

# **Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority**

## **Annual Report 2018 – 2019**

# Welcome

It has been another busy year of significant delivery for the National Park Authority. In 2018-19 we continued our work alongside many partners and stakeholders to enhance Loch Lomond and The Trossachs as an outstanding landscape, and a beautiful place to live, work and visit.

The 2018 summer season once one of the busiest experienced in the National Park with extended periods of warm weather and a noticeable increase in visitor numbers and international visitors. Our seasonal operation coped extremely well in responding to the resultant pressures and ensuring a positive experience. There was a 50% increase in numbers of campers in the Camping Management Zones' sites and a very welcome 70% increase in young people camping. Despite increased numbers the level of positive customer feedback on our camping areas stayed at the same high levels as 2017. We continued to invest in camping facilities, completing a new campsite at Loch Achray and making improvements to other areas. Successful bids were submitted to the Scottish Tourism Infrastructure Fund which will help us continue investing in a high standard of visitor infrastructure to support the rural economy.

We were delighted to welcome the new Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment, Mairi Gougeon, to the National Park to showcase our contribution to supporting the delivery of Scottish Government's National Outcomes. It provided a great opportunity to demonstrate our partnership approach to delivering significant successes including our work in the Year of Young People, affordable housing developments, the National Park as a world-class location for international sporting events (2018 European Championships), visitor management approaches, access & inclusion and Callander's landscape.

2018 also saw our Minister approve the National Park Authority's 5-Year [Corporate] Plan, which will focus our organisational resources to deliver the Our 5-Year Plan's eight priorities and the National Park Partnership Plan's thirteen priorities.

We were delighted to welcome 10 new and returning Board members through the local election process in July 2018 and Ministerial appointments in November 2018. These appointments mean that the National Park Authority has achieved the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018 "gender representation objective".

Our recently published Equalities Mainstreaming Report & Equality Outcomes Progress Report for 2019 reports a 4.9% median pay gap in favour of women.

Alongside these significant developments, as part of the delivery of the 2018-19 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. [Delivering for Today, Investing for Tomorrow](#) – The Government's Programme for Scotland which articulates that Scotland's successful future requires a strong, sustainable and inclusive economy, workplaces that embrace transformational technological change and the need to see an overall improvement in population health. Scotland's National Parks continue to make a significant contribution to many of the Scottish Government's stated priorities including:

- Climate Change – National Parks are regarded as major players in the drive to tackle climate change (now the global climate emergency), safeguarding our environment, preparing for a low carbon future and contributing to achieving national targets with the imperative that the Public Sector leads by example.
- Health & Wellbeing – Supporting the national agenda to tackle the challenge of poor public health, we maximise opportunities of the National Park's natural capital to boost active travel and improve mental health.
- Communities – The National Park Authority supports enterprising rural communities.

# Highlights of the Year

## Conservation and Land Management

***Growing and Protecting our Trees and Woodlands:*** After detailed discussions with key delivery partners, including Forestry Commission Scotland, we drafted a Trees and Woodlands Strategy which was approved by our Board for public consultation in spring 2019. The strategy will drive forward the delivery of expanding and enhancing our woodlands and forests, aiming to hit our National Park Partnership Plan target of a 2000ha increase by 2023. The Tree Preservation Order review project has resulted in eight Tree Preservation Orders being confirmed by the Planning and Access Committee, which updated tree protection in five locations.

***Wild Park Action Programme:*** The new biodiversity action programme for the National Park, Wild Park has been approved by our Board, following a review and refresh. Action for nature will now focus more on tackling the key environmental threats to our natural environment: the poor quality of some waterbodies, unsustainable levels of grazing, invasive non-native species and the global climate emergency. A relaunch of Wild Park will take place later in 2019.

***Development & Natural Heritage:*** Achieving good conservation outcomes from development remains a major focus of our work. We have continued to ensure good restoration is being delivered for buildings and infrastructure, including access tracks for run of river hydro schemes and took forward the first year of works to deliver landscape mitigation and benefits associated with the Cononish Gold Mine. We have also worked to ensure good landscape outcomes from housing proposals including those at Balmaha, Luss, Drymen and Callander.

***Spotlight on Peatlands:*** In October 2018 we were proud to host the International Union for Conservation of Nature Peatland Conference with delegates coming from all across the UK and beyond to hear about the need to protect and restore our precious peatlands, which contain vast stores of carbon, water and biodiversity.

## Visitor Experience

***Your Park Camping Management:*** March to September 2018 saw the second season of camping management bylaws being implemented in the four Camping Management Zones around the Park. More than 24,000 people (including more than 4,800 children) camped within one of the permit areas or low cost campsites during the season and positive feedback was received from the majority of the 1,600 people who responded to the customer feedback survey, with 90% saying that they would be likely to recommend staying over in a permit area. The trend towards more young people and families camping is welcomed, as was the ongoing construction of a new campsite by Loch Achray in the Trossachs.

