

Review of Wild Park 2020



Paper for approval

1. Purpose

- 1.1. To seek the Board's support and approval for the refresh of Wild Park in line with the outcome of a review of Wild Park 2020 which has been carried out in consultation with our delivery partners. Recommendations from the review, its findings and proposals are summarised.

2. Recommendation

2.1. Board are asked to approve:

- (i) a refreshed approach to nature conservation in the National Park, through a reprioritised Wild Park Action programme.
- (ii) the contents of this paper and the attached (as Appendix 1) Wild Park Action Programme, which between them summarise how this refreshed approach will be implemented including;
 - the change of focus towards tackling the 'Key Environmental Threats' that adversely affect the precious natural environment of the National Park;
 - the involvement of new partnership organisations from the land management and community sectors in the governance and delivery of Wild Park.

3. Contribution to National Park Partnership Plan and Our 5-year Plan

3.1. Wild Park drives the main delivery of NPPP Outcomes 1 (Natural Capital), 3 (Climate Change) and 4 (Land Partnerships), and the following targets:

- 2000 hectares of woodland expansion by 2023;
- 2000 hectares of restored peatland by 2023;
- Increase from 2017 baseline of 76% of designated site features to 80% by 2023;
- Increase in water bodies achieving at least good ecological condition from 44% to 59% by 2023.

Wild Park is also reflected in Priority 1 (Litter) and Priority 7 (Policy-making) of Our 5-year Plan.

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4. Introduction

- 4.1. Nature conservation is the first aim of Scottish National Parks and is the very raison d'être of the global National Park network. The natural environment provides vital stocks of 'natural capital' from which flow benefits from nature such as water, clean air, timber, energy, food, recreation and enjoyment. A healthy environment is essential and underpins the whole economy and society of all those living and working in, and visiting the Park. Wild Park 2020 has been the main delivery vehicle for nature conservation work by the National Park Authority, in conjunction with a variety of delivery partners. It is designed to keep the key elements of our natural environment in good condition; its ecosystems, habitats and species.
- 4.2. First produced in 2014, Wild Park 2020 is the biodiversity action programme for the National Park and it sets out a vision and a series of 25 year outcomes associated with biodiversity condition. It has achieved some notable successes in key areas, and its '[Wild Challenges](#)' have been an effective communication tool and a focus for action. However the programme has undoubtedly had a lower profile than other Park Authority activities in recent years and there is now a need to change this in order to ensure that it is resourced to deliver fully against our new strategic outcomes and priorities; both socio-economic as well as environmental.

5. Mid-Term Review

- 5.1. As Wild Park 2020 covered a 6 year period spanning two consecutive National Park Partnership Plans, the approved plan included a commitment to a mid-term review in 2018, which allowed for new projects to be added, any completed or obsolete proposals removed and an update on live projects provided.
- 5.2. The timing of the review also followed the publication of the current National Park Partnership Plan which redefined the vision, outcomes, priorities and targets associated with conservation and land management in the National Park; allowing the programme to reflect the priorities and targets set out in the Plan.
- 5.3. As a refresh of the existing strategy, the review involved discussions carried out both internally and externally to ensure that a range of opinions and stakeholder perspectives were considered, and that these would be built in to update priorities. These discussions included: analysing the successes of Wild Park and the lessons learnt; whether we could demonstrate change; if the right partners were involved; the suitability of the Wild Challenges and whether they should be updated; and also if there were any notable project omissions.

6. Review Findings

- 6.1. After reviewing three years of activity and partnership working, it was proposed that Wild Park was refreshed to make it simpler and clearer for existing and potential new partners

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and stakeholders to understand what we collectively want to achieve and how we plan to deliver more action on the ground between now and 2023.

