

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 5



## CEO Update – Inclusive of Visitor Management Update

---

### *Paper for discussion*

#### 1. Purpose

1.1. The purpose of this paper is to provide the Board with important updates on significant issues affecting the operating environment of the National Park Authority. This includes an update the Board how we have responded operationally to the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, including the reopening of facilities in line with Coronavirus/COVID-19: [Scotland's Route Map](#) phases and the National Park Authority co-ordination of a wide range of public body partners to manage the significant numbers of visitors coming to the National Park while supporting tourism recovery. This has included the deployment of Ranger Service and Land Operations Team staff while ensuring 'COVID-safe' working practices. At its March meeting, the Board approved the report which considered the effects of the first three years of operating the National Park camping byelaws and associated camping provision for submission to Scottish Ministers. The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment has written in response (attached as Appendix 1) commending the work of the National Park Authority and endorsing the findings of the Report.

#### 2. Recommendation

2.1. Members are requested to note the contents of the report.

#### 3. Coronavirus (COVID-19): Scotland's Route Map National Park Visitor Management Response

3.1. The transition from full lockdown through the various phases of Scotland's Route Map easing of restrictions up to the reopening of Scottish tourism on 15<sup>th</sup> July has been extremely challenging. In particular, the necessary phased reopening of facilities and deployment of Rangers and field staff while staying in line with prevailing Scottish Government COVID-19 restrictions and guidance restricted the initial response to the unique and acute visitor pressures that were being experienced on the ground with so many visitors ignoring guidance. The uncertainties and restrictions affecting taking a holiday abroad, coupled with the absence of many other traditional summer activities such as festivals and sporting events, has meant that many more people are choosing to visit the Scottish countryside as an alternative. This has meant right through the summer the National Park has experienced unprecedented visitor numbers since the official unlocking, and to some extent before restrictions were officially lifted. It may be necessary for some of our normal seasonal operations to continue into October and the feasibility of keeping some facilities such as campsites open until the conclusion of the October school holidays is currently being assessed.

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 5

## CEO Update – Inclusive of Visitor Management Update

---

- 3.2. This is an interim update on the co-ordinated response to Visitor Management pressures experienced through the unlocking process and the remainder of the summer to date. Once seasonal operations have wound down, time will be spent using the insight and data gathered by ourselves and partners throughout the season to help characterise how visitor numbers, profile and behaviours have differed in the post-lockdown context. Given that the impacts of the pandemic on these issues are anticipated to continue for some time, consideration will have to be given to how to plan for next year's seasonal operations. As noted elsewhere on this agenda, significant additional costs were incurred to reopen and operate some facilities in a COVID-safe way. These will need to be reviewed in the context of ongoing budget constraints.
- 3.3. Throughout lockdown and the Scotland's Route Map Phases to date National Park Authority has chaired and co-ordinated a National Park Safe Recovery Action Group (NPSRAG) comprised of the four local authorities Police Scotland, Transport Scotland and Forestry and Land Scotland. This group has met at least weekly throughout the Phases since lockdown and has sought to co-ordinate the responses of partner bodies including the reopening and management of visitor facilities, the deployment of resources on the ground, consistent visitor information and ongoing Visitor Management measures. This group will continue to meet and will be reviewing how various Visitor Management measures have been operating, with a view to co-ordinating joint planning for the 2021 season. It is hoped that this will include capital improvement works across some partner bodies to improve some honeypot sites. A full report giving a more comprehensive overview will be presented to the December Board meeting and this topic may also be covered at a strategic Board session.
- 3.4. In addition to the local National Park context, staff have also been contributing to many discussions at national level. This includes engaging and advising on a number of national campaigns led by VisitScotland and NatureScot (previously SNH) to promote responsible enjoyment and on various national forums such as the Scottish Government ENFOR Access Group, Scottish Government Greener Communications Group, and the Scottish Tourism Emergency Response Group.
- 3.5. A particularly intense period for the work of the NPSRAG was during the weeks of phased easing of COVID-19 restrictions. This focussed on the co-ordinated reopening of facilities such as car parks, public toilets, boating facilities and campsites in line with the activities that were allowed in each phase. While the situation was fast moving, much effort was made to anticipate and plan for the return of visitors to the National Park while complying with Scottish Government guidance.
- 3.6. The main milestone dates for unlocking were:

