

# National Park Authority Board Meeting



Agenda Item 9

## 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 November and February 2018.

#### 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. At future Board meetings it is intended that the Board receive updates on Annual Operational Plan Progress.

#### 3. Chief Executive Office Update

- 3.1 A letter has been received on behalf of the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Roseanna Cunningham to confirm that she has approved our National park Partnership plan 2018-2023. It is most welcome that the Plan has been approved as submitted and a launch is planned involving the Cabinet Secretary later in March.
- 3.2 In the same letter the Cabinet Secretary acknowledges receipt of the Annual Update Report on the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs Camping Byelaws 2017 and congratulates the National Park Authority on its hard work in implementing them.

#### 4. Conservation & Land Use Update

- 4.1. Twenty-one camera traps have been set up in the Trossachs area as part of the Wild Cat survey and initial results are due imminently. Working with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, three monitoring transects have been set up for bee surveys in the Park and these will be in operation over summer 2018.
- 4.2. Design works for the A82 Taret to Inverarnan upgrade have been continuing based on the 7.3m carriageway width approved by the Minister for Transport. A public forum event will be held in Arrochar on 28 February to provide an update on the progress. We have been consulted by Forest Enterprise about their proposals for scrub woodland establishment for slope stabilisation above the A83 at the Rest and Be Thankful.

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- 4.3. In February 2015 approximately 0.55 ha of native woodland protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) was felled without consent at Buchanan Home Farm, Buchanan Castle Estate, Drymen. A tree replacement notice was served by the National Park Authority, requiring replacement planting. The landowner's appeal to the Scottish Government's Planning and Environmental Appeals Division against the notice was dismissed in June 2017 and the tree replacement notice upheld with minor amendments. Since then the landowner has worked with the Park Authority and replanting was completed in January 2018. The replacement planting is protected by the original TPO and the landowner has a duty to ensure the trees establish successfully.
- 4.4. We successfully secured Peatland Action funding for an additional five peatland restoration sites and by the 31<sup>st</sup> March, we hope to have completed Peatland restoration techniques within an area of 261 ha on 3 different sites.
- 4.5. In the Trossachs Water Vole Project area, mink are still being detected from time-to-time but fewer and fewer signs of mink are being seen. Over 2017 a total of nine mink were caught in the area.
- 4.6. In partnership with Farm Advisory Service Scotland, we are supporting a training day on Montrose Estate (27<sup>th</sup> March) to train land and deer managers in the techniques to allow them to monitor the herbivore impacts on their moorland. We are also organising a day at Glenfalloch to raise awareness of the herbivore impacts in Native woodland and how to assess and monitor them.

## 5. Visitor Experience Update

- 5.1 The cultural programme (Festival 2018) to coincide with the 2018 European Open Water swimming Championships being held at Balloch is being developed by a steering group representing the local businesses and community. This will help create a day of celebration on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> August that will attract a family audience to enjoy local talent such as dance, drama and music performers. A £10,000 community fund has now been launched to help local groups develop performances and entertainment for the day. Groups have been invited to apply and the final awards will be decided by the community through an online voting system.
- 5.2 A new West Highland Way website was launched in January ([www.westhighlandway.org](http://www.westhighlandway.org)). The new site can be accessed from mobile devices, has updated maps and information and can be used to promote the world class experience the route can offer. The old site was out of date and had suffered from a lack of investment over the past decade. Early feedback has been consistently

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positive with partners and users rating the site very highly. We will continue to respond to any suggested improvements and look forward to using the site as a key promotional tool for Scotland's premiere long distance route.

5.3 The Gateway Centre was handed over to the new tenant on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

### 6. Visitor Management Update

6.1 An update on the Your Park project can be found in Appendix 1.

6.2 During the winter period work for the Mountains and The People project moves indoors with planning for 2018 being a key activity. During this period adverse weather conditions have meant that only one contract is live within LLTNPA, the Ben Vorlich via Loch Sloy (LL09). Planning permission has been granted for round 4 of paths which are in the process of being tendered.

All of the 2017 trainees completed their training and were presented with their SVQ certificates. Recruitment for the 2018 cohort will begin in April. Volunteering activities have started again with days filling up very quickly and a number of multi day opportunities planned for later in the year.

