

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 6a

## 2020/21 Annual Operational Plan Progress Report and Green Recovery Update



### *Paper for information*

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper reports on our progress against the 2020/21 Annual Operational Plan. Appendix 1 details progress on each deliverable within the plan.
- 1.2 The plan was updated at our June 2020 Board meeting to reflect the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, a new theme was added to the plan: 'Delivering and Facilitating a Safe Recovery and Reopening of the National Park'. We also identified which of the existing deliverables within the plan would be considered recovery priorities.
- 1.3 As part of this, we have been developing and delivering on areas that support the Government's plans for a green recovery from COVID-19. This paper expands further on our green recovery work to date.

#### 2. Recommendation

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

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

- 3.1. The Annual Operational Plan objectives are aligned with the 2018-2023 National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) and relevant priorities from Our 5 Year (Corporate) Plan. The plan itself is a key part of ensuring we have delivery plans in place over the period of the NPPP and Our 5-Year Plan.

#### 4. Progress Update

- 4.1. The table below summarises the progress of the 44 deliverables in the plan:

	<b>Recovery priorities</b>	<b>Other deliverables</b>	<b>Total</b>
Complete	1	0	1
On track	13	9	22
Behind schedule	3	8	11
On hold due to COVID-19	0	8	8
Cancelled due to COVID-19	0	2	2
<b>Total</b>	17	27	44

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- 4.2. We are concentrating our staff and resource allocation on the recovery priorities, and the Executive Team's focus also remains primarily on these items. As a result, most of the recovery priorities are progressing well. Highlights of these are reported in the CEO report (agenda item 5) and Mission Zero Update (agenda item 9).
- 4.3. Progress on the other deliverables is more mixed, reflecting the specific constraints that COVID-19 has put on our ability to deliver some items, as well as the need to divert resources to the recovery priorities. In total, 10 items within the plan are on hold or cancelled due to COVID-19. Others are behind schedule due to the impacts COVID-19 has had on our productivity while working remotely.
- 4.4. In recent months our staff have adapted to completely new ways of working. Our office staff have learned how to operate, deliver and engage (both internally and externally) remotely. Our field based staff took on home working tasks early in the pandemic and then as restrictions were gradually lifted they returned to on the ground delivery. This included developing, learning, and implementing key COVID-19 adaptations such as hygiene and distancing measures to ensure COVID-safe working practices. The pandemic has impacted everyone, and has generally been hard for everyone's work and personal lives. We are proud of how our staff have risen to the challenge, adapted their ways of working, and continued to deliver.

### 5. Green Recovery Update

- 5.1. As part of the Annual Operating Plan update to the June Board, the focus on a 'Green Recovery' from the COVID-19 pandemic was introduced. An additional priority heading to this year's Annual Operating Plan was included to capture some of the immediate recovery activity that support this – 'Delivering and Facilitating a Safe and Green Recovery in the National Park'. Further consideration has been given to the Park Authority's role and the practical steps we can take now and looking to the future. This is alongside the update in Appendix 1.
- 5.2. In short, it is not proposed to prepare a 'Green Recovery Plan' at this time. It is intended to review what we already do that contributes, identify what we can adjust or change on ongoing or planned programmes of work within a wider consideration looking further forward. This will be a continued discussion internally, with the Board and partners over the months ahead, as we refine and explore all that we can and should do in this fast moving policy agenda.

#### *Background*

- 5.3. Prior to the pandemic, the focus for our work and much of Government, was increasingly on the global twin challenges of biodiversity loss and the climate

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emergency. Members agreed back in December 2019 that a key element of this was working to reduce our emissions as much as possible through both organisational operations and working with others across the National Park as a whole. There is a separate Board paper updating on our progress with the Mission Zero work. This is a key part of our work in supporting the Green Recovery.

- 5.4. New and immediate issues continue to emerge in responding to the pandemic across Scotland, however the urgent need for action on both biodiversity loss and the climate emergency remains. Helping to create a healthier and more resilient natural environment is mutually beneficial for nature and people. It brings benefits to health, wellbeing and also to the rural economy which is dependent on the Park's outstanding natural environment. This also reflects closely the Outcomes set out in the National Park Partnership Plan, highlighting the overlap in our established Priorities and work with supporting the Green Recovery. There is a clear role for the National Park Authority.
- 5.5. The Scottish Government describes the Green Recovery as "one that delivers economic, social and environmental wellbeing and responds to the twin challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss". Government has made clear commitments on this, emphasised in the new Programme for Government 2020/21 and encompassing delivering a net zero society and improving the state of nature. The Edinburgh Declaration, a significant new statement of intent on halting biodiversity loss, also demonstrates this commitment and expectation, including on government organisations such as the National Park Authority. There have also been a number of advisory groups commissioned by the Scottish Government to inform different aspects of the recovery out of the pandemic. These also add to the wider consensus on economic recovery being 'green' but also within an emphasis on equity.

