

Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority

Annual Report 2017 – 2018

Welcome

It has been another busy year of significant delivery for the National Park Authority where we have again worked alongside many partners and stakeholders to continue to enhance Loch Lomond and The Trossachs as an outstanding landscape and a beautiful place to live, work and visit.

The year saw the implementation of a significant new initiative to improve the visitor experience by managing the impacts of camping on our busiest lochshores through new byelaws, investment in new camping facilities and continuing to promote responsible behaviour. The first season of operation saw extremely positive feedback from campers alongside helpful suggestions for improvements. At the same time there continued to be significant investment in our footpath networks as well as a landmark High Court decision in favour of the National Park which protected access rights at the Drumlean Estate. A perfect illustration of the role of the National Park in promoting enjoyment and recreation while protecting our environment. Further investment in camping facilities, visitor sites and piers also got under way during the year ensuring a high standard of visitor infrastructure to support the rural economy.

Early 2018 also saw our Minister approve the National Park Partnership Plan 2018-2023. The finalised Plan followed a period of consultation in summer 2017. The National Park Partnership Plan provides the strategic direction for the work of the National Park Authority and its partners across the National Park area over the next 5 years, setting key outcomes and priorities and identifying organisations who will help deliver these. The Plan builds on the achievements of the previous 5 years and looks to focus on delivering more benefits for Scotland, particularly on addressing Climate Change, improving Health and Wellbeing, Improving Biodiversity, supporting Economic Growth and Community empowerment.

Alongside these significant developments, as part of the delivery of the 2017-18 Annual Operational Plan there was a diverse range of other successes and projects delivered throughout the year, a snapshot of which is shown below.

Gordon Watson
Chief Executive Officer

James Stuart
Convener

Our mission

...is to be the vital force in protecting and enhancing this iconic National Park.

Our aims

The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 sets out four aims:

- To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area
- To promote the sustainable use of the natural resources of the area
- To promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public
- To promote sustainable social and economic development of the communities of the area.

Our long term vision

We want the National park to be an internationally-renowned landscape where...

Conservation and Land Management

Nature, heritage and land are valuable assets, managed and enhanced to provide multiple benefits for all.

Visitor Experience

There is a high quality, authentic experience for people from all backgrounds. There are many opportunities to enjoy recreation activities and appreciate the area's outstanding natural and cultural heritage within an internationally-renowned landscape.

Rural Development

Businesses and communities thrive and people live and work sustainably in a high quality environment.

Our priorities

All of our plans are aligned to the priorities of the Scottish Government. The Government's Programme for Scotland: A Nation with Ambition; an inclusive, fair, prosperous, innovative country, ready and willing to embrace the future.

Scotland's National Parks make a significant contribution to many of the Scottish Government's stated priorities including:

- Tackling Climate Change
- Boosting active travel, improving mental health.
- Supporting resilient, empowered and inclusive communities

Highlights of the Year

Conservation and Land Management

Red Squirrels: There was promising news for species conservation work in the Park, specifically the Red Squirrel Wild Challenge this year. Survey work carried out by the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels project team helped by National Park volunteers recorded an increase in Red Squirrel sightings, and reduction in Grey squirrels, with 96.8% sightings being of red squirrels.

Habitat Impact Assessments: Our Land Management Team worked collaboratively with 14 land holdings in the Park to better understand some of the damaging impacts of wild deer and livestock on upland vegetation through Habitat Impact Assessments. We also raised awareness of wild deer impacts by delivering 3 training days in upland sites in the Park.

Peatland Restoration: We were delighted to secure £265k from the Peatland Action fund to carry out restoration of 5 peatland sites, which includes Auchlyne & Suie, Luss and one site on Glenfalloch - Ben Glas Burn. Two other sites were funded; Glenfalloch - Oss Flats and Ptarmigan - The Shady Glen, the work on which will be completed during 2018/19.

Water Vole Reintroduction: 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, the case study for which was featured in our 2016-17 annual report, and this achieved the runner-up spot as Highly Commended at the Awards ceremony in November.

Visitor Experience

Your Park

Between March and September 2017 also saw the implementation of Your Park, the first season of camping management bylaws, one of the biggest projects in the National Park Authority's history. The byelaws created four Camping Management Zones to manage camping pressures on popular lochsides covering 4% of the National Park. The associated Camping Development Strategy established the priorities for investing in facilities, with the first new campsite operating at Loch Chon. The impact of these changes on improving the visitor experience and environment of these pressured areas was monitored throughout the season, with an annual update being provided to the Minister. More than 16,000 people (including more than 2,800 children) camped within one of these permit areas or low cost campsites during this first season of the camping byelaws and positive feedback was received from the majority of the 1,200 people who responded to the feedback survey about the permit areas, with 87% saying that they would be likely to recommend staying over in a permit area. As would be expected improvements were made during the season in response to operational experiences, visitor feedback and local intelligence.

Paths Creation and Restoration: It was another highly successful year for new path creation within the Park. This included hill path restoration work being completed on Ben A'an, Ben Lomond, Ben Ledi, Ben Venue (Achray), Beinn Ime, The Cobbler and Beinn Narnain by The Mountains and The People team. In partnership with St Fillans Community and Sustrans, the Park Authority successfully delivered Phase 3 of the Lochearnhead Railway Path Project construction project which created 4.5 kilometres of valuable and well used link behind St Fillans and links into the village playpark. 1.5 kilometres of new walking and cycling route between Tyndrum and Dalrigh, which forms part of the Cross Scotland Pilgrims Way, was created in the community owned woodland at Dalrigh, Tyndrum. It facilitates a circular loop from Tyndrum, allowing cyclists to bypass the A82 trunk road and takes in impressive views of Ben More and the Breadalbane mountain range.