The first 2.5 years of this 5 year project have been very successful, delivering 18,201m of path works on heavily used Munros, 6 High Level Health Walks, 2 training courses with 16 trainees trained (14 achieving full SVQ award), 37 volunteering events, 292 Volunteer days (1751 volunteer hours) given and £950,566 capital spend to date.

6.3 Since the start of the 2017/18 year our Volunteer Rangers have delivered over 6000 hours. Whilst still a fantastic contribution, this number of hours is lower than we had anticipated, mainly due to trials of new Volunteer Ranger opportunities across the 2017 season with shorter days. More recently, their invaluable contribution has been focussed on supporting the recruitment and training of 25 new Volunteer Rangers.

6.4 Up to the end of January, Conservation Volunteers delivered over 4,900 hours of practical tasks helping with projects such as: Supporting the Ranger Service with maintenance along sections of the West Highland Way, removal of rhododendron as part of the INNS project at Loch Katrine, WeBs (Wetland Bird Survey) counts on Trossachs lochs and on Loch Lomond.

6.5 Over the winter period we have focussed on finalising our plans for delivery during the Year of Young People. We have created an organisation wide Year of Young People action plan for delivery in 2018; examples from this, that are already under

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way, include designing a new Volunteering leaflet specifically aimed at Young people; starting the conversation with young people about co-designing the activities we offer and bringing together a delivery team from across all areas of the organisation for the year ahead.

- 6.6 We designed and offered the first of this year's Junior Ranger Volunteer Days at Cashel. This brought together 12 young people from across all our Junior Ranger programmes, got them involved in practical conservation tasks and explored the history and cultural heritage of the area. The Junior Rangers will be involved in helping us design further volunteer opportunities for young people.
- 6.7 We have started our planning with a partner organisation, Backbone, and the communities they support for the Outdoor for All festival, being held at Balmaha in June 2018. This festival will target the BME community, with a focus on family groups and young people.
- 6.8 Our partnership with The John Muir Award has easily surpassed our target of 5000 awards within the National Park since the start of the partnership in 2013. We are working closely with the trust to celebrate this in line with the anniversary of the partnership in July 2018. This partnership continues to be very strong, and we will continue to work together to generate creative ideas for engaging young people with nature in the National Park.
- 6.9 Our responsibility under Developing the Young Workforce has been focussed on raising our profile at a range of different High School and job centre careers events. Young people and those looking to further develop their skills in the sector are always very interested in the role of the National Park as an employer in the area, as well as our skills based programme, such as volunteering opportunities or online education resources.
- 6.10 After a very successful summer the Ranger Service undertook a thorough review of the season including; patrolling deployment, working systems resourcing & procedures. This has informed planning for the summer 2018 visitor management season including development of a revised deployment model, seasonal staffing structure & refining of work systems & procedures.
- 6.11 From October to December the Ranger Service also moved into its winter work programme which also included:
  - Increased support for the learning and outreach programme
  - Support for the Access & Recreation Team

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- 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
- 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

6.12 From January the key focus for the team will be finalising plans & preparations for the start of the camping management byelaw period on the 1<sup>st</sup> March. Key milestones include; the recruitment of Seasonal Rangers, delivery of a revised training package for all staff, completion of preseason camping permit area inspections and preparation of all resources required for core service delivery.

## 7. Rural Development Update

7.1 The main areas of activity has concerned –

Current significant development proposals or applications include -

- The Cononish Gold Mine Planning application's assessment was being brought to a conclusion during this period, which was presented to the Board at the Special meeting on the 27<sup>th</sup> February. The Board approved this application, subject to conclusion of the required Section 75 Agreement, following a site visit and hearing.
- The Rural Stirling Housing Association's application for housing in Balmaha is anticipated to be ready for the Planning & Access Committee's determination following a site visit later in March or April.
- The community consultation period associated with the prospective development proposal for Balloch West Riverside and Woodbank House concluded at the end of December and the submission of an application is anticipated during Spring.
- Likewise, the community consultation on a proposal for 50 houses by Rural Stirling Housing Association at Claish farm (adjacent to the McLaren leisure centre, south of Callander) is due to progress at the end of February. This will commence the statutory 12 week pre-application consultation period for

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community engagement which must be undertaken prior to the submission of an application.

- Arrochar Community hydro (just above the West Highland rail line) is nearing completion – which, in addition to delivering a renewable energy source and community income potential, has also enabled improved opportunities for access and invasive species control.