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 5

## CEO Update – Inclusive of Visitor Management Update

---

- 18th June – (Phase 2) people were allowed to travel a short distance for outdoor leisure and guidance suggested that people should travel no more than 5 miles
  - 3rd July – (Phase 2) travel restrictions were lifted, some forms of self-catering accommodation and outdoor hospitality were allowed to open with appropriate safeguards
  - 15th July – reopening of Scottish tourism (Phase 3) including holiday accommodation and indoor hospitality with appropriate safeguards.
- 3.7. During Phase 1 of the Scottish Government Route Map (which ran up to 18<sup>th</sup> June) when the 5-mile guidance on travel for recreation applied, the National Park experienced high numbers of visitors who were clearly not following this guidance. At this time the NPSRAG member public bodies were following Scottish Government guidance not to reopen car parks and other visitor facilities as this would be inconsistent with the guidance being given to the public. Similarly, our Ranger staff were not able to patrol until the Scottish Government permitted and published guidance on non-essential outdoor working. As a result the focus for National Park staff and volunteers located within the National Park was to share information in real time to help support Police Scotland officers who were on the ground in considerable numbers both to enforce COVID-19 restrictions and other regulations such as illegal/dangerous parking and byelaws. The combination of both public facilities and most businesses being closed made these pressures more acute than normal with extensive irresponsible parking and outdoor toileting taking place. Communities were also concerned by the perceived large numbers of visitors using local shops when the advice was not to travel long distances.
- 3.8. As we moved through Phase Two of the Scottish Government's Route Map, our Ranger Service was mobilised again either on solo patrol (due to guidance on physical distancing) to gather intelligence or through COVID-safe 'buddy patrolling' to enforce the Camping Management Byelaws and liaise with Police Scotland on more serious issues. While at this stage car parks and toilets were able to be reopened, other facilities such as campsites and camping permit areas had to remain closed. Having risk assessed existing National Park toilet facilities for social distancing requirements, it was concluded that it would be ineffective to open these with drastically reduced capacity. Consequently, the National Park Authority has had to invest in deploying temporary toilets at the busiest locations where it was considered crucial to replicate existing capacity while also ensuring heightened cleaning regimes. Collaboration with local authorities allowed portions of Luss and Balmaha car parks to be used to facilitate layouts which provided for socially distanced queuing and one way systems. Temporary toilets have also been provided at Tarbet and Rowardennan. These have been well received.
- 3.9. The period where camping facilities (both public and private) could not be opened was very challenging to manage. Large numbers of people were visiting the

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 5

## CEO Update – Inclusive of Visitor Management Update

---

countryside to camp with no sites or permit areas open. The sheer volume of people camping on lochsides with nowhere to redirect them meant that the practical enforcement of the byelaws was not as effective as in normal circumstances. Many communities reported significant disturbance from irresponsible campers. Particular problem areas included Loch Earn and Loch Venachar. Significant amounts of abandoned campsites and litter were also a feature.

- 3.10. During this period the system for registering and launching boats and other powered craft using the Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway was completely redesigned to allow a COVID-safe slipping service to be provided. In anticipation of the need to keep different users socially distanced as well as manage boat registrations safely, a new queuing and registration layout was implemented. While there was delay in reopening to enable this which initially attracted some complaint, the new operation has been well received and complemented by most users. The experience of this season will likely inform more permanent improvements for future seasons. Waterborne Ranger patrols were also taking place in advance of DMMS reopening to address the upturn in powered craft activity on Loch Lomond.
- 3.11. The National Park campsites at Loch Achray and Loch Chon were reopened following 15<sup>th</sup> July lifting of restrictions on tourism accommodation. Similarly camping permit areas within the Camping Management Zones were also reopened for bookings. Forestry and Land Scotland also reopened Salloch site on East Loch Lomond. It was decided to reopen campsites at reduced capacity to ensure that communal toilet and washing facilities could be managed in a COVID-safe way. As anticipated, demand has been high due to the combination of many people choosing to camp as an alternative holiday option alongside many private operators not accepting bookings for tents or camper vans without an internal toilet. The reopening of facilities was a key element of returning to the normal management of camping pressures however some locations have continued to receive persistent non-compliance with byelaws including flytipping and elements of anti-social behaviour. The analysis of byelaw operation will be undertaken after the end of the season but from the experiences to date South Loch Earn remains a significant challenge (as has been previously highlighted in the 3-year report to Scottish Ministers). Information on the numbers of formal reports of breaches of the byelaws is still being compiled but this is expected to be higher than previous seasons, with some locations (such as South Loch Venachar) requiring more enforcement patrolling than ever experienced before. High rainfall and water levels in early August meant that Loch Achray required to be temporarily closed for a number of days.
- 3.12. Another feature of post-lockdown easing of COVID-19 restrictions has been significant and persistent traffic pressures, again a feature of many more people choosing to visit popular and accessible parts of the National Park than in normal

