



**INDICATIVE**

# **Regional Spatial Strategy**

**PREPARED FOR THE SCOTTISH  
GOVERNMENT TO HELP INFORM  
PREPARATION OF NATIONAL  
PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4**

**SEPTEMBER 2020**

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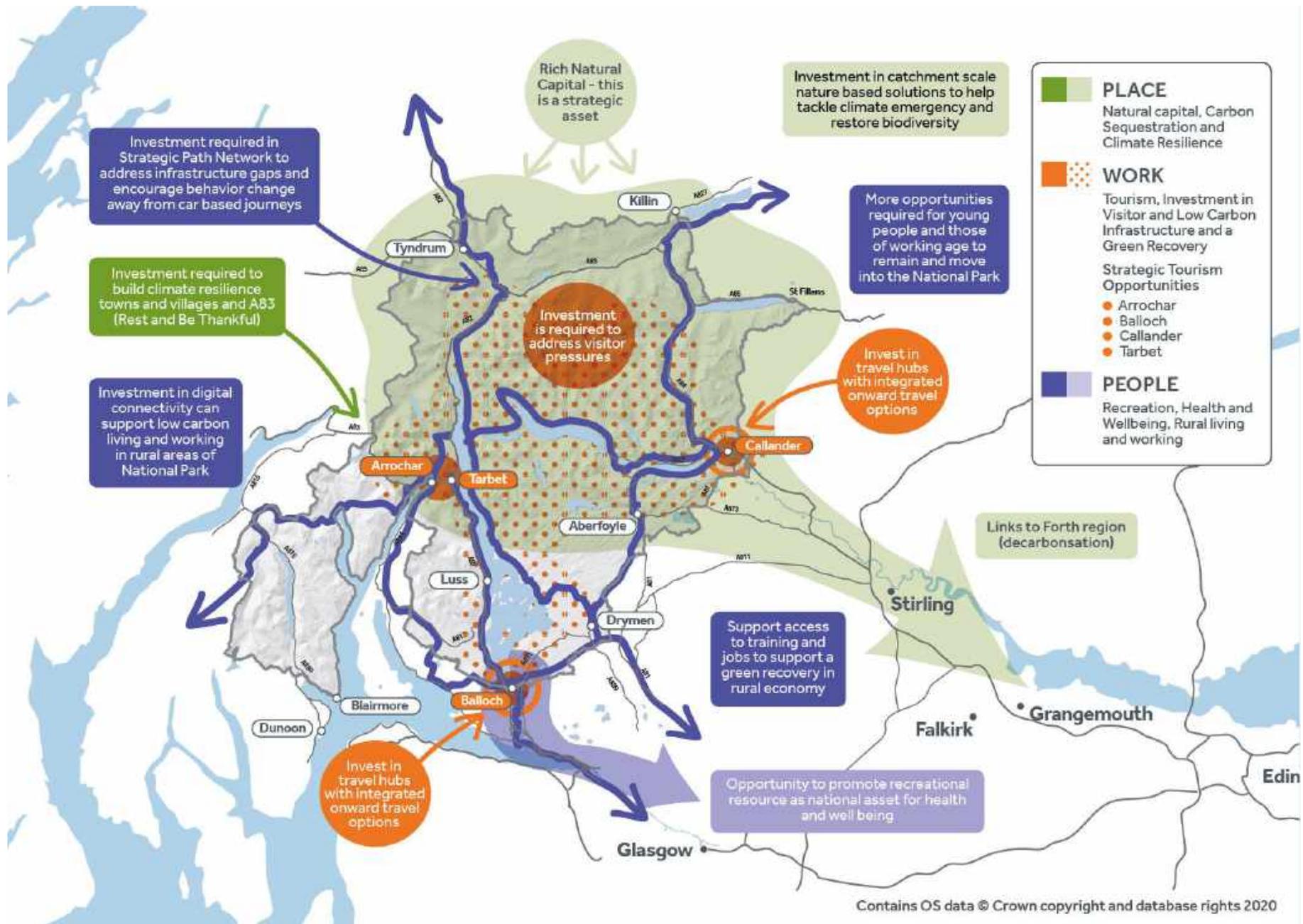
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## Summary of strategic opportunities for Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park