7.2 Support to projects identified in the Local Development Plan has included -

- In Callander a draft feasibility study for a new bridge crossing over the River Teith has been produced with Stirling Council, this will inform the Stirling Council City Deal preparation work.
- The Balloch streetscape improvement project has been progressing with a consultation event to show signage ideas to be held on the 20<sup>th</sup> March. Phase 1 of the project includes traffic calming and formalised parking bays along Balloch Road West and the creation of a Village Square (both anticipated to commence Sept 2018). Additional parking is proposed to be implemented at Moss O' Balloch in May/June 2018 by West Dunbartonshire Council.

7.3 Support to communities from both the NPA and the Community Partnership has been focussed on the Lochgoil, Gartmore and Strathard communities. Lochgoil and Gartmore are both nearing the end of their process to prepare new Community Action Plan's. In Strathard the community is mapping a way to progress actions arising from their recently completed Community Action Plan and from the Strathard Initiative. There is a need for agency support to prioritise and coordinate activity and an inception meeting of a proposed Strathard Partnership has been arranged for the 16<sup>th</sup> March.

7.4 The updated Callander Landscape Partnership stage 2 submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund was submitted in February. This was a significant piece of work, requiring support from the across the organisation, community groups and partners. The feasibility study into the Falls of Leny Visitor Destination infrastructure, or confirm technical options and provide more detail costs, was progressed and significant moves forward this key element of this project.

## 8. Corporate Update

### 8.1 Marketing and Communications

8.1.1 Communications preparation is underway in anticipation of the new National Park Partnership Plan being approved by Scottish Ministers.

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8.1.2 Pre-season communications and stakeholder engagement have been a focus in time for the new camping byelaw season beginning on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2018.

8.1.3 The Communications team coordinated an interactive all staff meeting and workshops focused on our next 5-Year Plan (our Corporate Plan).

### 8.2 HR Update

8.2.1 Following this year's Best Companies annual survey we are pleased to have been recognised as a 'one to watch' company. Teams will produce their own action plan and for the first time the HR team will also analyse the results and look for the key themes across the organisation and produce a joint action plan.

8.2.2 We are delighted to advise that after a very successful assessment day we have achieved our Silver Healthy Working Lives award.

8.2.3 The Pay Remit for 2018/19 has been released by Scottish Government. Negotiations with UNISON have commenced and we are hopeful that we will bring these to an early conclusion.

### 8.3 Governance Update

8.3.1 The volume of information requests and complaints received reduced during the last quarter. Two information requests were appealed to the Scottish Information Commissioner, one was dismissed, and the other is currently under consideration by the Commissioner.

8.3.2 Preparations are underway to ensure compliance with the new general data protection regulations (GDPR), which are coming into force in May 2018.

8.3.3 The induction of our new Board members who have been in post since 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017 has now been completed.

8.3.4 Preparations are underway in relation to the Park Authority local elections which will be held on 5 July 2018, with the Park Authority working with Stirling Council to ensure that there is strong communication and positive engagement in this process. The Scottish Ministers appointment process will also be commencing for the new ministerial appointments which will be made in the Autumn 2018.

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### 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 took place in Edinburgh on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> February 2018 in front of three judges. It will be several months before a decision is issued.
- 8.4.2 Buchanan Home Farm, Drymen – unauthorised tree felling. The replanting in accordance with the Decision Notice issued by the Reporter has been completed and the case is now concluded, with an outcome which means that the trees have been replanted and the members of the public who complained about the felling can see that action has been taken.
- 8.4.3 Luss Visitor Centre – recovery of possession. There was a Proof Before Answer in Dumbarton Sheriff Court which ran for three days from 29<sup>th</sup> November to 1<sup>st</sup> December 2017 inclusive. A further four days in court have been arranged in April to hear the remainder of the evidence. There will then be a further hearing in May without witnesses.

### 8.5 Infrastructure/Shared Services Update

- 8.5.1 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 October 2018. Testing was carried out in January 2018 and the Cyber Essentials PLUS certificate was issued in February 2018. This certifies that our organisation was assessed as meeting the Cyber Essentials implementation profile and thus that, at the time of testing, the organisation's ICT defences were assessed as satisfactory against commodity based cyber-attack.

**Appendix 1 – Your Park Project Update**

**Authors:** Managers & Executive  
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