- 6.2. At the time of the review over 65% of the original projects were either completed or progressing on schedule. Projects that have been completed or have not significantly progressed due to different reasons have been reviewed and updated. The remaining projects have been reprioritised and new projects added where necessary and where the opportunity has arisen. The Park Authority also intends to take greater leadership of the projects where it is appropriate to do so and budget allows.
- 6.3. While the refreshed Wild Park prioritises ecosystem, habitat and landscape scale action, species conservation remains important and relevant. The Partnership Plan highlights species conservation projects that contribute directly towards tackling the key threats that impact on multiple species and habitats, as individual species recovery depends on the health and integration of large scale ecosystems. The four Flagship Species¹ indicated in the Partnership Plan (page 26 of NPPP) are iconic species which will allow us to highlight issues within different habitats; they are intended to be key media tools in awareness raising that will help us tell a story.
- 6.4. By refocussing delivery, it is our intention that partners and stakeholders (particularly new ones) see Wild Park as a clearer and simpler action-focused, delivery plan which sets out what collectively we want to achieve, and is relevant to the public, private and third sectors. New partnerships will need to be formed to focus on local delivery, including on a joined up landscape-scale, involving multiple land holdings. These partnerships should, through discussion and agreement with partners, open doors to more resources, expertise and opportunities.
- 6.5. Work will also be carried out to embed relevant outcomes and priorities of Wild Park into future development and planning strategies and plans, such as the Local Development Plan, Rural Development Frameworks and Community Action Plans, and thus reinforce the point that natural capital plays an essential role in economic and community wealth.
- 6.6. The use of the suffix '2020' will be dropped to future-proof the programme and strengthen the Wild Park brand.
- 6.7. On the back of the launch of the National Park Partnership Plan, we will also look to further promote the National Park as a place for innovation and demonstration in the fields of nature conservation and land management, and how these sectors help to deliver multiple benefits for Scotland by tackling and adapting to climate change, protecting and enhancing our natural capital and under-pinning the health and wealth of our communities.

¹ Flagship Species (p.26 National Park Partnership Plan): Red Squirrel, Black Grouse, Brown Trout and Gannet

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7. Tackling Key Environmental Threats

7.1. The vision and 25 year outcomes detailed in Wild Park 2020 remain fit for purpose and have not been changed; the review has explored on how we collectively we focus our efforts to deliver these outcomes. The refreshed Wild Park will focus on tackling the Key Environmental Threats which adversely the health of the National Park's natural environment, and so its ability to provide essential benefits from nature.

7.2. These threats are:

- Human activities that lead to poor quality of some lochs and rivers, such as pollution and erosion from adjacent land use;
- Unsustainable levels of grazing from livestock and wild mammals, which reduces woodland and natural vegetation cover;
- Invasive, non-native species which have no natural control and displace native biodiversity;
- Climate change pressures which are rapidly changing the ancient patterns of nature.

7.3. Each Key Environmental Threat now has its own action plan which sits within the overall Wild Park Action Programme.

8. Wild Park Action Programme

8.1. The full details of the various Key Environmental Threat action plans are found within the Wild Park Action Programme (appendix 1). They include key conservation objectives, indicators of success, geographic focus within the National Park and working group membership. Where appropriate designated sites² will be prioritised for action as these are our most important sites for biodiversity, with conservation effort focusing on actions which tackle threats to sites or features which are classed as being in 'unfavourable' or 'deteriorating' condition.

8.2. Complementing the Action Programme is the Wild Park Project List which contains over 100 current or aspirational biodiversity focused projects, with details including location, objectives, delivery bodies and resources. This live document is designed to provide a pipeline of shovel-ready biodiversity projects, which can be prioritised and matched with income sources and community aspirations and engagement. Note: The project list is included in the Action Programme, which is in the Appendix of this paper, but a selection of key projects are listed in 12 below.

² Inc. Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Ramsar sites, Marine Protected Areas, National Nature Reserves.

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9. Communications

9.1. As part of the review a refreshed Wild Park Communications Plan will be developed by our Communications Team. It is recognised that Wild Park contains multiple and long-lasting media and communication opportunities to highlight the Park, our work and Scottish Government priorities.

9.2. It contains key messages for wider audiences:

- Outlining how the economy and communities of the Park rely on the health of the natural environment;
- Outlining the vision of Wild Park;
- Showing what success looks like through achieving positive outcomes;
- How we achieve these outcomes by tackling the Key Environmental Threats;
- Explaining what the priorities for action are, the multiple benefits they will bring and how people can get involved (volunteering, funding, etc.);
- Showing how we will work to deliver these priorities, including using refreshed Wild Challenges, and how we will work with our partners to help deliver their own organisational priorities;
- Outlining how we will measure success by using indicators and targets.