The National Park is a strategic asset for Scotland. The map on page 3 shows the long term strategic opportunities for the area that can help deliver for the following outcomes:



# Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park: Strategic Map



# Introduction

## Purpose

This document is the Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy (iRSS) for Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. It sets out our early thinking on the strategic issues and opportunities within the National Park and considers the potential linkages with adjoining areas where regional joint working could help deliver strategic place based outcomes.

Prepared at the request of the Scottish Government to help inform the drafting of National Planning Framework 4, it should be noted that this draft strategy has not yet been consulted on. It is intended only to set out current thinking and consideration of the strategic scale changes needed to support transition to net zero, green recovery and a more inclusive society. These are as much dependent on behavioural changes as strategic development and investment and a holistic approach is required to support and drive forward delivery.

Members of the National Park Planning and Access Committee endorsed the key strategic challenges and opportunities for the National Park area at a meeting on the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020. Full stakeholder engagement and consultation will form a key part of the process to prepare the formal Regional Spatial Strategy in due course.

## What is a Regional Spatial Strategy?

The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 established a new duty for a planning authority, or authorities acting jointly, to prepare and adopt a Regional Spatial Strategy. Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) are long-term spatial strategies which are to identify:

- the need for strategic development
- the outcomes to which strategic development will contribute
- priorities for the delivery of strategic development
- proposed locations, shown in the form of a map or diagram.

Regulations and guidance are still to be prepared on how to prepare these strategies, however all planning authorities are currently considering what the strategic challenges and opportunities are at regional level up to 2050. This early think has been prompted by the Scottish Government which has asked that indicative draft RSS's are prepared to help guide and inform strategic content in the new National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) that is currently being prepared by Government.

## National Planning Framework 4

NPF4 will be a long-term development plan for Scotland up to 2050, setting out where development and infrastructure will be needed to support sustainable and inclusive growth. It will have fuller regional coverage and improved alignment with wider programmes and strategies, including on infrastructure and economic investment. In particular, it will align with the National Performance Framework; respond to the shift to inclusive growth; improve health and well-being for the people of Scotland, improve equalities and eliminate discrimination; provide a spatial planning response to the Global climate and nature emergencies; provide a renewed focus on rural development including rural repopulation; and give a stronger steer on housing delivery and diversification including the setting of targets on land for housing.

NPF4 will also, for the first time, incorporate Scottish Planning Policy and will take on enhanced status as part of the statutory development plan making it a key document for the Local Development Plan and Local Place Plans.

The Scottish Government have identified five main themes for planning to focus upon through the emerging NPF4 as:

- **Climate** - responding to the global climate emergency.
- **People** – supporting wellbeing and ensuring communities have access to services and facilities.
- **Work** - effective and efficient planning can support inclusive growth.
- **Place** - planning can maintain and enhance the unique character and identity of our natural and built environment.
- **Delivery** – a clear plan for delivery will be required

## Drafting this indicative Regional Spatial Strategy

The Scottish Government has asked iRSS main themes follow the above NPF4 themes of Place, People and Work. Much discussion has taken place over the summer months to share thinking and ideas across planning authorities on the strategic issues to be identified in iRSS's, including workshops, themed sessions and videos.

To inform our thinking for the iRSS we used Scottish Government grant money to commission Kevin Murray Associates to carry out two internally focused workshops, with staff participating from across the National Park teams. As part of the work the consultants also reviewed all our existing plans and strategies to help tease out potential regional and national issues and themes within the National Park.

We have used the consultant's report as a basis to identify a number strategic themes that could be relevant at a National Level and also themes that applied more at a Regional level that would require cross boundary working.

