for recovery of the Luss Visitor Centre following irritation of the lease has been continued in Dumbarton Sheriff Court until 4th July 2017.

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8.5 Infrastructure/Shared Services Update

- 8.5.1 We are working closely with both Stirling and Argyll & Bute Councils to improve co-ordination and increased efficiency in service delivery of visitor sites. This will address issues including bins, litter picking and parking management.
- 8.5.2 The upgrade of our current backup and Disaster Recovery solution now complete. This upgrade will provide us with a fit for purpose solution for the next 5 years whilst also enhancing our ability to backup to cloud in the future should the need arise.
- 8.5.3 A replacement firewall has been installed and integrated into our current systems. This device will continue to ensure that all data contained within Park Authority systems remain secure whilst also providing the Authority with the capability to further improve and enhance remote access capabilities currently available to staff.

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