

# 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 June and August 2017.

#### 2. Context

- 2.1 The Delivery Group reports provide greater detail on specific highlights and progress towards achievement of the 2017-18 Annual Operational Plan objectives.

#### 3. Chief Executive Office Update

- 3.1 The Chief Executive attended a launch event, celebrating the commercial partnership made with Columbia outdoor clothing through National Parks Partnerships LLP. This will provide all staff across the 15 UK National Parks with outdoor clothing free of charge for the next 5 years as well as providing other commercial opportunities. This is the first commercial partnership to be delivered by National Parks Partnerships LLP.
- 3.2 A visit by the Head of Environment and Forestry directorate sponsorship hub was hosted by the Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services. This provided the opportunity to showcase the work of the National Park Authority and discuss the new directorate sponsorship hub arrangements.
- 3.3 A productive joint management meeting with Cairngorms National Park Authority was held in June. Discussions focussed around National Park Partnership Plan, health agenda, The Mountains and The People project, shared services, National Parks UK Ltd and Governance/Board matters.
- 3.4 A follow up meeting involving the Convener with the Chief Executive and Convener of Cairngorms National Park Authority took place. Governance was the main topic of conversation in addition to looking at future collaboration between both Boards.
- 3.5 All Chief Executives within the environment portfolio currently sit on the Rural Affairs, Forestry and Environment (RAFE) Board. The name of this group has now changed to Environment and Economy Leadership Group (EELG).
- 3.6 The Chief Executive supported by a number of Board Members hosted a visit by the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform at the beginning of July. The visit focussed on a series of projects around Callander and

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the eastern area of the Park and provided an opportunity to meet a range of community, business and partner organisation representatives. It also provided an opportunity to showcase the priorities and outcomes proposed in the new National Park Partnership Plan 2018-23.

- 3.7 The annual Scottish Leaders Forum Plenary session took place which was attended by the Park Authority's Chief Executive, topics included Brexit and public sector workforce development.
- 3.8 A meeting of the Joint National Parks Officers Group took place in Chester during July, the Chief Executive to discuss improved collaborative working.
- 3.9 The Chief Executive recently attended the RSPB Loch Lomond Circular Path opening event. The new path is part of the ongoing development of the Wards Estate part of the Loch Lomond National Nature Reserve and provides new access opportunities to experience the rich natural heritage of the site. The opening also celebrated a new addition to the Scottish Scenic Routes Initiative, enhancing the visitor experience and harnessing young design talent. A new installation designed by a Strathclyde University architecture student is sited at a dramatic new viewpoint overlooking the Reserve and the wider Loch Lomond area.
- 3.10 A new section of path from Tyndrum to Dalrigh was recently opened by the Park Authority's Chief Executive, this new link was delivered by the Countryside Trust working with a range of national partners and the local community and another section of the proposed Cross-Scotland Pilgrims Way and National Walking and Cycling Network. The project is another fantastic example of routes being improved or created through the National Park to provide more opportunities for people to get out and enjoy the outdoors.
- 3.11 The Chief Executive has held a number of positive meetings with key partners and stakeholders such as RSPB, West Dunbartonshire Council, Stirling Council, Transport Scotland and private landowners.

## 4. Conservation & Land Use Update

- 4.1 The Wild Park 2020 mid-term review is now underway. Project and Wild Challenge Action Plan updates have been received from partners and a workshop is planned for September for the Wild Park 2020 Delivery and Monitoring Group, to review progress against the 25 year outcomes and identify any priority areas for the next three years.

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- 4.2 Conservation and Land Use team members continue to provide advice on a number of development planning cases including for development proposals at West Riverside. In addition, several telecom masts are required within the National Park and Conservation staff are advising on suitable locations for these.
- 4.3 Officers recently attended a summit on the A82 upgrade in Crianlarich to speak directly to the Minister on our priorities for the route including tourism, recreation and environmental issues and opportunities within the National Park as well improving its role as a vital transport artery for Argyll & North-West Scotland.
- 4.4 The national 'Peatland Action' programme aims to restore some of our internationally important natural peatlands, which are important carbon and water storage habitats. Restoration work is continuing with the appointment of an SNH funded National Park Peatland Action Project Officer who will work with land managers to facilitate funding applications for peatland restoration as well as oversee works on the ground. Contractors have started on the Beinn Dubh to Mid-Hill section of Luss Estate. Work there is re-profiling approximately 18km hags/gullies and the installation of 250 peat dams as an addition to work carried out in 2015. Sphagnum moss 'plugs' are also to be used to revegetate 0.78ha of bare peat across the site. Surveys have been undertaken on four other sites in the National Park with the hope of being able to progress these to funding applications in the coming few weeks. Further sites are to be approached this month.
- 4.5 We recently joint hosted a 'Biodiversity Management on Hill Farms' day workshop with Scotland Rural University College Kirkton Farm at Crianlarich and Scotland's Farm Advisory Service. Our Land Use team were in attendance and presented on a number of topics relating to funding measures through Scottish Rural Development Programme and agri-environment schemes, as well as peatland restoration, farm woodlands and agroforestry. This workshop is the first in a suite of workshops planned, with the next planned on the 5<sup>th</sup> September on 'Woodland Management and Creation on Farms.' In addition, the same workshops will be repeated during the autumn but as part of an evening workshop format.
- 4.6 We were recently invited to join a National Farmers Union of Scotland evening meeting focused on the draft new National Park Partnership Plan. The evening was well attended with some good comments and constructive discussion. NFUS members have also intimated a wish to continue a relationship with the team going forward and we are exploring options for a more regular format to allow this to happen.