You can see the outputs of this work which includes mapping diagrams in Appendix 1

## Context about National Parks

### National Park Aims

Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park was Scotland's first of two National Parks in Scotland and was established in 2002 with the Cairngorms in 2003. Scotland's National Parks are national assets. National Parks bring clarity of focus in addressing a range of interrelated rural issues at a regional and local scale ensuring better co-ordinated delivery and best use of limited public resources. This also makes our National Parks a perfect place to innovate and develop new solutions.

Both Scotland's National Parks share four statutory aims set out by Parliament, these are

- To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area;
- To promote 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 economic and social development of the area's communities.

### Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park

Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park is home to some of the most iconic wildlife and landscapes in Scotland and draws visitors from across the globe. Its famous lochs, forests, mountains and heritage are an historic part of the Scottish culture and make a huge contribution to the country, being a haven for nature and the benefits that come from it. Across the Park, 67 sites are designated for their special nature conservation value and the peatland and forests of the park store millions of tons of carbon.

The National Park attracts over four million visitors a year which provides a huge boost to the visitor economy, however the benefits the National Park can offer are far reaching – not just for the area itself, but for the whole country. These benefits include helping to tackle the impacts of climate change through protecting and enhancing the rich natural capital through extensive peatland and woodland restoration, creating sustainable communities through affordable housing and the creation of employment and training for young people.

The Park also provides opportunities to help improve the health and wellbeing of people from all backgrounds through recreation and enjoyment of the great outdoors. With 50% of Scotland's population living within one hour travel time of the National Park these special assets provides massive opportunities for Scotland but also brings with it challenges which need addressed to ensure that that the quality of environment, visitor experience and community life are protected and enhanced

## Potential Vision for Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy

The National Park whilst not traditionally being part of a Strategic Development Plan area but sitting within four Local Authorities requires a strong partnership approach to deliver our priorities. We are fortunate to have a good coverage of plans and strategies and good relationships with partner bodies and constituent communities to develop an iRSS from.

Existing Plans include the

- National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP),
- Local Development Plan,
- Trees and Woodland Strategy,
- Active Park, Healthy People our Draft Outdoor Recreation Plan
- Wild Park our Biodiversity Action Plan.

Therefore, there has been a lot of thinking undertaken considering what the strategic challenges and opportunities are that we must address and having such a strong baseline has helped inform this iRSS.

From the current National Park Partnership Plan the following visions are relevant

***We want the National Park to be an internationally-renowned landscape where...***

***Conservation & Land Management*** - Nature, heritage and land are valuable assets, managed and enhanced to provide multiple benefits for all.

***Visitor Experience*** - We want the National Park to be an internationally-renowned landscape where... 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*** - We want the National Park to be an internationally-renowned landscape where... businesses and communities thrive and people live and work sustainably in a high quality environment.

Whilst the above National Park Partnership Plan visions are the ones we are working too, through the iRSS workshop discussion we consider that in addition the following are relevant too.

***The National Park serves as a national exemplar and role model for...***

- *having progressive behavioural change in the travel movement modes of its local and regional connections, ensuring a healthier, lower carbon environment*
- *piloting innovation to help other places in terms of integrating land management and development planning, demonstrating good practice to be taken forward.*
- *A thriving visitor economy that embeds nature based solutions and low carbon principles that encourages people to experience and connect with the rich wildlife, landscapes and the wide range of recreation activities on offer in a sustainable manner*

*The Loch Lomond and The Trossachs Park Authority will play a leading shaping, enabling and delivery support role*

## Emerging themes at National Level for NPF4 and the National Park themes for iRSS

The diagram below highlights where we consider there are opportunities for the iRSS to contribute to the NPF4 identified themes. With more detail on each of these themes in the text below and on the strategic map.