*Helping to deliver a Green Recovery - What are we already doing?*

- 5.6. The established Outcomes and Priorities in the National Park Partnership Plan, along with this year's Annual Operating Plan, already outline many projects which are directly helping to support the Green Recovery. Looking across existing projects, programmes and activities, examples include:
- **Mission Zero Route map** - our plan for how we will reduce our carbon emissions over time to net-zero as our corporate contribution towards Scottish Government climate change targets.
  - **Wild Park** - projects being delivered through our biodiversity action plan, such as peatland restoration and the control of invasive species.
  - **Callander's Landscape** - a community led partnership project which delivers on a wide range of improvements to the natural and cultural heritage, along with

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apprenticeships in rural skills and tourism. This programme is anticipated to be extended by one year due to COVID-19, however this creates an opportunity to also broaden its scope to include more outreach to areas outside the National Park that experience high levels of deprivation. This will enable more people to engage with nature and heritage.

- **National Park Tree Planting Grant Scheme** - supporting an increase in woodland cover.
- **National Park Grant Scheme** – supporting projects that deliver outcomes in the National Park Partnership Plan, with an adjustment to its focus this year to prioritise capital projects that help address climate emergency and loss of nature.

5.7. Other core areas of our work also contribute as part of our day to day activity, for example supporting and promoting active travel in communities (such as Lochearnhead, Balloch, Drymen and Balmaha), securing conservation gains through our planning decision making, volunteering programmes that deliver practical conservation improvements and the continued investment in our estate such as at West Loch Lomond visitor sites.

5.8. The contribution from our work to support visitor management and tourism is also significant and relevant. Supporting a safe re-opening of the Park for our communities, visitors and businesses has been a huge area of work since the easing of lockdown restrictions. This has also been critical to the Park's tourism economy re-opening which in turn brings local spend and income for our local businesses and communities.

### *Future opportunities*

5.9. While it is important to recognise the work we are already doing, and where we can adjust or improve on project outcomes or delivery, we can't lose sight of potential steps over the longer term that we should explore. Not least working towards the National Park becoming a place that supports lower emission lifestyles, businesses and ultimately be net zero by 2045.

5.10. The collective focus on Green Recovery will bring benefits and opportunities, with increases in funding to support this area to help deliver the new Programme for Government. While this policy agenda covers a very broad area there will be potentially more opportunities for the National Park, our communities and businesses.

5.11. An example of a new opportunity being explored is our recent bid to host one of the pilot Scottish Government promoted Regional Community Climate Action Hubs. A

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decision is awaited at the time of drafting however if successful this would provide funding and resources to help engage, animate and support community led action which would help build on our established work with the Countryside Trust and the Community Partnership.

- 5.12. As we continue to deliver on this year's Annual Operating Plan, and prepare next years, there is much to consider that will inform progress on our contribution to the Green Recovery. Where we can, new opportunities will be explored, and clear communication on how our work already supports this area.
- 5.13. Existing and emerging strategy and collaborative work will help map the role and work of the Park Authority in the future and also provide a framework for delivery in tandem with the above, including work on:
  - **Trees and Woodland Strategy** - to guide woodland enhancement and new woodland creation.
  - **Active Park, Healthy People** – finalising this programme provides an opportunity to ensure opportunities for recreation as well as active and more sustainable forms of travel deliver for the Green Recovery
  - **Regional Spatial Strategy** - a new requirement arising from the 2019 Planning (Scotland) Act, this will identify the strategic development needed in the National Park to 2045. It is intended to integrate with **Regional Land Use Frameworks** and jointly these will establish a framework to guide and support land use change and strategic development and delivery of this.
  - **Strathard Framework** - a place based approach currently being progressed with the local community and partners towards integrating development strategy and land use within the Strathard Community Council area of the Park. Climate change is already embedded into the work to date.
  - **Community led Place Plans** - a new right introduced to communities in the 2019 Planning (Scotland) Act. These plans will be a key vehicle to help us to engage and work with communities to consider, identify and map their transition towards zero carbon as well as support important community led priorities for action.

## 6. Conclusion

- 6.1. Overall, we are making good progress on the COVID-19 recovery priorities in the Annual Operational Plan. Progress on the remaining deliverables is suffering due to the impact the COVID-19 lockdown had on our ability to deliver, reduced staff capacity, and the need to divert resources to the recovery priorities.

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- 6.2. It is clear the focus on the Green Recovery out of the current pandemic in the longer term will do much to support the work of the National Park Authority. It is an opportunity to amplify and increase the scale of our work on the twin challenges of habitat loss and the climate emergency while supporting an economic recovery. While a developing area, it strongly reflects much of what already do but equally should form a stimulus to develop and expand future opportunities.

Appendix 1 – 2020/21 Annual Operational Plan Progress Report

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