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 5

## CEO Update – Inclusive of Visitor Management Update

---

seasons, with even fewer people keen/able to use public transport than before. A significant part of the work of the NPSRAG has been responses to these pressure to deal with extensive irresponsible parking (both when car parks were closed during Phase 1 and reopened in Phase 2). Responses were required either due to the significant safety issues arising on fast stretches of trunk road or on more minor roads where verge parking prevented vehicles passing and could prevent emergency vehicle access. The four local authorities as roads and traffic enforcement authorities alongside Transport Scotland introduced a wide range of measures and restrictions including:

Trunk Roads – Temporary Clearway and speed restrictions at:

- A83 – Arrochar at Loch Long to address parking at Cobbler path
- A82 – Falls of Falloch
- A84 – Loch Lubnaig

Argyll and Bute

Temporary parking restrictions within Luss Village.

Stirling

**East Loch Lomond** B837 and access at Drymen.

Variable Message Signs deployed to advise of access restrictions and when car parks full.

Prior to East Loch Lomond car parks reopening local access only restrictions applied.

Regular monitoring of car park capacity and irresponsible parking to introduce road closures by Police Scotland.

**Callander** – temporary parking restrictions introduced at Bracklinn Falls access road.

**Trossachs** – temporary clearway restrictions introduced on A821 between Aberfoyle and Callander.

- 3.13. Alongside these measures, significant enforcement of these and other existing parking restrictions has been taking place across Council traffic enforcement staff and Police Scotland when parking is deemed to be dangerous. Notwithstanding the additional regulations, irresponsible and illegal parking has been persistent in many locations. Discussions with partners will examine where it may be feasible and appropriate to increase car park capacity or undertake other improvements.
- 3.14. In anticipation of the high demand the National Park Authority has been trialling a weekend car park status update service to provide real time public information on which car parks were full and where there was capacity to allow visitors to make an informed decision which would help ease traffic pressures. This has involved a network of volunteers and partner body staff feeding in information to our weekend

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 5

## CEO Update – Inclusive of Visitor Management Update

---

duty staff to provide timeous updates on our website and social media. This has been well received and consideration will need to be given to how it is operated and resourced in 2021.

- 3.15. Another feature of the season has been a significant increase in levels of littering and flytipping being observed. This is discussed in more detail in the litter prevention paper elsewhere on this agenda. Our Land Operations team have been uplifting unprecedented amounts of litter both from our own managed sites and from other locations in camping area, laybys and visitor sites. A [‘Love it Like a Local’](#) litter campaign which featured local residents, National Park Rangers and litter staff from local authorities was launched and materials have been produced for partners and communities to use. While public toilets were closed in Phase 1, inappropriate outdoor toileting was a significant concern, and again this has persisted in areas where toilets are not available. A camping permit area was recently temporarily closed on South Loch Earn in the interests of public health until significant amounts of human waste could be safely uplifted from the permit areas.
- 3.16. [Communications](#) have been a constant area of work throughout the summer. The NPSRAG also had a sub-group of communications staff to ensure good co-ordination of visitor information and messages. The National Park Authority website and social media feeds were kept up to date with all the latest information for residents and visitors. A [Think, Check, Plan](#) campaign was used to encourage visitors checked information on facilities and the situation at popular locations before travelling. This has been used consistently by all the partners including national organisations .
- 3.17. In addition to national and local public body partners, we have been working closely with the following groups:
- **Communities:** Direct CEO update communications have continued to be sent to community organisations at key points of change; weekly National Park updates are included in the Community Partnership e-newsletter; a further series of community video conferences were held (with many public body partners in attendance) to discuss reopening plans both park wide for all communities and for local hotspots such as Luss, East Loch Lomond, Trossachs and Loch Earn also involving landowners and local business representatives.
  - **Businesses:** The National Park Destination Group continues to meet regularly to share the challenges and experiences of the reopening of tourism. Regular meetings are also being held with Cabinet Secretary for Tourism, Fergus Ewing MSP to discuss the significant issues faced by tourism businesses and how best to support a sustainable recovery.

