

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 8

## The Great Trossachs Forest Partnership

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### *Paper for noting*

#### 1. Purpose

- 1.1. To inform Board of the intention of the National Park Authority to become a fully recognised partner in The Great Trossachs Forest Partnership, contributing towards future management and promotion of The Great Trossachs Forest National Nature Reserve. This will take place following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding for the Partnership in December 2017.

#### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Board note the National Park Authorities' new partner status in The Great Trossachs Forest Partnership (TGTF), and as a result will:
  - Commit to delivering a number responsibilities and actions to help secure the future of TGTF project legacy – outlined in section 4.
  - Benefit from new opportunities for delivering National Park strategic objectives, including National Park Partnership Plan outcomes related to Conservation & Land Management and Visitor Experience objectives – outlined in section 5.
  - Become actively involved in the management and future development of one of the UK's largest nature reserves.

#### 3. Introduction

- 3.1 The Great Trossachs Forest National Nature Reserve (NNR) is an internationally important designated site covering 16,500 hectares (approximately 9%) of the National Park. It was declared an NNR by Scottish Natural Heritage in 2015 and is one of Scotland's largest nature reserves. Due to its size and central location in the Trossachs, the area is of great strategic importance to the delivery of National Park objectives – a map of the NNR is found in appendix 1. Its southern section overlaps with the Strathard project area, most of it falls within the Balquhider Deer Management Group area and at its eastern end is the Callander Landscape Partnership area. The Great Trossachs Path is one of Scotland's Great Trails and runs through the NNR from Callander to Inversnaid, providing a strategic link between the West Highland Way and the Rob Roy Way. A dedicated website is maintained by the current partners and can be found at [www.greattrossachsforest.co.uk](http://www.greattrossachsforest.co.uk)
- 3.2 The land within the partnership and covering the NNR falls under three ownerships: RSPB Scotland, Woodland Trust Scotland and Forest Enterprise Scotland (the latter under a 190 year lease from Scottish Water). It is currently managed by a Steering Group comprised of the three land-owning partners plus representation from the National Park Authority. TGTF and partnership was originally developed as a

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collaborative project under the now lapsed Scottish Forest Alliance (SFA), with British Petroleum as the major funding partner. Over the last five years, the project has been further progressed using Heritage Lottery Fund funding, and the HLF-funded project manager post and existing Memorandum of Understanding signed by partners in 2007 comes to an end at the end of December 2017. The National Park Authority was not a signatory to the SFA, the HLF funding package or the 2007 MoU and therefore was not recognised as a Partner. The HLF funding requirements and good practice require a plan for managing and securing the legacy of the project to be produced. The current MoU becomes out of date at the end of 2017 and has therefore been reviewed by the partners and National Park Authority with this in mind.

- 3.3 These circumstances have led to the existing partners formally approaching the National Park Authority to become a new partner, helping to share the legacy of the initial project and providing the opportunity to capitalise on the opportunities that it will bring.

#### 4. Commitments by the National Park Authority

- 4.1 Following several detailed discussions between senior National Park Authority staff and the current Chair of the TGTF Steering Group, it has been agreed *in principle* that the National Park Authority will become formal partners and contribute to the partnership in a variety of ways summarised below. The National Park Authority contribution is predominantly in-kind, in the form of staff time, and is considered well within current capacity levels.

##### **Access & Recreation**

- Promoting the Great Trossachs Path as part of the Great Trails Network in the National Park.
- Potential custodianship of the Great Trossachs Path trademark and logo – to be confirmed in early 2018.

##### **Administration & Resources**

- Membership of TGTF Partnership steering group.
- A maximum of £5k/year cash contribution for five years (£25k).
- Fielding general visitor enquiries about TGTF.
- Forward technical enquiries to one or more of the landowning partners.

##### **Communications**

- Leaflet reprinting – communications and design time to develop new content.
- Promotion of TGTF content on National Park Authority website and via social media

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- Contributing to related social media, articles and presentations.
- Using of TGTF logo and branding on appropriate web pages and information boards.

### Conservation

- Promoting the contribution that TGTF makes to the National Park and Wild Park 2020.

### Education & Volunteering

- Promotion and support of TGTF education and volunteering opportunities
- Talks and site visits - contributing where appropriate.

4.2 Following agreement between all partners the aim is to sign the partnership MoU in the New Year.

4.3 It is important to note that the costs of managing the land and the access infrastructure including woodlands, herbivore management, path maintenance and signage maintenance will rest with the each of the three landowning partners, not the National Park Authority.

## 5. Benefits and opportunities to the National Park Authority

5.1 Due to its size and central location, the Great Trossachs Forest NNR offers several potential benefits and opportunities to the National Park that could be capitalised on through continued and strengthened joint working with the existing TGTF partners. These are summarised below:

### Visitor Experience – Access & Recreation

- The Great Trossachs Path caters for walkers and off-road cyclists and provides a recently constructed west-east connection between the West Highland Way and the Rob Roy Way and National Cycle Network Route 7, along with future links to the A82 cycleway when this is developed north of Tarbet (as part of the planned A82 Tarbet to Inverarnan upgrade). Promotion and marketing of the route could be coordinated with the work required for the West Highland Way and other paths in the National Park, further strengthening the recreational offer provided.

### Conservation & Land Management

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- Delivery of native woodland expansion and improved woodland habitat connectivity. Existing management by the three landowning partners is delivering against these objectives but there is scope to strengthen this, for example by securing funds for further woodland establishment via the VIEW /VISTA project and continuing our work to develop a new habitat network model that demonstrates the improvements in ecological connectivity, and helps to guide further woodland expansion in adjoining areas.
- Regeneration of previously heavily grazed moorland and blanket bog habitats and restoration of montane scrub woodland including promotion of sustainable herbivore management, for example by working with TGTF partners and landowners to the south to develop a management group addressing issues of deer and other herbivores, extending to the Strathard and Callander Landscape Partnership project areas and beyond.
- Protection of key species including black grouse, golden eagle, water vole, salmon, brown trout and red squirrel. Existing management by the three landowning partners is delivering for these species but there is scope to further strengthen this, for example by further expansion of the reintroduced Trossachs water voles.

### Communication & Engagement

- An opportunity to promote one of the UK's largest nature reserves, which is in the heart of the National Park, and also to promote the work of the partners, including the National Park Authority.
- An opportunity to promote a broad range of outcomes and priorities from the new National Park Partnership Plan.
- Opportunity to create a higher profile destination for volunteering, outdoor education and nature-focussed tourism. The Great Trossachs Path, the visitor gateways at Lendrick and Inversnaid and the Woodland Trust Scotland office at Lendrick Steading all present opportunities for consolidating and expanding our partnership work to deliver on these areas.

### 6. Monitoring & Review

- 6.1 In order to ensure that membership of the partnership is delivering positive outcomes and best value for the National Park Authority and the National Park, staff will monitor progress moving forward. An evaluation review will take place 12 months after the commencement of the new partnership, with results and any recommendations being reported to the Executive team for consideration.

### 7. Conclusion

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- 7.1 The Great Trossachs Forest NNR is delivering significant benefits across a wide range of key priorities for the National Park. However to date the Park Authority has had an informal and relatively light touch engagement with the NNR partnership. By becoming full partners we will take on modest costs which are more than offset by a number of benefits which will help to deliver National Park Partnership Plan outcomes.

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**Board Sponsor:** David Warnock

**Appendix 1: The Great Trossachs Forest area within Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park**

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