

Annual Operational Plan 2021/22



Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact on our organisation and the National Park's communities, visitors, and other stakeholders. Over the past year we have worked alongside our partners to deliver on our priorities while adjusting our work plans and actions to address the many challenges created by the pandemic.

Our Annual Operational Plan 2021/22 sets out our priorities for delivery in the coming year. With the effects of the pandemic likely to continue for some time to come, our 2021/22 plan focuses on the short term actions we need to take as a direct result of COVID-19, the things we will be doing to adjust to new economic and social realities, while ensuring we keep our core purpose of protecting the National Park for the present and future at the top of our agenda. Our work remains grounded in our National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) 2018-23, and Our 5-Year Plan 2018-23, and this year we will begin to take the first steps to develop the next version of these plans.

For 2021/22 our focus will be on:

1. Taking and inspiring action to address the global climate emergency
2. Restoring and protecting nature in the National Park
3. Working collaboratively on positive solutions to growing visitor numbers
4. Making our organisation, our people, and the National Park more resilient through a green recovery

We expect the pandemic to continue to test our resilience this year. But the National Park has a wealth of strengths to draw upon to help it continue on the path of recovery from the pandemic. This includes its communities, businesses, and visitors. It also includes the natural capital that so many will rely upon for their own respite and recovery in these uncertain times.

Our people and partnerships are what make us effective in achieving our goals and delivering outcomes for the National Park. This year it will be crucial for us to support and develop them in order to build and enhance our own organisation's resilience so that we can accomplish all that is set out in this plan.

Background

The National Park Authority was established to achieve four key aims laid out in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000. These are:

- 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

We contribute to the national outcomes and strategic objectives of the Scottish Government. The extent to which we contribute to Scottish Government's priorities and outcomes is fundamental to our own success as a National Park Authority in delivering for Scotland. The 2020/21 Programme for Government: 'Protecting Scotland, Renewing Scotland' clearly sets out Scottish Government's expectations for Scotland.

Our National Park Partnership Plan (2018-2023) describes the vision and outcomes for the whole National Park area and contributions required from many different organisations over a five year period to help achieve our shared vision for the National Park.

Our 5-Year Plan (2018-2023) expresses the organisational objectives of the National Park Authority and outlines how we will contribute to the National Park Partnership Plan and to the broader National Park aims.

This Annual Operational Plan (2021/22) describes the specific organisational priorities and objectives for the year ahead.

Theme 1: Taking and inspiring action to address the global climate emergency

The effects of the global climate emergency have very real, negative impacts on all our lives, our places and our natural world, and these will increase in the future. In December 2020 we agreed our Mission Zero Route Map, with the aim of the National Park Authority achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030. Besides our own emissions, we also have a significant role in working with partners across the National Park and beyond to consider land use and land management, sustainable tourism and transport, and community resilience. With nearby Glasgow hosting the UN's COP26 this year, there will be new opportunities to engage our partners, the public, and wider stakeholders in embedding carbon reduction throughout the National Park.

1.1 *We will start to implement our Mission Zero Route Map to be a net zero organisation by 2030.* This includes developing a detailed implementation plan for the next two to three years of investment and change within the National Park Authority. We will deliver infrastructure upgrades across our estate including heat pump installations, new electric vehicle charging points, and lighting upgrades. Following a review of our fleet requirements, a new fleet management strategy for our road vehicles will identify how we will fully electrify our fleet and minimise diesel and petrol usage in the meantime. Finally, we will engage our staff, Board, and volunteers to support and encourage positive behaviour changes to reduce emissions, including through a review of our organisational policies.

1.2 *We will work with our partners to deliver strategic change across the National Park.* This includes building momentum for coordinated climate action within the National Park. It also includes leveraging the opportunities that the UN's COP26 in Glasgow provides to form new partnerships and build new expertise. We will fund and support the Countryside Trust to work with communities and other stakeholders to develop and deliver local action for climate, nature and active travel.