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### 5. Visitor Experience Update

- 5.1 Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> August saw the return of the Great Scottish Swim at Loch Lomond. The event was once again delivered professionally and with close attention to safety for swimmers and other loch users in the area. Media coverage was strong, with National coverage on the lead up and over the weekend, along with a BBC Scotland crew filming an hour long special about the event which was aired on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> September at 6pm. This year's event particularly important as it gave the organisers of the European Championships 2018 a chance to closely inspect arrangements and meet with key stakeholders to inform planning for that event.
- 5.2 Balloch businesses recently gathered to discuss development of a Balloch events programme. During the 'LIVE in Balloch' Charrette, events were identified as a key untapped attribute for the area. The first new large event is being developed as part of the European Championships where proposals for a cultural festival or fair are being created in partnership with businesses, communities and arts organisations. This will allow Balloch to capitalise on the increased profile the European Championships will bring. Careful consideration is being paid to the challenges around large events that were identified during the charrette.
- 5.3 A new West Highland Way website is being developed. The current site ([www.west-highland-way.co.uk](http://www.west-highland-way.co.uk)) is not showcasing Scotland's premiere long distance route at its best. The new site will have a stronger focus on inspiring new walkers with strong imagery and useful content to help planning for the experience. Businesses will have a new and improved advertising platform too. Discussions with partner organisations regarding the future management and promotion of the route are under way.
- 5.4 The Estates Team have continued to prioritise dealing with the large volume of litter generated by visitors to our own sites throughout the season. In addition to working with our Local Authority partners we have started to work with other local stakeholders to trial different waste management solutions that are tailored appropriately to their respective uses and impact on neighbouring land. During peak times it is especially challenging to ensure that litter bins have capacity and that sites are clean, and we have invested in providing 7-day cover throughout the season to try and keep on top of this. Throughout September we will be trialling the use of compressing 'smart bins' in Luss, Balmaha and at Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway to inform our work looking into how we improve waste management on our estate going forwards.
- 5.5 The Gateway centre landlords works are now close to completion to enable handover to our new tenant.

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### 6. Visitor Management Update

- 6.1 The Mountains and the People path works are progressing on Ben Ime, Bealach na Mhain and Ben Narnain and the second intake of trainees have been learning new path building skills on Ben Lomond and Ben Ledi and have taken part in a joint training session with their trainee counterparts in Cairngorms National Park. The Board of Outdoor Access Trust Scotland (formally COAT) held their most recent Board meeting in the Park and took the opportunity to see the new path repairs on Ben Lomond.
- 6.2 Since the end of June, volunteer rangers have delivered over 130 days of visitor inspiration duties; this is the highest amount of days ever recorded for this time of year. Activities included:
- Attendance at the police open day with the mobile visitor centre in Dumbarton.
  - Mini events support at Kinlochard Highland Gathering with leaflets, table and popup banners.
  - Assisting our ranger service with the annual deaf blind Scotland visit to climb conic hill and walk the millennium trail.
- 6.3 Since the end of June, conservation volunteers delivered over 80 days of practical tasks helping with projects such as: Supporting the development of Blairmore wildlife garden in preparation for beautiful Scotland assessment; Clearing Himalayan Balsam from around the Endrick Catchment and Loch Lomond; Removing boardwalks from the Loch Ard forest area.
- 6.4 Due to staff absence and school timetables our Junior Ranger programme is scheduled for September 2017. The preparation for this is well underway and we look forward to working with pupils from both McLaren and Balfron High Schools.
- 6.5 Our relationships with the John Muir Award continues to flourish and to date the partnership has supported over 870 awards since April. Our partnership work on the John Muir Award Record e-book is ready for a soft launch at the end of August. The Volunteer, Education and Engagement team John Muir Award has been used as a case study for how to use the online tool.
- 6.6 Our planning for the Year of Young People 2018 is moving forwards through close working with Young Scot. We have a co-design session planned for October when we will be working with young people from across the National Park to help shape our activity plan. We hope that this may also be the first step to ongoing

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engagement with young people in the strategy and policy creation within the National Park.