The promotion of Wild Park, following re-launch will be ongoing and largely delivered on-line, through targeted campaigns, news items and the regular use of social media. An accessible [‘at a glance’ booklet](#) outlining Wild Park has been drafted. Events associated with high priority actions and flagship species will be used to raise awareness of the wider programme and there is also a good opportunity to tie into other strategies, such as the Trees & Woodland Strategy.

10. Resourcing Wild Park

10.1. In order to drive forward the development and delivery of the refreshed Wild Park, a full-time Wild Park Officer has been recruited and sits within the Land Management Team. A funding strategy to enable project delivery will be put in place, in order to identify sources of income from across the partnership and external sources. Working Groups and the Steering Group will prioritise projects in order to manage commitments and aspirations, and celebrate successes.

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11. Governance

11.1. Following the review, the governance of Wild Park will evolve to reflect the findings. Changes include:

- the creation of a Wild Park Steering Group and Working Groups to focus on tackling each of the Key Environment Threats, monitoring the indicators of success and focusing on overcoming barriers to success;
- the inclusion of private land management and community delivery partners to widen the reach and effectiveness of the programme.

12. Wild Park Projects 2019-21

12.1. Examples of proposed, larger scale projects and programmes we plan to develop and deliver within the next 1-2 years include:

- 'Cool Rivers' – enhancing our rivers in Park catchments by waterside tree planting, fencing off livestock to reduce erosion and reducing diffuse pollution problems. Forth Rivers Trust as a key delivery partner, with opportunities to work with Argyll, Lomond and Tay Fisheries Trusts in those catchments, engaging with the fishing community. A chance to use brown trout as a new flagship species and also highlight the arrival of beavers in Scotland's first National Park.
- 'Wild Trossachs Recovery Project' – a catchment by catchment clearance of invasive, non-native species across the Great Trossachs Forest and surrounding areas, using contractors and local volunteers to deliver action. An opportunity to highlight to multiple stakeholders the environmental, social and economic implications of invasives on our native species and celebrate the success of water vole recovery in the Park.
- 'Lonely Tree Project' – protecting our incredibly rare mountain trees and 'sub-montane scrub' habitats, through protective fencing, planting and management of wild deer and sheep in the Breadalbane area. Scottish Rural College at Kirkton would be a key delivery partner, along with estates and deer management groups in the north of the Park.
- 'Wild Strathfillan' – building on work associated with the Greater Cononish Glen Management Plan and the nearby Coille Coire Chuilc Caledonian pinewood National Nature Reserve, expand the rare woodland resource of this area, through management of grazing animals and associated native planting, involving local communities and landowners in delivery. Cononish Mine mitigation funding used as a pump primer with links to 'Lonely Tree' Project delivery.
- 'Saving the Lomond Rainforest' – a project aimed at ensuring a sustainable future for our best native forests into by managing invasive rhododendron and grazing animal impacts. An opportunity to highlight our red squirrel work. Key delivery

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partners would be RSPB, Forest Enterprise Scotland and local deer management groups.

- Peatland ACTION - would continue to be the main focus of our external climate change mitigation work, with woodland expansion also tackling climate change.
- 'Cowal Coastal Action' - there is a need to further develop a marine project, which tackles the threats to the Park's coastline and seas including diffuse pollution and marine litter. It is proposed that this is prioritised in 2019/20, linked into the existing Beachwatch initiative and is built into our wider litter strategy.

13. Conclusion

- 13.1. Wild Park forms the overarching delivery plan for biodiversity conservation across the National Park. This timely refresh of the project will re-focus its emphasis and resources to ensure that it aligns with for the National Park Partnership Plan and delivers for people and nature in the National Park. Board are asked to approve and support a refreshed Wild Park programme which will tackle the key threats to our precious and vitally important natural environment, and enhance its ability to provide benefits for now and future generations. The Board are requested to approve this new approach and the refreshed Wild Park Action Programme attached as Appendix 1.

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