

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 9

## Chief Executive Officer Report

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### *Paper for information*

#### 1. Purpose

- 1.1. To provide an overview of significant issues and developments in the National Park Authority's operating environment.

#### 2. Recommendation

- 2.1. Board Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

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

- 3.1. The report discusses topics which cover a number of outcomes and priorities from across the National Park Partnership Plan and Our 5 Year Plan 2018-23.

#### 4. Scottish Government

- 4.1. **Environment Strategy:** The Scottish Government has published a new strategy to ensure Scotland's nature is protected and restored with flourishing biodiversity has been published. By 2045 the strategy is intended to help to transform Scotland and secure the wellbeing of the environment and biodiversity by restoring nature and ending Scotland's contribution to climate change.

- 4.2. The Strategy is promoted as helping ensure Scotland:

- plays a full role in tackling the global climate emergency and limiting temperature rise to 1.5C°
- uses and re-uses resource more wisely, bringing an end to the throwaway culture
- promotes a sustainable economy that conserves and grows our natural assets
- supports a healthy environment that delivers a fairer, more inclusive society

- 4.3. A diagram showing the vision and outcomes and how these relate to the National Performance Framework and the UN Sustainable Development Goals is appended to this report. The intention is that the strategy provides an overarching high level framework to bring various national strategies and plans together and identify new strategic priorities and opportunities.

- 4.4. In the same announcement, the Scottish Government also proposes to set up a new non-Ministerial Department which will form part of new environmental governance structures following the UK's exit from the European Union. The new body will ensure

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that public bodies and Scottish Ministers are in compliance with environmental laws in carrying out their duties. It is envisaged that there will be further legislation to establish the body and its powers.

- 4.5. **Scottish Budget:** The proposed Grant in Aid support for the National Park Authority is highlighted at agenda Item 5. Also announced as part of the Scottish Government budget for 2020/21 was £20M towards the Peatland ACTION programme and a proposed 10 year commitment of £250M. This is most welcome in the context of the Climate Emergency and our National Park Partnership Plan commitment to restore 2000Ha of degraded peatland by 2023. Previous annualised budgets and timings have made projects very challenging to deliver within the same financial year. Discussions are under way with Scottish Government and other partners to explore how funding processes can be streamlined to facilitate a step change in delivery. We have a number of projects already awaiting funding and we look forward to playing a significant role contributing to national targets during 2020/21. An additional £1M has been allocated to previous Biodiversity Challenge Funds and we currently have two Wild Park projects awaiting funding approval.
- 4.6. **Deer Working Group Report:** A report commissioned by the Scottish Government to review the current statutory and non-statutory arrangements for the management of wild deer in Scotland has been published. The remit of the working group was to “make recommendations for changes to ensure effective deer management in Scotland that safeguards public interests and promotes the sustainable management of wild deer”. The extensive report makes a lot of recommendations regarding technical improvements to the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996. It also makes recommendations relating to the non-statutory approaches adopted by the Scottish Government and SNH to support the implementation of the legislation and improvements in the standards of deer management more generally.
- 4.7. Overall, the recommendations are still looking to use the voluntary approach to deer management. However, this is based on a requirement that the deer legislation needs to be modernised, SNH needs to take a re-focused non-statutory approach and the Scottish Government needs to take steps to be in a position to introduce further statutory measures in due course if that proves necessary. There is a call for population densities to be reduced to 10 deer/ km<sup>2</sup> in parts of Scotland. Deer densities vary in the National Park and counts done within some Deer Management group areas may have higher deer densities than this. Deer numbers also have to be viewed within the context of other grazing pressures such as sheep and feral goats. Deer and grazing management is a key consideration where excessive numbers may threaten other public benefits being sought such as peatland restoration, woodland creation or other habitat management. Unsustainable deer impacts are highlighted as a key threat to the environment in the National Park and tackling these are central to delivering our Wild Park programme. The Scottish Government is currently considering the report’s recommendations. Our Land Management Team staff

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currently attend Deer Management Groups in the National Park in order to influence sustainable approaches to deer management.

- 4.8. **Scottish Biodiversity Programme Advisory Group:** The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy was refreshed in 2013 to reflect Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) International Aichi targets set for 2020. The 'Route Map to 2020' set out large scale collaborative action to help deliver these targets. New international biodiversity targets for 2030 are due to be agreed in Kunming, China at a Conference of Parties (CoP15) in October 2020. In the light of this impending milestone, work will be led by SNH and the Scottish Government over the next 2 years to assess how successful Scotland has been in achieving biodiversity targets. This will in turn influence what will be included in a future Scottish strategic framework for biodiversity 2030 which will be developed in line with new international targets. The National Park Authority has been invited at CEO level to sit on the Advisory Group in support of this work. This will provide an opportunity to share the successes and challenges of delivering the National Park's Wild Park programme in recent years.

## 5. Partnership Working

- 5.1. **Scottish Leaders Forum – Climate Emergency Action Group:** The Scottish Leaders Forum (SLF) is where Scotland's senior leaders come together to agree individual and collective action in pursuit of Scotland's national purpose and outcomes as set out in the National Performance Framework (NPF). The Forum is attended by leaders of a wide range of organisations from the public, third, and academic sectors and is led by the Permanent Secretary supported by a leadership group. The SLF recently created Action Groups to create the space to consider and test new and innovative approaches, driving transformational whole-system change, at pace and scale. These are voluntary and address key themes that emerged from the wider Forum. The National Park Authority is represented at CEO level on a Climate Emergency Action Group which will explore how public services can respond to the challenge as well as exploring the implications of climate change for our public services. This provides an excellent opportunity to share how different sectors are approaching the climate challenge.
- 5.2. **Scottish Land Commission – Regional Land Use Partnerships:** The Scottish Government has asked the Scottish Land Commission to advise on the establishment of Regional Land Use Partnerships to maximise the potential of Scotland's land in taking action on climate change. The work will look at how best Regional Land Use Partnerships could be established, what kind of structures and powers are needed, and how to widen participation, empowerment and benefit in decisions about land. The National Park presents an ideal opportunity to be a regional land use partnership area. The partnerships bring an opportunity for reform to engage more people in decisions about land and better connect strategic land use decisions with wider regional economic, community and environmental priorities. This will be particularly important if these become mechanisms for guiding how public money is prioritised to respond to regional land use issues and opportunities. In order to take this work forward, our Land Management Programme Manager Harriet Donald has been

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seconded to the Scottish Land Commission on secondment for the next year and the National Park Authority will be involved in advising on the emerging thinking.

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