- 6.7 The Developing the Young Workforce action plan for 2017/18 has been drafted and teams from across the organisation continue to deliver against this priority.
- 6.8 The Ranger Service completed over 540 land based visitor management patrols across the park from 1<sup>st</sup> June to the 21<sup>st</sup> August. The key focus of the patrols has 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.
- 6.9 The Loch Lomond based Ranger Team continued to process boat registrations, undertake boat maintenance and hazard buoy repair work and completed 75 patrols on Loch Lomond during June and July. The team also managed the facilities at Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway supporting approximately 1,900 launches between April and July.
- 6.10 Balmaha Visitor Centre (BVC) has proved to be very popular again this season with approximately 75,000 visitors through the door between the 1<sup>st</sup> April & the end of July. This is an increase of 20,000 visitors for the same period in 2016 and indicates that the centre is likely to welcome more than 100,000 visitors for the 1<sup>st</sup> time this year.
- 6.11 The Ranger Service have also practically supported management of the camping permit areas, Loch Chon campsite and provided staff time in support of the camping booking system.

## 7. Rural Development Update

- 7.1 There continues to be a lot of development activity across the National Park with a range of development types in various stages in the process; pre-application advice, applications being determined and approved development being constructed that we are monitoring or reviewing compliance with any conditions. The number of applications received is averaging at 33 per month, with the highest monthly average over the last 10 years being 36 in 2015. During this period there has also been the need to take enforcement action, most notably at a site by Drymen Bridge in respect of an illegal car wash and which has been successful in stopping the activity. Some of the 'major' applications previously highlighted to the Board are progressing towards formal processes with the Cononish Goldmine revised application being received.

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- 7.2 On the ground, there continues to be a variety of development taking place such the improved access from the A83 for affordable housing in Succoth by Dunbritton Housing Association. There are 6 run of river hydro schemes that are being monitored as part of our programme of post construction work with an application for a new scheme to the West of Crianlarich at Ben More being received. Members may be aware that there is a major programme underway for a new emergency services communication network across the country, as mentioned in the conservation update. This new emergency services network will improve coverage within rural areas through 4G mobile connectivity and in turn functionality for the police, fire and rescue, and ambulance. We have granted planning permission for 9 telecoms masts in the Park and have 5 applications currently pending a decision as part of this programme. Works are expected to start this year.
- 7.3 The 6<sup>th</sup> annual Planning Performance Framework for the 2016/17 year was prepared and published in July. This continues to be a key tool for measuring, reporting and publicising our ongoing commitment to progress the quality of our planning service and customer experience together with our target improvement areas for the year ahead. It was reported to the August Planning and Access Committee.
- 7.4 Continued effort has been placed on engaging with partners to progress development opportunities identified in the Local Development Plan including meetings with Stirling Council regarding Claish farm, wider city deal and feasibility funding for new road bridge and further consultation event and exhibition for Balloch streetscape proposals (led by Sustrans) in June.
- 7.5 Engagement with Community Planning Partnerships has continued at Executive and Officer level, as each Partnership develops their Local Outcome Improvement Plans (due to be published October 2017).
- 7.6 The National Park Grant Scheme launched on 7<sup>th</sup> August with built heritage, natural heritage and community grant scheme being run as the one grant scheme this year. The scheme seeks to prioritise projects that offer multiple benefits to the National Park and that support National Park Partnership Plan and local Community Action Plan priorities. The process comprises an expression of interest followed by invitations to high-scoring applicants to submit a full application by Friday 22 September, with grants being awarded in November 2017.
- 7.7 Gartmore, Lochgoil and Trossachs communities are receiving support from the Community Partnership to prepare new Community Action Plans. The new Scottish Government promoted Place Standard tool is being used to support this

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engagement with further sessions planned involving this including with Killin community in September.

- 7.8 Significant progress has been made towards securing Heritage Lottery Fund's grant for the Callander Landscape Partnership. The required information has been submitted for the Stage 2 application, which has required staff time from across the organisation as well as the time of volunteers in the community and from partner organisations.

### 8. Corporate Update

#### 8.1 Marketing and Communications

- 8.1.1 The consultation on the draft National Park Partnership Plan 2018-2023 is now complete. The campaign to promote the consultation included coverage in the press (including The Herald, Holyrood magazine, The Scotsman), online (including BBC News) and a targeted email campaign to stakeholders which resulted in a strong response to the consultation from both organisations and individuals.
- 8.1.2 An update on how the camping byelaws and associated camping provision has gone received broad coverage in both local and national media. Further improvements have been made to the information available online for people looking to booking a camping permit. Feedback received daily via the permit area and campsite feedback survey has been used to improve information, maps and imagery to allow people to pick the best place for them to camp.
- 8.1.3 Water safety, particularly in relation to swimming in the Park's lochs has been a focus over the summer months. In addition to enquiries about water safety from the press (following tragic deaths in the Park's lochs) we have had national TV news coverage (featuring our water-based Rangers and our Ranger Service Manager being interviewed). We also produced our own short [water safety video](#) to promote on social media, [updated information](#) on our website and have used these alongside advice from our Rangers when out on patrol. This material has been used tactically ahead of busy, sunny weekends and holidays, with water safety messages featuring prominently in our Great Scottish Swim press materials and online promotion.