***Year of Young People:*** During the year we have grown the opportunities for young people to actively engage with the National Park. In May 2018, we set up a National Park Youth Committee made up of 11 dedicated young people who live in or near to the National Park and who are passionate about supporting the work we do and sharing their ideas and enthusiasm. Other highlights included our first Young Person Residential, supporting three work experience placements and two modern apprentices in partnership with West Dunbartonshire Council, launching a new Young Volunteer Programme for young people aged 16-25 and, thanks to a partnership with Forest Holidays, we expanded our Junior Ranger Programme.

**Upholding Public Access:** Our team has resolved 21 cases where barriers to responsible public access were removed. An internal audit process in partnership with West Dunbartonshire Council also revealed that the National Park Authority is performing its statutory access functions well.

**Path Creation and Restoration:** 14km of new paths were completed, notably sections of the Rob Roy Way and West Highland Way which were in very poor condition and also a new multiuse path in Lochgoilhead, opening up a beautiful circular walk up the river from the village. There was also a number of Mountains and People paths completed this year including Ben Narnain in the Arrochar Alps, Ben Vorlich at Loch Sloy, Ben Lui, and Ben Duchraig including a new bridge. Monitoring data indicates the Park's paths continue to be enjoyed by an increasingly significant number of users each year.

**Active Places, Healthy People:** The 'Walk in the Park' initiative coordinated by Loch Lomond & The Trossachs Countryside Trust continues to grow from strength to strength and is widely respected as an exemplar project of its kind. This year 257 people enjoyed taking part in this project; a 52% increase on the previous year.

**Visitor Research:** In January 2019, an agency was appointed via the government framework to prepare a 12-month, park-wide survey to gather visitor profile and behaviour information; visitor feedback and trends from a sample of 2,400. This is a substantial piece of work being commissioned in association with Cairngorms National Park Authority to help with comparisons where appropriate. The National Park Authority has secured funding contributions from West Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute Councils. Fieldwork commences in May 2019.

**Great Scottish Swim:** August saw the 5<sup>th</sup> and final Great Scottish Swim at Loch Lomond. It attracted 2,640 swimmers; 9,000 spectators; and contributed almost £500,000 to the local economy. In spring 2019, the operators announced the event was not commercially viable and would cease. The National Park Authority worked with national agencies to support a new event model with a new operator for September 2019.

**European Open Water Swimming Championships 2018:** Loch Lomond was chosen by Glasgow 2018 as one of the world-class venues to host the European Championships in August. Over four days, 127 elite athletes participated against the spectacular backdrop of Ben Lomond in a competition which was broadcast as part of the entire Championships event to a global TV audience of 1.3 billion. National Park Authority's successful contribution to the event has opened opportunities now being explored with Glasgow Life and Event Scotland for a World Cycling event in 2023.

**Cultural Festival 2018:** The first-ever Balloch Loch Lomond carnival parade and local community cultural festival was held in August for 3,500+ people on the main site at Moss O' Balloch. The parade comprised 160 participants from 14 different community organisations and five national acts plus a further 120 performers who delivered stage shows, street and promenade theatre plus evening music performances. The National Park Authority engaged with local businesses to extend the commercial opportunities on a day deemed highly successful by all who attended including community police services. The event was funded by Glasgow 2018 'Our Place' fund and also attracted local donations.

## Rural Development

**Callander's Landscape:** This National Heritage Lottery funded partnership project entered its three year delivery phase in July 2018. We are the lead public body working with 15 partners to deliver a total of 19 separate projects. These focus on the dramatic landscapes in and around Callander. They seek to improve the area's natural and cultural heritage and enable more people to access the landscape and better

appreciate, understand and look after it. A number of exciting activities, including training and practical conservation volunteering opportunities have been offered with a highlight being a very successful family orientated star gazing event held in November 2018 which attracted 240 people from as far afield as Glasgow.

**Community Empowerment:** Working with the Community Partnership, we supported Gartmore and Lochgoil communities to prepare and launch their own Community Action Plans. A successful Village Halls Summit was hosted in June 2018 with 80 people from 18 different village halls in attendance and supported by 25 specialist organisations. Arrochar hosted the annual community 'gathering' in October 2018 to discuss the theme 'A Green Revolution: Building Sustainable Communities Now'.

**Development Activity:** There continues to be a range of development activity both on the ground and being submitted, or assessed, by our planning service. This has ranged from major applications in Balloch and Drymen to small scale renewable energy schemes, the start of development at the Cononish Gold & Silver mine, and smaller scale development in our towns and villages. Further examples include:

- Approval was given for 25 new homes and 23 new affordable homes which were completed early 2019 at the Old Telephone Exchange in Callander.
- Approvals were given for 34 self-catering, 90 bed spaces and 7 stances for camping pods or lodge style static caravans. In terms of completions, the largest tourism development that was completed this year was at Drimsynie Leisure, at Lochgoilhead, where a new restaurant and 38 bedroom hotel was opened in July 2018. This represented a significant investment in this area of the National Park.