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 5

## CEO Update – Inclusive of Visitor Management Update

---

- Landowners: With the support of Scottish Land and Estates a number of landowner meetings have been held which have focussed on how visitor pressures associated with reopening are being handled.
- Sectoral and Non-governmental groups: Meetings were held with senior environmental NGO executives (RSPB, Woodland Trust Scotland, and National Trust for Scotland have sites in the National Park) and recreation NGOs (Ramblers Scotland, Mountaineering Scotland) to discuss reopening and conservation management issues.

3.18. As we move towards the end of the visitor season, the National Park Authority will continue to engage with the wide range of partners and stakeholders referred to above as we take stock of the unique challenges and pressures that have been presented by the post-lockdown reopening. A very positive feature has been the significant amount of responsive collaborative work that has taken place across many partners. A further feature of the pandemic restrictions has been the significant amount of digitally enabled engagement that has been taking place across communities and other stakeholders. The off-season period will allow for more collaborative planning and engagement to take place ahead of the 2021 season. While the challenges of lockdown and phased reopening during 2020 will hopefully not have to be repeated, it is expected that many of the impacts of the pandemic will still be a reality and that high numbers of visitor numbers can be expected to feature again in 2021.

3.19. The work summarised here has involved an enormous amount of work by many National Park staff (mostly working from home and often juggling other home life responsibilities with work) to make a reality. Delivery fast responses to continuously changing restrictions, finding COVID-safe solutions to operating facilities and continuing to offer a good service to our visitors in the face of unprecedented pressures has required sustained high pressure delivery throughout the season. It has tested our resilience with staff welfare being a key focus throughout. Sincere thanks is due to all our staff who have consistently gone above and beyond to deliver this.

#### 4. National Park Camping Management Byelaws Three Year Report

4.1. Members will recall that at our Board meeting on 16th March 2020 approved a formal report to be submitted to Scottish Ministers that reviewed the effects of the first three years of the operation of the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Camping Management Byelaws 2017 and associated camping management measures. A response dated 22<sup>nd</sup> July has now been received from Mairi Gougeon MSP, Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment.

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 5

## CEO Update – Inclusive of Visitor Management Update

---

- 4.2. The response acknowledges *“the commitment and hard work by the Park Authority staff in implementing the Byelaws and in preparing a comprehensive and very helpful three year report.”* She also states that, *“the report’s recommendations represent a cogent and pragmatic plan of action for the Park Authority and its partners to take forward in the next few years to address the issues recognised in the report. I am therefore content to endorse them as the next steps in building upon the first three years of the successful operation of the Byelaws and camping management measures.”*
- 4.3. A full copy of the letter is attached to this report. The Minister’s very positive response and endorsement is to be welcomed and marks the culmination of many years work. Members’ will recall that the report’s conclusions highlighted issues that still required to be tackled and the post-lockdown camping pressures have highlighted these further. As per the undertaking in the report a further annual update will be provided to the December Board meeting will set out the experiences of this season more fully.

### 5. Peatland Restoration

- 5.1 The National Park Authority has been successful in securing direct funding from the Scottish Government Peatland Action fund for restoration projects in the National Park. This avoids the need to apply for funding via NatureScot (SNH) as was the case in previous years. So far it is intended to undertake £212k worth of work in Glen Finglas in the Trossachs and Glen Falloch. Work continues to develop a programme approach to develop a pipeline of projects which both achieves the National Park Partnership Plan target of 2000Ha restored by 2023 as well contributing to national targets.

### 6. Community Partnership/Countryside Trust Review

- 6.1 The Community Partnership and Countryside Trust are key partners in supporting the delivery of a number of project area that benefit the Park’s environment and communities. With the increasing pressure on established funding sources for both organisations, and with the continued pressure on the Park Authority’s budgets affecting our capacity to support, there has been an ongoing conversation between officers’ and both organisations on how best to ensure a viable longer term future.
- 6.2 As independent organisations from the Park Authority, it is for the Trust and the Partnership to consider and determine their approach looking forward. However, as established partners who have been provided with financial and in-kind support for project delivery on behalf of the National Park Authority officers have been be part of the conversation exploring future models and options. A review is underway, with jointly commissioned external advice being provided to inform options for the future. Members will receive further updates on the conclusion of this work and any changes that may be recommended.



# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 5

## CEO Update – Inclusive of Visitor Management Update

---

### 7. Edinburgh Declaration

- 7.1 Members may recall that it was intended for the Scottish Government to host an the international biodiversity workshop for sub-national governments with the intention of developing a declaration to feed into The Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) which is now provisionally due to take place in China from 17-30 May 2021. It is anticipated that a final agreement on a post-2020 global biodiversity framework will be agreed at COP 15 to support the CBD's 2050 vision of "living in harmony with nature".
- 7.2 As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic the workshop was not able to be held and was subsequently replaced with an online Edinburgh Process. A statement of intent, known as The Edinburgh Declaration, has been agreed between subnational, regional and local governments across the world and calls on the Convention on Biodiversity to take bold action to halt biodiversity loss. It also calls for greater prominence be given to the role subnational governments, cities and local authorities play in delivering a new global framework of targets, set to be agreed next year. This was published on 31 August as board papers were being finalised and is now open for signature on the Scottish Government website: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/edinburgh-declaration-on-post-2020-biodiversity-framework/>.
- 7.3 The Cabinet Secretary Roseanna Cunningham has signed the Declaration on behalf of the Scottish Government. Although the Declaration is primarily aimed at sub-national governments, local authorities and cities, there is also the option to add a signature to a 'supporters' section. It is expected that organisations such as Scottish National Parks will also be signatories. Once officers have had an opportunity to review the document a fuller update to the Board will be provided.

### 8. Programme for Government 2020/21

- 8.1 Also as Board papers were finalised the Scottish Government announced its new Programme for Government 2020/21. Having just been published, officers are currently digesting its contents and identifying those areas where the National Park Authority can play an important role. Entitled '*Protecting Scotland, Renewing Scotland*', it sets out the actions the Scottish Government will be taking in the next year. While many measures are focused on delivering a recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, the need to resume efforts to address the climate crisis and biodiversity loss still feature as part of a green recovery. Features include a Green Jobs Fund, £500m to be allocated to active travel, and other measures to deliver a net zero economy and zero carbon housing.
- 8.2 Under the heading of Environment and Agriculture includes:
- £100m will be invested in increasing new planting by Scottish Forestry, with £30m for Forestry and Land Scotland to expand forests and land.
  - The Scottish Land Commission will produce advice on factoring land into economic thinking.

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 5

## CEO Update – Inclusive of Visitor Management Update

---

- The rate of peatland restoration will be increased.
- The Biodiversity Challenge Fund will have £3m in 202-21 and a high-level statement of intent on biodiversity will be published by the end of the year.
- Recommendations will be made on new agricultural support mechanisms.
- The third Land Use Strategy will be published
- A £70m fund to improve local authority waste collection infrastructure will be established, and the Household Recycling Charter will be evaluated.
- The Scottish Government will work with local authorities and deposit return scheme administrators to unlock investment in reprocessing.
- The carrier bag charge will be increased from 5p to 10p, a consultation will be launched on banning some plastic items, and charging for single-use beverage cups.
- Public bodies will be required to set a date for becoming net-zero emitters.
- The first meeting of a citizens' assembly on climate change will take place in the autumn.
- Regional hubs will allow communities to develop local solutions to reach net-zero, with a network of Climate Action Towns.

8.2 Also of note under the Transport and Planning heading is:

- The Scottish Government will promote the idea of the '20-minute neighbourhood'.
- Through a Place Based Investment Programme, £275m will be invested in community-led regeneration. The Empowering Communities Programme will strengthen community anchor organisations and create more shared space local working hubs.
- £500m over five years is to be committed to active travel.
- Local authorities will be able to turn temporary infrastructure projects implemented during the pandemic into permanent schemes.
- Engagement on the future of transport will take place with young people and work has begun to deliver free bus travel for under-19s.

8.3 Officers will continue to identify where there are Programme for Government opportunities to ensure our own plans and priorities are aligned and delivering on national priorities where the National Park Authority is well placed to do so.

Appendix 1 - Letter to Convener of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority

**Author:** Gordon Watson, CEO  
**Executive Sponsor:** Gordon Watson, CEO