

# 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 September and November 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 A Post Referendum stakeholder event, chaired by the Cabinet Secretary was attended by the Chief Executive and Depute Convener. This was a well-attended event with representatives from all Environment and Economy bodies.
- 3.2 The Chief Executive accompanied a small delegation of Board Members on a very interesting and informative visit to the Cairngorms National Park, with an opportunity to see projects and initiatives on the ground.
- 3.3 The Chief Executive spoke at the recent RTPPI Conference in Edinburgh, sharing perspectives on Planning for Environmental Sustainability.
- 3.4 National Parks UK held their recent AGM and annual Conference in the South Downs National Park, which was attended by the Chief Executive and Convener in addition to Director of Conservation & Visitor Operations and Depute Convener.
- 3.5 The Executive team enjoyed a volunteering day with The Mountains and The People team at Ben Venue, their experience allowed them to help maintain path drainage features and also improved small sections of the path surfacing.
- 3.6 The Chief Executive continues to contribute to the Scottish Government Environment and Economy Leadership Group which has been considering the development of a national Environmental strategy. He also has been leading the delivery of the EELG Digital Strategy which saw the launch of the revamped Scotland's Environment Website which provides a central source of environmental data held by all member organisations.

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 11

## Organisational Update

---

- 3.7 A number of positive meetings with key partners and stakeholders such as Constituency MSPs and Argyll & Bute Council have taken place over the past quarter.
- 3.8 A positive first meeting with the newly formed Scottish Government Environment and Forestry Directorate Sponsorship Hub and the entire Executive team took place recently.

## 4. Conservation & Land Use Update

- 4.1 The Wild Park 2020 mid-term review is progressing steadily with a target of completing the review by the end of March 2018. We have been progressing plans for a camera trap survey of 'wild cat' sighting hotspots in the Park as well as working with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust to increase the coverage of bee surveys in the Park to contribute to the Scottish Pollinator Strategy.
- 4.2 We worked with partners Forest Enterprise to submit an entry to the Nature of Scotland Awards Species Champion Category for the successful Trossachs Water Vole Reintroduction and achieved the runner-up spot as Highly Commended at the Awards ceremony in November.
- 4.3 A significant area of development management requiring Conservation and Land Use team advice has continued to be Hydro schemes, with eleven separate issues and six schemes requiring attention in this reporting period. This is particularly in relation to ensuring progress with the discharge of conditions for restoration of access tracks to the water intakes. A site visit with representatives from Mountaineering Scotland and Ramblers Scotland was held to demonstrate the restoration objectives and practicalities associated with these developments. We also contributed our expertise to an SNH workshop on track restoration. Another major work area has been a large number of applications for new telecoms masts required to improve phone network coverage for emergency services. The siting and access tracks for many of these masts involve careful consideration of landscape matters, resulting in fifteen separate requests for advice. Other significant work areas have included the Cononish gold mine application and associated EIA processes, mountain path repairs, new caravan pitches at the Loch Lomond Holiday Park, the Three Lochs Drive campsite development and revisiting the Loch Chon campsite to check how restoration measures and various design aspects are bedding in.
- 4.4 For the A82 between Tarbet and Inverarnan we have continued to provide landscape advice to the design team for the design works currently underway, as well as advising Transport Scotland and BEAR on some significant works on

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 11

## Organisational Update

---

drainage, safety barriers and removal of collapsing stone walls that were undertaken in November.

- 4.5 In relation to wider engagement, we represented the Park Authority at a Landscape Institute for Scotland reception at Holyrood and at the European Environment Bureau conference held in Dynamic Earth in Edinburgh. We have also contributed with Cairngorms National Park Authority to SNH work on the development of new technical guidance on the management of Special Landscape Qualities.
- 4.6 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 have two holdings signed up to Minute of Agreements to progress Agri-Environment Climate Scheme applications for the next round closing in Spring 2018.
- 4.7 The national 'Peatland Action' programme aims to restore some of our internationally important natural peatlands, which are important carbon and water storage habitats. Peatland restoration works have now been completed on Beinn Dubh to Mid Hill on Luss Estate where an area of 167ha has been restored. A publicity event was organised to highlight the works completed and good press coverage was achieved.