## PLACE – Climate Resilience, Natural capital and Carbon Sequestration

### Climate Change

We are currently facing a climate and nature emergency which is having a significant detrimental impact on the communities and biodiversity of the National Park. Developing solutions for combatting climate change and protecting our nature is incredibly important and will require cross boundary working to influence the necessary behaviour change.

There is a potential major national role that parts of the National Park could play in the way we manage the land within the National Park to not only deliver benefits to nature, but also provide benefits such as natural flood risk management and increased carbon storage. This will help us adapt to and address climate change and make our communities more resilient to the potential impacts of climate change across the whole catchment.

The ecosystems of the National Park are key to its success and popularity but also play a vital role regionally and potentially nationally in mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change through its role in maintaining carbon stores, sequestering carbon, and storing surface water. It is therefore vital that we protect and seek opportunities to enhance the ecosystems and biodiversity of the National Park to ensure they are resilient to the effects of climate change.

### Natural Capital

We are working to address the key threats to natural capital in the National Park. The National Park's peatlands hold an estimated 20 million tonnes of carbon and our forests hold another 2.5 million tonnes. Through the restoration of degraded peatlands huge benefits can be delivered, including reducing the risk of flooding in the lowlands and securing healthy peatlands that are capturing, rather than emitting, carbon-based greenhouse gases. Our woodlands and forests already offer important stores of carbon and provide huge benefits from the biodiversity of the National Park. Through enhancing our native woodland we can further contribute towards meeting national woodland creation targets designed to support biodiversity and increase carbon sequestration.

The benefits provided by the ecosystems of the National Park extend beyond the planning authority boundary and have positive effects to the whole catchment, including helping with climate resilience. There are still significant industries transitioning to a low carbon economy and they can help climate resilience through looking to offset their carbon emissions within the same catchment. For example, Grangemouth's transition period. From discussions with the Forth iRSS we know there are real challenges for the Forth Region to be able to reach their net carbon zero target due to the current industries operating within the region. Therefore, looking up the catchment could offer solutions to this. Here there are opportunities for additional biodiversity enhancements such as native tree planting and peatland restoration that will lock and store carbon and help make the whole catchment more climate resilient such as mitigating flooding.

## Linking Development Planning and Land Use Change

The climate and nature crises we are currently are facing are intrinsically linked and it is important to look at the potential opportunities for joined-up approaches, including nature-based solutions, which will contribute to achieving increased resilience to both. Through seeking greater integration between land management and development and through thinking strategically at catchment or sub catchment scales about the way we manage our land there are real opportunities to deliver enhancements to biodiversity and increase our resilience to climate change. Opportunities could be offered through the alignment of Regional Spatial Strategies and emerging Regional Land Use Partnerships.

An exciting project is underway in the National Park, in Strathard, which is seeking to integrate planning and land management at a sub catchment scale. This will see the creation of a new 'Framework' for the Strathard area which will incorporate guidance on development opportunities and explore land use. Set across the whole Strathard area, the Framework will identify geographical areas which are sensitive to or have scope for development or land use change. Our aim is to build on existing plans and strategies and agree a shared vision across the community and partner organisations, to create a healthier, more climate responsive Strathard that is an economically-thriving place to live, work and visit. The Framework will address issues such as climate change, infrastructure, sustainable development and growth, species management, biodiversity, local economy and tourism.

National Planning Framework 4 could support and encourage this type of integrated approach between land management and planning which looks beyond traditional development sites or planning boundaries, and align them with emerging Regional Land Use Partnerships.

The benefits we envisage from this approach is to see much greater alignment between development planning and land management. Innovative approaches could deliver large scale habitat restoration potentially funded through development activities providing multiple benefits across the catchment for people and nature whilst offering help to industries wishing to contribute positively to addressing the impacts of climate change. It will be necessary for NPF4 to provide further tools and regulatory mechanisms to facilitate this catchment wide and integrated approach.

