

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 8

## Trees and Woodland Strategy

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### *Paper for decision*

#### 1. Purpose

1.1. To present Members with the new Trees and Woodland Strategy for the National Park and request approval to undertake public consultation on its contents.

#### 2. Recommendation

2.1. Board members are asked to:

- (i) **Note** this progress update;
- (ii) **Approve** the text and maps of draft plan for public consultation;
- (iii) **Agree** to delegate approval of design and final minor editorial adjustments to officers prior to public consultation;
- (iv) **Approve** the proposed date for the start of the public consultation period, on 8th April 2019;

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

3.1. **National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP)** - this strategy will help deliver Outcome 1 (Natural Capital), 2 (Landscape Qualities), 3 (Climate Change), 4 (Land Partnerships), 5 (Recreation Opportunities), 7 (Visitor Economy), 8 (Visitor Management), 9 (Health & Learning), 10 (Placemaking) and 11 (Sustainable Growth). It also is the key delivery driver to the NPPP target of 2,000 ha of new woodland by 2023

3.2. **Our 5-Year Plan** - the strategy will help to deliver Priority 7 (Policy-making).

#### 4. Background

4.1. The woodlands and forests of the National Park are some of its most special and important places and are a rich source of natural capital. Their value in terms of biodiversity, landscape, timber production, recreation, soil protection and carbon storage<sup>1</sup> is huge and their health is vital to ensure that they continue to provide many benefits for nature and future generations.

4.2. The main purpose of the strategy is to act as a tool for helping to deliver national level, NPPP and Wild Park targets and outcomes through its use by land owners and managers, forestry advisers, community groups, Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) and the National Park Authority to guide the development and approval of forest and woodland creation and management proposals in the National Park.

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<sup>1</sup> The woodlands and forests of the National Park capture approx.75,000 tonnes of carbon/yr., and store an estimated 2.5 million tonnes of carbon.

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- 4.3. Scottish Government has set ambitious targets for new woodland creation<sup>2</sup>. In addition it is recognised that this will deliver for a range of related national policy priorities including climate change mitigation, flood management, biodiversity, health and access.
- 4.4. Woodland creation and management proposals outside planning control are regulated by Forestry Commission Scotland, with the National Park Authority as a consultee.
- 4.5. Approximately 30% of the National Park is covered by woodland: around 22.5% productive conifers and 7.5% native woodlands. By comparison, the current woodland extent for Scotland is about 17%, yet the European Union's average is 38%. Our native woodlands are of global importance for nature, including rare temporal rainforests and the most southerly remnants of Scotland's ancient Caledonian pine forests.
- 4.6. The key challenges facing our existing woodlands are:
- unsustainable herbivore impacts (both livestock and wild mammals), which reduce woodland extent and condition;
  - invasive non-native species including plant diseases, which displace native biodiversity and affect tree health;
  - woodlands without natural species diversity and age structure;
  - limited scope and scale of existing woodland/forestry grant schemes.
- Key challenges for woodland expansion include
- ensuring new woodland fits well with existing natural and cultural heritage;
  - suitable land supply and changing land use;
  - funding regime constraints such as budget limitations, attractiveness of incentives, and initial outlay costs.
- 4.7. The strategy covers all scales and types of woodland management from small scale tree planting for landscape and amenity, farm woodlands to native woodlands and productive conifer schemes of all sizes. It will also guide local implementation of the new national [Scotland's Forestry Strategy](#) 2019-2029, as well as helping to achieve national native woodland creation targets.<sup>3</sup>
- 4.8. As a result of the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill 2018, the regulatory functions of FCS will become an executive agency of Scottish Government called Scottish Forestry on the 1st April 2019, the week before the public consultation is planned to commence. Reflecting this change, the Trees and Woodland Strategy refers to Scottish Forestry rather than FCS.

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<sup>2</sup> 10,000ha to be planted each year up to 2021 when targets will rise, in steps, to 15,000ha each year by 2025

<sup>3</sup> Native woodland creation targets of 3000 to 5000 ha per annum

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### 5. Progress to date

5.1. Work on the National Park Trees and Woodlands Strategy commenced in June 2018 with an external stakeholder event. The consultation draft has been written by officers in discussion with FCS as well as engagement with a range of other stakeholders.

### 6. Strategy Summary

6.1. The strategy has seven objectives:

- (i) Increasing woodland cover - with a key focus on improving connectivity of existing native woodland and scrub habitats.
- (ii) Improving woodland condition and diversifying woodland management - to enhance benefits to biodiversity, landscape quality and timber products and services.
- (iii) Protecting and enhancing this nationally important landscape
- (iv) Maintaining and enhancing economic sustainability - through forestry related skills and business development.
- (v) Promoting cooperative woodland management and creation - as part of an integrated land management approach.
- (vi) Improving community empowerment and resilience - through active engagement in woodland management.
- (vii) Encouraging and promoting public access to woodlands for recreation and improving people's quality of life.

6.2. To deliver across these objectives, and reflecting their inter-connectedness, the strategy is structured around five main topics detailed below:

- (i) Habitat enhancements - including sections on woodland habitat networks, riparian and montane<sup>4</sup> woodland, priority woodland habitats, flagship species, invasive non-native species and restructuring of productive conifer including those planted on ancient woodland sites.
- (ii) Landscape integration - setting out how forestry proposals should take the landscape character and special landscape qualities of the National Park into account.
- (iii) Integrating woodland with other land uses - including sections on designated sites, open ground habitats, deer management, deer fencing and agricultural land management including integration of woodland creation and management with agriculture.
- (iv) Rural economic development - including sections on woodland management skills, timber products, haulage and timber transport, community empowerment, tourism initiatives, consultation and stakeholder engagement and natural flood management.
- (v) Woodlands and People - including sections on responsible access and health.

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<sup>4</sup> Riparian = adjacent to rivers and burns, Montane = of the mountains

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### 7. Public Consultation

7.1. It is recommended that public consultation of the strategy period begins on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2019 and finishes on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2019. The public consultation will largely web-based, utilising a bespoke “Questionwhere” platform on the National Park Authority website. In addition there will be targeted face to face engagement with key stakeholders and partners, targeted correspondence to stakeholders and press coverage to encourage consultation responses. This consultation includes a draft Habitats Regulations Appraisal and the statutory consultation on the Strategic Environmental Assessment for the strategy.

### 8. Post-consultation key milestones

8.1. Following the public consultation period the following timetable is planned:

- Review and compilation of consultation responses (June – July 2019);
- Finalising of the Strategy and completion of statutory assessment documents (by end August 2019);
- Final Strategy presented to the Board for approval at September 2019 (date to be confirmed);
- Launch of Strategy, subject to Board approval (date to be confirmed).

### 9. Conclusion

9.1. Board members are asked to support the draft Trees and Woodland Strategy and the many benefits that its implementation will bring to people and nature in the National Park and beyond. Board are also asked to approve the draft text for public consultation and approve the start date of the public consultation period. Members are asked to agree to delegate final design of the consultation version and minor editorial changes to officers as the document is finalised for public consultation.

Appendix 1 – Draft Trees and Woodland Strategy and appendices

Appendix 2 – Strategic Environmental Assessment

Appendix 3 – Habitats Regulations Appraisal

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