## An Excellent Organisation

**Our 5-Year Plan:** Ministers approved our new (Corporate) 5-Year Plan which reinforced our commitment to:

- Litter prevention
- Investment in visitor infrastructure
- Exemplifying good practice as a sustainable organisation
- Promoting our towns and villages as attractive and vibrant destinations
- Supporting sustainable communities
- Maximising other sources of funding
- Develop appropriate policies to support delivery of our National Park Partnership Plan
- Share learning and celebrate our successes

**Climate Emergency.** This was the first full year of working to deliver our Climate Change Action Plan (now referred to as 'Climate Emergency') which lays out the actions we will take to help tackle the global climate emergency, both at a corporate level and across the National Park. Activity included a 'Climate Change Awareness Month' for staff in November 2018, including events such as tree planting, peatland restoration and a waste and recycling survey at Carrochan (our HQ). Led by our Facilities Team, we decreased electricity use by 60,000kWh, through energy-saving investment in more efficient lighting and better management of computer monitors. Following the previous investment in electric/hybrid vehicles, we constructed three new charging points in 2018/19. We also stopped the purchase and regular use of single use plastic cups and cutlery.

**Green Tourism Award:** Led by our East Loch Lomond Ranger Team, we were pleased to receive a Silver Award under the 'Green Tourism Award' scheme. As part of this staff looked at improved accessibility features and identified ways to make the centre more dementia friendly.

**Digital Engagement:** Visits to the National Park website continue to grow year-on-year. In 2018/19, the National Park website was visited more than 887,000 times (+22%), with pages on the website being viewed more than 2.5 million times. Most website visits (75%) still come from the UK but visits from the USA saw significant growth (+46%), alongside growth in visits from many European countries too. Our social media channels continue to be important ways to connect with our audiences, with our main Facebook and Twitter channels reaching more than 11 million people in 2018/19.

**A Cyber Resilient Scotland:** The National Park Authority has continued to invest significant staff resource to strengthen and enhance the security of our wider ICT infrastructure resulting in;

- The successful renewal of the Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation.
- The full implementation of the National Cyber Security Centres Active Cyber Defence programme to enhance the security of our websites and email systems.
- The implementation of DomainKeys Identified Mail (DKIM) to protect the National Park Authority from email spoofing and phishing.
- Cyber Security Awareness training has been provided to all staff and included in the staff induction process.

**Board Governance:** The National Park Authority Board was delighted to welcome five locally elected Board members in July 2018 and five new Ministerially appointed Board members in November 2018. The Authority continues to deliver an on-going induction programme, to support an understanding of Board member responsibilities and the work carried out by the Authority.

**FitForLife:** Modelled on the hugely successful Daily Mile initiative started by St Ninian's Primary School in Stirling, as a pilot project, the National Park Authority encouraged all staff to take part in a 15-minute walk in the National Park, within work time, every working day, and every week for 9 months. Approximately 80% of staff signed up to the pilot. Sickness absence amongst those staff who have participated within the pilot, which still has two months to run, has reduced by 44% from the previous year.

**Equality and Diversity:** We were pleased to publish our progress on Equalities Mainstreaming Report & Equality Outcomes. The report highlighted many excellent examples of where we have enhanced equality and diversity with particular highlights being that the National Park Authority:

- ✓ Achieved the requirement under the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018 which advises that for Ministerial appointments the "gender representation objective" for a public board is that it has 50% of non-executive members are women. It was also pleasing that in respect of the 6 Local Authority nominated Board members there is also 50% representation.
- ✓ The production of accessibility statements for a number of our visitor sites with the intention to continue to develop these for all the sites the National Park Authority are responsible for.
- ✓ 4.9% median Gender Pay Gap for 2018/19 in favour of women. This has increased from 0.5% in 2017/18. Recently published data on the figures to March 2018 indicate that the public sector average is a median gender pay gap of 14% in favour of men.
- ✓ Hosted an Outdoor Festival For All, in partnership with [Backbone](#), to help families and young people from excluded or marginalised communities access and enjoy the great outdoors. More than 150 invited guests from all ages, abilities and backgrounds living in Dundee, Edinburgh and Falkirk took part in a range of activities including guided walks on Inchcailloch and Conic Hill, canoeing, capoeira, bush craft activities, a boat cruise and a trip on the waterbus.

**Infrastructure:** The National Park Authority were delighted to be successfully awarded Rural Tourism Infrastructure Funds of £260K to upgrade toilets and car parking on West Loch Lomond (Tarbet, Inveruglas, Luss), the work on which will commence during Summer/Autumn 2019; and £247K towards project infrastructure at Falls of Leny if the package of match funding and permissions are in place within the Fund's timeframe.

The new campsite at Loch Achray opened in March 2019.

**Litter Prevention:** The appointment of our first ever Litter Prevention Manager has already enabled a focus on some quick wins; notably, in partnership with Argyll and Bute Council a joint roadside litter pick (124 bags) on the A82 between Duck Bay and Luss. More joint activities are planned as part of Keep Scotland Beautiful's #SpringClean19 – including six volunteer events and an all staff, all day litter challenge. Great progress has been made engaging with the Procurator Fiscal and Justices of the Peace on byelaws, litter and fly-tipping with the National Park Authority being responsible for half of the six reported national successful prosecutions for fly-tipping last year.