## **WORK - Tourism, Investment in Visitor and Low Carbon Infrastructure and a Green Recovery**

### **Tourism and the rural economy**

Tourism plays a crucial role in enhancing the rural economy providing the major source of income and employment within the National Park. The National Park currently offers a high quality, authentic experience for visitors, with many opportunities to appreciate and enjoy the natural and cultural heritage, within an internationally renowned landscape. It compares to the best on offer around the world.

### **Strategic Tourism Opportunities**

Arrochar, Tarbet, Balloch, and Callander are locations where new strategic tourism development opportunities are currently encouraged. Within the countryside, the focus is on improving the visitor experience of the National Park through provision of high quality recreation and access opportunities including a network of paths, visitor facilities and infrastructure. Development in these areas will assist in establishing and reinforcing the character and role of these places as visitor destinations and gateways within the National Park.

### **New Tourism Opportunities**

Significant opportunity remains to encourage the tourism offer to move towards developing a stronger theme around sustainable and lower impact tourism and make more of the Park's rich wildlife, landscapes and the wide range of recreation activities that attract longer staying visitors. This greener tourism could be a vital way to

support the tourism sector as part of a post-covid green recovery where there is likely to be an increasing focus on the domestic tourism market which we are keen to support. Activities include cycling, high quality paddle sports, long-distance walking and open-water swimming – although this requires careful management in areas with significant existing boat use. Creative use of publicly owned and managed sites can help provide more visitor services and activities.

### **Key Strategic Travel Infrastructure Opportunities**

The National Park's road, rail and long distance path network represent some of the best scenic routes in Scotland with stunning views of the area's lochs and mountains. The West Highland Line offers an outstanding rail experience but opportunities to come here via local stations are currently under-promoted. For example Balloch train station provides a fantastic opportunity for an attractive transport hub where onward travel options and opportunities are inspiring and clear. Balloch and Callander also have the potential to be greatly improved with better design, promotion and new cycle friendly bus services.

## **Responding to the challenges of high visitor numbers**

High visitor numbers can put pressure on some of the more accessible and popular places and landscapes within the Park, particularly on lochshores, in picturesque towns and villages, and along popular paths. Currently many of the visitors to the National Park largely travel into and through the National Park using motorised vehicles and high numbers of visitors puts pressure on the existing visitor infrastructure and some local communities.

Much public investment has already been targeted on raising the quality of visitor facilities in the busiest areas, however, further work and investment is required developing solutions to pressures such as litter, camping and peak visitor demand.

A particular focus of the required investment is on providing additional visitor infrastructure and exploring ways of developing and delivering more integrated transport strategies and solutions that will decarbonise transport; making active travel a first choice for local journeys that easily connects into other modes.

This will help influence peoples transport behaviours and offer a sustainable alternative to the motorcar helping to ensure that in the most popular parts of the National Park the quality of environment, visitor experience and community life are protected and enhanced.

## PEOPLE - Recreation, Health and Wellbeing, Rural living and working

### A national resource for Health and Wellbeing

The National Park can serve as a major national resource for walking, cycling and beneficial appreciation of the outdoor countryside, nature and landscape. It can also have a positive effect on mental health and wellbeing. This can have benefits to urban and rural dwellers, and would focus on a mix of long a short distance walking and cycling trails and routes, linked to stations, car parks and settlements inside and outside the Park.

For many people the National Park provides their first experience of the 'wild outdoors', whether it's marvelling at the tranquillity of a quiet loch, climbing their first mountain or camping for the first time. Encouraging people of all ages to enjoy and be confident in the outdoors will help promote healthy lifestyles, valuing nature and understanding of responsible use of the countryside. The contribution that the environment can make towards improving health and wellbeing is well recognised, benefiting both physical and mental health, as well as social wellbeing.

The National Park has a wide range of easily reached and inspiring outdoor experiences which could help address health issues for people living within easy reach of the National Park. There are still many people living in nearby urban areas who have never visited the National Park and may lack the means, confidence or knowledge to do so which is a key opportunity for cross boundary working to make greater connections with the health sector.