Our Peatland Action Adviser has also continued to work with land managers and we have submitted five grant applications to SNH Peatland Action for an additional five peatland restoration sites.

- 4.8 Advisers in our Land Use team have successfully facilitated co-ordinated landscape scale action working with private land managers to deliver sustainable invasive non-native species control in a nationally important oak woodland. This has been achieved by working with two private land managers to clear rhododendron from Hell's Glen SSSI in Lochgoilhead as well as supporting a third land manager with assistance in submitting a Forestry Grant Scheme application to fund rhododendron control. A fourth land manager has submitted a Forestry Grant Scheme application separately.
- 4.9 We continue to work in partnership to facilitate delivery of the Riparian Invasive Non-Native Species Wild Challenge Action Plan as set out in Wild Park 2020. The aim of our work is to improve the quality of riparian habitats by controlling the spread of invasive non-native species as part of a catchment scale approach, working in partnership with land managers and communities.

The Upper Tay project continues with locations previously treated showing a large decrease in size and density for Skunk Cabbage, Japanese Knotweed and

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 11

## Organisational Update

---

Himalayan Balsam. For this year the number of locations where no regrowth has been recorded has risen from 33 sites in 2016 to 47 sites in 2017. Giant Hogweed remains absent from the entire project area.

We have continued to support INNS work in the Forth catchment continuing work carried out by the Forth Fisheries Trust to date. We have also started working this year in East Loch Lomond including around the Endrick Water focusing on treatment of Giant Hogweed, Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam.

In addition to the above we have also funded Benmore and Kilmun Community Development Trust to train and equip seven members of the local community to carry out invasive non-native species control in their local community.

- 4.10 In partnership with Farm Advisory Service Scotland, Scotland's Rural University College and their Hill and Mountain Research Centre Kirkton Farm at Crianlarich we have supported a series of workshops to highlight biodiversity on hill farms as well as woodland creation and improvement opportunities. All the workshops were well received and were attended by a mixture of land managers, agents and organisations.
- 4.11 We continue to support the work of voluntary Deer Management Groups throughout the Park in their delivery of public interest benefits. Deer Management Groups work in collaboration across the open habitat red deer range and we have recently supported Inveraray and Tyndrum towards a five year project carrying out Upland Habitat Impact assessments across their area.

## 5. Visitor Experience Update

- 5.1 Following VisitScotland's announcement to close a number of iCentres we have been working with the Callander community and VisitScotland to investigate alternative forms of information provision. Early discussions indicate that while these closures are disappointing, there are some potentially beneficial and creative opportunities to be explored that would help consolidate the visitor offer responding to changing visitor demands.
- 5.2 The National Park Destination Group met on 15<sup>th</sup> November to review the summer season and look ahead to destination wide project activity for the next five years. This industry group was positive about 2017's summer season and were keen to take a leadership role in developing the visitor proposition for the National Park in the coming years, making best use of funding and opportunities and collaborative projects that will continue to improve the visitor experience, extend the visitor season and grow the visitor economy. The group is considering a work programme from this meeting.

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 11

## Organisational Update

---

- 5.3 The Estates Team, as part of their work to develop a more innovative approach to the management of waste and litter on Park Authority owned and managed sites, carried out a trial of three Big Belly bins at key visitor sites throughout September and October. These 'smart bins' compact the waste and send a signal when they are nearing capacity, and the team were all extremely positive about them. The data collected from this trial is currently being analysed, along with information from other organisations who have also been using them, and this will help us to plan how we invest in this type of technology in the future. The initial indication is that when used in the correct places these types of bins do significantly reduce litter-related issues as well as being more efficient to manage, and we look forward to taking this forward.
- 5.4 Our tenant at Inveruglas has given up their lease, providing us with an opportunity to carry out essential upgrade works to this building and secure a high quality tenant in future. It is anticipated that a shorter-term 'pop-up' arrangement will be secured for next season whilst we plan and carry out this work. The Estates Team are focussed on improving the quality of our public toilet provision across the board and, like our litter management work, this will take time and investment, however the evidence gathered from sites where we have already made improvements gives us confidence that even small changes can make a big difference to the visitor experience.
- 5.5 The Landlords Works at the Gateway Centre are now officially complete and the building is ready to handover to the new tenant.