#### 8.2 HR Update

- 8.2.1 This month is the launch of our participation in the 2017 Best Companies Staff Engagement Survey. As before we have chosen September to launch



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to ensure we give our seasonal staff the opportunity to participate and with seasonal ranger numbers at an all-time high this is an opportunity not to be missed. We also have number of new staff since we last participated in the survey back in 2015 and we have engaged with them to promote the value of the survey to encourage maximum participation and maintain our high response rates over the past years.

8.2.2 Over the past few months we have been working on the assessment criteria for the Silver Healthy Working Lives award. We have now completed this and the next stage is a formal assessment day with the Healthy Working Lives Assessor which will be arranged over the coming months.

8.2.3 Following the launch of the National Parks e-learning solution in May we continue to develop the site at every opportunity. The latest additions will be a more user friendly and interactive induction module and a comprehensive managers' toolkit. This will be a great opportunity for staff to use their personal development days to engage with the system and enhance their learning.

### 8.3 Governance Update

8.3.1 The volume of information requests and complaints remained high in this quarter given the increased interest in camping management within the National Park and the start of the summer season.

8.3.2 The Keeper of the Records for Scotland has given us an interim response to our Records Management Plan with only a few minor points to address before the plan can be signed off.

8.3.3 Arrangements are continuing to ensure a successful induction of new Board members who will join in October 2017.

### 8.4 Legal Update

8.4.1 Renyana Stahl Anstalt v LLTNPA – appeal against an 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. The Estate has now been given leave to appeal to the Inner House of the Court of Session. The Park Authority shall defend the appeal. Arguments and counter arguments are currently being prepared and lodged with the Court and a procedural

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hearing to confirm that both parties are still proceeding and to arrange a date for the appeal will take place in Edinburgh on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2017.

- 8.4.2 Buchanan Home Farm, Drymen – Unauthorised tree felling. The Park Authority served a S.168 Tree Replacement Notice on the accused who appealed to the Planning and Environmental Appeals Division (DPEA) of the Scottish Government saying that the Notice was ambiguous and therefore flawed, that the TPO did not apply to the felled trees, that the planting season was inappropriate and that the Park Authority did not have the power to specify the sourcing and handling of the trees. The Reporter dismissed the appeal and upheld the notice with minimal amendments. A further notional trial diet has been set for 30<sup>th</sup> October 2017 in Stirling Sheriff Court to give the accused time to begin replanting in accordance with the Decision Notice issued by the Reporter.
- 8.4.3 Luss Visitor Centre – recovery of possession. The case for recovery of the Luss Visitor Centre following irritation of the lease called in Dumbarton Sheriff Court on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2017. In an effort to resolve matters out of court, mediation with the current occupier is scheduled to take place in Edinburgh on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2017. The outcome of the mediation will be reported to the Sheriff Court at a pre-proof hearing on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2017 and if settlement has not been reached there will be a Proof Before Answer which will run for three days from 29<sup>th</sup> November to 1<sup>st</sup> December 2017 inclusive when the witnesses will give evidence.

### 8.5 Infrastructure/Shared Services Update

- 8.5.1 Cloud Disaster Recovery - Discussions are ongoing with an external contractor to try to ascertain an indicative price for relocation of our current DR solution to the cloud. Servers have been monitored over a 4-week period which will help aid the contractor to produce a pricing structure relevant to our needs.
- 8.5.2 SWAN (Scottish Wide Area Network) – Discussions have been renewed with Capita regarding pricing of SWAN and additional free services available via SWAN network. Whilst implementation of this solution would result in savings year on year on data costs, the installation costs remain high with pricing still in the region of £37k.
- 8.5.3 Data Security – Following the recent well publicised Malware cyber security issues to hit Europe, Scottish Government have provided direction to public

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bodies to attain Cyber Security Essentials+ accreditation for the organisation by the end of the current financial year. Discussions are ongoing with an external contractor who will advise on due processes that the organisation is required to follow in order to attain certification.

- 8.5.4 Geographic Information Systems (GIS) – A new agreement has been signed with ESRI, which covers GIS software, support and maintenance. This is a new shared service with Cairngorms National Park Authority which will deliver increased functionality at lower cost for both authorities over the c5 year term of the agreement.

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