The Vale of Leven corridor could be an initial focus with the National Cycle Network Route 7 (NCN7) and Balloch–Glasgow train line providing an existing transport corridor along which interventions and programmes can be created. This would be to develop effective interventions to overcome barriers around transport and access to the outdoors.

### Strategic Routes

There are a number of important walking routes which go through the National Park. One of these is the West Highland Way which is an important attraction for visitors to the National Park with 40,000+ walkers completing the route every year and the same number again enjoy sections as shorter single day experiences. In addition to the West Highland Way, a further six of Scotland's 'Great Trails' (John Muir Way; Three Loch Way; Great Trossachs Path; Loch Lomond and Cowal Way; the Rob Roy Way; and the Pilgrims Way) pass through the National Park boundaries.

This provides a further option for walkers to gain exposure to some of the more remote areas within the National Park and are an important part of the active tourism product all of which contribute to the National Walking and Cycling Network.

However, opportunities exist to enhance the National Walking and Cycling Network from which we can develop behaviour change initiatives and promote active and sustainable travel itineraries. The National Walking and Cycling Network within and around the National Park has a number of infrastructure gaps though such as Tarbet to Crianlarich and Glen Dochart. These create barriers to safe active travel and active tourism.

### **Behaviour change – alternative travel options to car based journeys**

Going forward it is crucial that place and transport infrastructure are designed to offer active and low carbon options to cope with increased numbers of visitors and protect the environment. Further improvements are also required on the key links into and out of the National Park. A well-designed strategic path network across the National Park can only provide a basis for behaviour change if that network has a strong relationship with the public transport system, allowing itineraries to be created and promoted with confidence. However, the current provision and connectivity of public transport across the National Park is generally limited which will need to be addressed if we are to see a reduction in the use of cars across the National Park.

### **Rural living and working**

The National Park is experiencing a declining and aging population. If this cannot be reversed then there is a threat to the sustainability of local communities and services as well as to local businesses, including the land based sector, and the economy. More opportunities are required for younger people and those of working age, to remain and move into the National Park. This includes supporting access to training and jobs in support of a green recovery and continued affordable housing provision to help counterbalance the pressured housing market.

High demand for commuting, retirement and second/or holiday homes, makes it one of the most expensive areas in Scotland to purchase a home. With around 70% of the houses sold being purchased by people from outside the National Park, access to housing is extremely difficult for many local people, younger households and those not able to afford full market value for a home.

There needs to be a continued focus on funding for rural housing and support for infrastructure costs which are higher within the rural areas and ensure the rural homes and buildings are climate friendly and resilient. Bespoke approaches are required that will encourage investment in low carbon energy infrastructure to decarbonise the ways we heat our homes and buildings and support local energy provision helping to stimulate changes throughout the rural area.

We see potential opportunities for the National Parks rural communities arising from recent changes in lifestyle and work patterns post-Covid 19. This includes opportunities for digital growth to enable increased numbers of people to be able to work from home or from rural business hubs, instead of daily commuting to the central belt. This, in conjunction with local business growth and an increase in community led social enterprise activities could assist with local food, retail and service provision.

Continued investment in the public realm and active travel connections can also make the rural villages more attractive and connected, encouraging people to spend more time in them and spend more money locally. This will help to create communities within the National Park where people have the ability to meet most of their daily needs within a 20-minute walk from home enabling them to live better, healthier lives and support net zero ambitions.

## Next Steps

- **Submit iRSS** to Scottish Government as consultation input to draft NPF4. Assess any feedback from Scottish Government including how the iRSS material has been reflected in the NPF 4 position statement.
- **Share iRSS** with partners and neighbouring planning authorities to further discuss and explore linkages, opportunities and means for delivery.
- **Identify a broad timetable and work programme** for future cross-authority working toward a potential formal RSS.
- **Confirm what grouping(s) RSS is to be based on**, and prepare project plan.