## 6. Visitor Management Update

- 6.1 An update on the Your Park project can be found in Appendix 1.
- 6.2 The Mountains and the People project has now completed capital path improvements on The Cobbler, Ben Ime, Ben Vorlich (Sloy), Stob Binnien, Ben Ledi, Ben A'an and Ben Lomond. Planning applications covering the next tranche of work on Ben Lui, Ben Dubhcraig, Ben Narnain, Ben Vane and Conic Hill have also been submitted. The project has eight trainees in the Lomond area (plus six in the Cairngorms) who will complete their SVQ qualification by the end-November. The trainees have completed over 550m of path improvements on Craigmore, Ben A'an, Ben Lomond and The Cobbler. In addition, the project has also completed c.13 days of conservation volunteer work on a range of paths in the Park. OATS recently hosted their annual public meeting during which two NPA volunteers James Gillies and Euan Rammage were presented with awards for their excellent contributions towards the success of this project.

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 11

## Organisational Update

---

6.3 Over the 2017 season our volunteers delivered 389 visitor inspiration routes including:

- 236 Volunteer Ranger Routes
- 37 Walking routes
- 55 Cycling routes
- 61 Water bus routes

Overall our Volunteer Rangers Contributed 5736 hrs to inspiring visitors across the National Park. This included delivering 182 Education and Event days including having a presence at The Lodge, Light up the Forest event, Mhorfestival and RHET Food for Farming educational event.

6.4 Up to the end of Quarter 2, Conservation Volunteers delivered over 3245 hours of practical tasks helping with projects such as: assisting Gartmore Community with a hedge laying project; working with Friends of Loch Lomond on the make a difference day at West Loch Lomond; and surveying water vole habitat in Loch Ard Forest.

6.5 In September, two weeks of the Junior Ranger programme was delivered for Balfron and McLaren High Schools. This really successful again this year, involving a wide range of partners to ensure the young people involved got a real taste of what are priorities are here at the National Park Authority. Their week included hard physical work with a day The Mountains and the People project, a day at Balmaha Visitor Centre helping to engage with and inspire visitors to the National Park, and much more. The feedback was excellent from all participants and will help us shape next year's programme.

6.6 In Quarter 2 we were able to target our support to hard to reach groups, supporting over 167 people to come and engage with the National Park. An example of this was the Ranger support provided to the Al-Meezan group who visited to walk Conic Hill and who also supported us with taking part in a National Park Authority photo shoot on the same day. In addition to this we supported visits from eight schools, and 228 pupils from across Scotland.

6.7 We supported two of the trainees from the Mountains and the People project on a weeklong placement opportunity with the National Park Authority. Both trainees were excellent and we received good feedback on the breadth of the programme and support provided. As a further positive outcome, one trainee has decided to continue their relationship with us and start to volunteer.

6.8 Our planning for the Year of Young People 2018 has also progressed well. We held a co-design workshop with a group of young people, to get their input and ideas for

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 11

## Organisational Update

---

developing the programme of delivery for 2018. Our action plan for the year is in draft and this will be finalised in early 2018.

- 6.9 The John Muir Award Partnership launched the use of the digital record book, which hopes to increase opportunities for John Muir Award participants to engage with the natural environment and record and share their experiences. This positive development was picked up as a story in the media.
- 6.10 The Ranger Service had a very busy summer season. This included; completing 1161 land based visitor management patrols across the Park and spending 1275 staff stays managing Balmaha Visitor Centre, Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway and Loch Chon campsite. The key focus of this activity has been to enhance the experience for visitors to the Park and in support of the new camping management byelaws raising awareness, educating and gaining compliance from visitors planning to camp.
- 6.11 The Loch Lomond based Ranger Team continued to provide critical support for loch users from their base at Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway. In addition to processing boat registrations, facilitating launches, providing safety information and hazard buoy repair work they completed 206 patrols on Loch Lomond from April to September. From the 1<sup>st</sup> October the team has been focusing on safety inspections of hazard and navigation buoys, piers & pontoons as well as boat repair and maintenance work.
- 6.12 September saw completion of updates to the boat registration database which has significantly improved functionality and ability of the team to easily manage data.
- 6.13 Balmaha Visitor Centre welcomed a record number of visitors this summer with approximately 115,850 visits between April and October. This is an increase of almost 19,000 visitors for the same period in 2016.
- 6.14 From 1<sup>st</sup> October the Ranger Service moved into its winter work programme which includes:
- Planning and preparation for the summer 2018 visitor management programme
  - Increased support for the learning and outreach programme
  - Support for the Access & Recreation Team
  - West Highland Way and West Loch Lomond Cycle Path inspections and maintenance
  - Support for the Land Use & Conservation Teams with invasive non-native species management, peatland restoration, natural heritage planning and biodiversity monitoring projects