Active Park: Data collected from remote counters revealed that there were significant increases in path use at key locations in the Park including an 8% increase on the West Highland Way, a 3% increase on both the Cobbler hill path and National Cycle Network route 7 at Aberfoyle, and an 11% increase on the Ben Lomond hill path. 169 people enjoyed taking part in the 'Walk in the Park' initiative this year, which is coordinated by Loch Lomond & The Trossachs Countryside Trust. This is an 8% increase on previous year.

West Highland Way: A new West Highland Way website (www.westhighlandway.org) was launched in February. The new site can be accessed from mobile devices, has updated maps and information and can be used to promote the world class experience this iconic route can offer. The traffic on the website was up 50% year-on-year, with more than 100,000 hits in February- April 2018, compared with 67,000 during the same months in 2017.

Great Scottish Swim: August saw the return of the Great Scottish Swim at Loch Lomond. As well as the Elite races there were 2,700 swimmers open water swimming distances of half mile, 1 mile, 2 mile, 5k and 10k. 50% of participants were from outside of Scotland, bringing increasing numbers of spectators and adding significantly to the local economy. The repeated success of the National Park and its event partners in delivering the Great Scottish Swim helped to secure the 2018 European Open Water Swimming Championships.

National Park Junior Ranger Volunteers: We designed and offered the first National Park 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.

John Muir Award: Our partnership with The John Muir Award has easily surpassed our target of 5,000 awards within the National Park since the start of the partnership in 2013. There have been 6,950 John Muir Awards achieved to the end of 2017/18, 1,636 of which were through work with inclusion groups.

Gateway Centre: At Loch Lomond Shores, the Park Authority and Scottish Enterprise revitalised and marketed the contemporary Gateway building in a prime location to bring new business to the area. The Shore, Loch Lomond opened its wedding and event venue, bar, restaurant and dry spa in Spring 2018.

Rural Development

Callander Landscape Partnership: The community-led project to turn the town of Callander into the outdoor capital of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park has been given £1.43million funding from the National Lottery. This funding will support more than 20 projects including:

- improving access and restoration of the Victorian Walkway at the Falls of Leny
- improving and conserving the area's natural heritage,
- exploring the past through cultural heritage and archaeology,
- creating a cycling and walking network,
- enhancing visitor interpretation to encourage people to make the most of getting active in the outdoors.

Planning Applications: On average 32 applications per month were submitted with between 20 and 30 determined. The time taken to determine our most straightforward applications has significantly improved during this year – from 10.5 to 6.4 weeks.

Accommodation: 88 new homes, 25 camping pitches and 12 camping pods, 78 additional bedspaces and 75 self-catering units were approved during the year.

Run of river hydro schemes: 6 hydro schemes were completed during the year. The number of operational schemes increased from 35 to 38. Arrochar Hydro Scheme, providing funding to Arrochar and Luss communities became operational - the fourth community hydro scheme in the National Park.

Cononish Gold and Silver mine: The revised application for the operation of a gold and silver mine at Cononish by Tyndrum was a particular focus for the delivery team with the National Park Board approving the application in February 2018.

Bio mass plant: The 5MW Acharn bio mass plant just south of Killin has been constructed – the only facility of this kind in the National Park - and is due to be commissioned in July 2018.

Emergency Services Communications Infrastructure: The Home Office project to update emergency services communication infrastructure across the UK has generated applications for 11 new masts across the Park, with 8 being consented and 6 under construction.

Access Enforcement: In March 2018, after a 5-year legal battle, the Inner House of the Court of Session, the highest civil court in Scotland, found in favour of the Park Authority to the effect that the owners of Drumlean

Estate, near Aberfoyle were unlawfully blocking members of the public from enjoying access rights granted by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003

An Excellent Organisation

Climate Change: The year also saw the publishing of the first National Park Authority Climate Change Action Plan which aims to identify and facilitate actions that support progressive climate change mitigation and adaptation for the National Park Authority and National Park. We invested in electric vehicles to replace some of our aging fleet and reduced our energy consumption in our staff-occupied buildings.

Digital Engagement: Visits to the National Park website were up +39% year-on-year, with our website receiving more than 700,000 visits in 2017/18. Our main Facebook page reached more than 4.7m people, up from 3.1m in 2016/17. Tweets on our main Twitter channel reached more than 3.1m people, up from 2m in 2016/17.

Cyber Resilience: Following high profile international cyber-attacks, the Park Authority invested significant staff resource to strengthen and enhance the security of our ICT infrastructure resulting in the award of the Cyber Essential Plus certification.

Board Governance: The Park Authority Board was delighted to welcome six new local authority board nominated members. The Authority successfully delivered a comprehensive induction programme for them, to ensure that they gained a thorough understanding of their duties as members and the work carried out by the Authority. A campaign to engage with potential candidates and electoral voters commenced for the local elections taking place in July 2018.

Lifestyle Friendly Employer: Our Pay Award for 2017/18 included a wide range of non-pay benefits that to enhance our position as an employer of choice committed to improving the balance between work and home life.

Equality and Diversity: We were pleased to publish our Equalities Mainstreaming Report & Equality Outcomes for 2017-2021. The report highlighted many excellent examples of where we have enhanced equality and diversity including through the appointment of modern apprentices and interns and use of more diverse and inclusive visual imagery on all our publications and media channels.

Infrastructure: The Park Authority undertook significant capital repairs to the piers and pontoons that we manage, helping to safeguard these high risk structures for the benefit of our local businesses and visitors into the future. Following feedback from the first season of Your Park, high standard pitch upgrades were undertaken on our Loch Chon camp site in time for the second season. Work on building a new campsite at Loch Achray commenced with opening due in Summer 2018.