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 11

## Organisational Update

---

- Support for practical conservation volunteering, volunteer management and development projects
- Practical maintenance support for the Facilities Team
- Support for the Callander Landscape Project
- Review and development of interpretative material for Balmaha Visitor Centre in support of the Tourism Team

6.15 The Ranger Service Manager represented the Park Authority at the ANPA Ranger Managers conference in November. The group were given a brief update about key projects and programmes of work delivered over the last 12 months including the successful first year of the new camping management byelaws.

## 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 – from affordable housing to run of river hydro schemes, telecommunication masts to new public access pontoons - 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 being received and determined over the period remains high averaging 30 per month, and 84 decisions for the period. Some of the ‘major’ applications previously highlighted to the Board are progressing still towards the formal process, with the formal Proposal of Application Notice for West Riverside and Woodbank House received on the 6<sup>th</sup> October starting the 12 week period where public consultation can take place within. The Cononish Gold mine application is expected to be ready for determination early in 2018.

7.2 Regular steering group meetings continue to be held to coordinate project and partner activity for Callander, Balloch and Arrochar. For Callander, a joint scoping for the feasibility for the new bridge over the River Teith is underway, forming part of the business case for Stirling Council City Deal. The study will determine the optimal bridge crossing arrangement, location and costs. The report will be complete by the end of January. A final consultation event was held in November for the Balloch Streetscape project with Phase One due to commence in 2018 and including traffic calming and formalised parking bays along Balloch Road West (March-May 2018) and the creation of a Village Square (start date September 2018). The Station Square project will be delivered later as Phase Two. Arrochar Forum meetings have continued with progress being made on the creation of a new viewpoint and pontoon projects. The forum is also facilitating discussions on the former Torpedo Site and marine litter.



# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 11

## Organisational Update

---

- 7.3 The Local Development Plan Action Programme was updated and approved at the October Planning and Access Committee. This is being used to track development delivery across the National Park. Significant progress is being made in relation to delivery of a Local Development Plan sites and infrastructure including:
- Strategic transport routes – A new section of the multi-use path was opened between Tyndrum and Darigh car park, which is part of the Cross-Pilgrim Way.
  - Arrochar and Succoth – construction of 26 new affordable homes.
  - Callander – onsite construction of 23 affordable flats at housing site next to the Dreadnaught Hotel by Rural Stirling Housing Association.
  - Killin – construction of the biomass Plant at Acharn Rural Activity Area, nearing completion.
  - Luss – filling station open and five new affordable homes now occupied.
- 7.4 The National Park Grant Scheme, which invited applications for projects that offered multiple benefits to the National Parks natural heritage, built heritage and communities attracted 46 Expressions of Interest and 18 full applications. Awards have now been offered to several projects, including capacity grant awards to Local Community Development Trusts to support their operational costs.
- 7.5 Lochgoil and Gartmore are both due to complete their new Community Action Plans in Q4. This year the Community Action Planning process has included the use of the Place Standard tool which we have adapted to incorporate an additional land use theme to help facilitate discussion on this. Part of this years' Service Level Agreement with the Community Partnership includes awareness raising and provision of advice to communities on the new rights and opportunities arising from the Community Empowerment Act including asset transfer, right to buy and participation requests. Advice has been given this year to Lochgoil, Killin, Kinlochard and Buchanan.
- 7.6 Progress continues towards securing Heritage Lottery Fund's grant for the Callander Landscape Partnership, with the focus on match funding pending the Funds decision which is now due in March.

## 8. Corporate Update

### 8.1 Marketing and Communications

- 8.1.1 The National Park was the focus of a number of high profile national documentaries including 'Britain By Bike' with Larry and George Lamb which drew an audience of 1.1m for the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 11

## Organisational Update

---

Park episode. Media coverage was also achieved on a number of important National Park projects including the upgrade of the Ben Lomond path through The Mountains and The People project, this year's Junior Ranger programme and the expansion of the peatland restoration programme.

8.1.2 In partnership with NFU Scotland, guidance was issued to landowners and businesses in the Park, and people considering using 'sky lanterns' of the potential danger these pose to wildlife and the environment. A joint press release, coordinated social media and an email to businesses in the Park helped raise awareness and suggested alternatives for people looking to mark special occasions.

8.1.3 The National Park Authority's Gaelic Language Plan 2017-2022 was approved by Bòrd na Gàidhlig in October. It was officially launched at The Community Partnership's annual event, The Gathering, alongside a film which has been produced. The [film](#) is first project from the second Gaelic Language Plan and has been produced as an educational resource to highlight and celebrate the strong Gaelic heritage of the National Park. BBC Alba attended the launch and covered the story on their main news programme.

8.1.4 Five picturesque paths within the National Park are now live on Google. Staff and volunteers from the National Park used high-tech equipment from Google to film some of the most popular paths, with the aim of showcasing this beautiful area to a wider audience and enhancing visitors' experience. A press release was issued to all national and local media as well as social media messages to promote the project. The story has so far been covered by The Herald and The National.

### 8.2 HR Update

8.2.1 September saw the launch of the 2017 Best Companies Staff Engagement Survey and as always we had a great response; 82%. The survey closed mid-October and the results will be rolled out across the organisation in January 2018.

8.2.2 In October senior responsibilities and line management were formalised to help us take forward our future priorities. The Estates function is now part of Corporate Services and the Capital Projects Team will be part of Conservation and Visitor Operations. In addition to this the Visitor Experience team will now be directed by the new role of Director of Rural

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 11

## Organisational Update

---

Development and Planning. The Head of Visitor Experience vacated earlier this year will be replaced by a Visitor Experience Manager.

8.2.3 In December and as part of our programme of themed months, for the first time we are having an Equalities Awareness month. This is a fantastic opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to being a more diverse organisation. The Park for All group have arranged a number of activities covering all of the protected characteristics. This includes guest speakers from under-represented groups, an equalities quiz and the highlight of the month an all staff multicultural sharing feast. Board members are very welcome to participate.

### 8.3 Governance Update

8.3.1 The volume of information requests and complaints received remained steady during the second quarter; this is as expected due to the annual increase in visitors to the National Park during the summer season.

8.3.2 The Keeper of the Records for Scotland approved our Records Management Plan on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017.

8.3.3 Arrangements are continuing to ensure a successful induction of our new Board members who have been in post since 1<sup>st</sup> 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 to the Inner House of the Court of Session against the decision of the Sheriff Appeal Court will take place in Edinburgh on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

8.4.2 Buchanan Home Farm, Drymen – Unauthorised tree felling. A further notional trial diet has been set for 8<sup>th</sup> January 2018 in Stirling Sheriff Court to give the accused time to complete the replanting in accordance with the Decision Notice issued by the Reporter.

8.4.3 Luss Visitor Centre – recovery of possession. Mediation with P of A Limited, the current occupier, took place in Edinburgh on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2017. No settlement was agreed at the mediation or thereafter therefore there will be a Proof Before Answer in Dumbarton Sheriff Court which will run for three days from 29<sup>th</sup> November to 1<sup>st</sup> December 2017.

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 11

## Organisational Update

---

### 8.5 Infrastructure/Shared Services Update

8.5.1 Disaster Recovery – Cairngorms National Park Authority will use our Disaster Recovery Site in order to enhance their Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity procedures.

8.5.2 Data Security – Following the recent well publicised Malware cyber security issues to hit Europe, Scottish Government have provided direction to public bodies to attain Cyber Security Essentials PLUS accreditation for the organisation by the end of the current financial year. Discussions with an external contractor have been constructive and preparation work has begun in order to attain certification in January 2018, subject to availability.

8.5.3 The mobile field data collection system, used by the Ranger service during the 2017 camping byelaws season, is currently being revised to take on board the improvements suggested by the end of season review.

Appendix 1 – Your Park Project Update

**Authors:** Managers & Executive  
**Executive Sponsor:** Gordon Watson, CEO