1.3 *We will better integrate land use and development planning to help address climate and nature emergencies.* This includes completing the Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy, which will show our early thinking on long term strategic development and land use priorities in the National Park and starting to prepare a Regional Land Use Framework for the National Park as one of five pilots identified by the Scottish Government. We will also complete the Strathard Framework, which will be used to help guide development, investment and land use change within the Strathard area of the National Park. As we undertake the new Local Development Plan, we will start to consider what a zero carbon National Park could look like.

These actions support the following outcomes of our National Park Partnership Plan 2018-2023...

- Outcome 1: Natural Capital
- Outcome 3: Climate Change
- Outcome 4: Land Partnerships
- Outcome 10: Placemaking
- Outcome 11: Sustainable Growth

... and the following priorities of Our 5-Year (Corporate) Plan 2018-2023

- Priority 3: Sustainable Organisation
- Priority 5: Placemaking and Sustainable Communities
- Priority 7: Policy-making
- Priority 8: Communication and Engagement

Theme 2: Restoring and protecting nature in the National Park

Nature's intrinsic value to our society, health, wellbeing, economy and livelihoods is recognised through our primary statutory aim to conserve and enhance the National Park's natural heritage. For us to achieve more and better outcomes for nature, we and our delivery partners need to find ways of overcoming long-established barriers. There is growing momentum nationally and internationally to take action on nature, and in 2020 we signed onto the Edinburgh Declaration as part of our leadership commitment to help tackle the global biodiversity crisis. We will use this as a springboard to redouble our efforts to show leadership in restoring and protecting nature in the National Park.

2.1 *We will develop a future strategy for nature.* This includes developing a Future Nature Route Map that will craft a stronger identity and common purpose for all those with a stake in nature in the National Park and to achieve over time more and bigger outcomes to help reverse nature loss. The strategy will focus on landscape-scale delivery of nature restoration projects, enabling partnerships, and nature-based solutions to tackling the climate emergency.

2.2 *We will deliver nature-based solutions projects.* We will undertake another year of our successful programme of peatland restoration and native woodland expansion projects. Within the Wild Park programme, we will also deliver targeted projects and further develop a programme of funder-ready proposals.

2.3 *We will broaden our engagement to lead diverse groups in valuing and taking action for nature.* This includes providing easy ways for all visitors to the National Park to demonstrate and share their respect for nature during their visit. We will also deliver our Junior Ranger programme, engage young people, and fund the education travel grant. Finally, we will support our volunteers in delivering more for nature.

These actions support the following outcomes of our National Park Partnership Plan 2018-2023...

- Outcome 1: Natural Capital
- Outcome 2: Landscape Qualities
- Outcome 3: Climate Change
- Outcome 4: Land Partnerships
- Outcome 9: Health & Learning
- Outcome 11: Sustainable Growth

... and the following priorities of Our 5-Year (Corporate) Plan 2018-2023

- Priority 4: Attractive, Accessible and Healthy Destinations
- Priority 6: Fundraising
- Priority 7: Policy-making
- Priority 8: Communication and Engagement
- Enablers: Partnerships

Theme 3: Working collaboratively on positive solutions to growing visitor numbers

COVID-19 has led to unprecedented changes in visitor patterns in the National Park. We are pleased that the National Park has been able to offer people respite from the pandemic and reconnect with the natural environment. At the same time, the increased visitor activity is amplifying visitor-related pressures such as traffic congestion and littering. We must continue to work together with partners to ensure the National Park remains a place for all to enjoy, and engage with visitors so that they understand how to visit responsibly and are motivated to play their part when they visit.

3.1 *We will provide clear, consistent, and accessible visitor information.* We will implement our Joint Response Visitor Management Plan with partners, including shared engagement, infrastructure, and enforcement actions. This partnership approach ensures there is joint leadership across those responsible for visitor services in the National Park, and also covers the broad areas of impact needed in order to encourage positive and responsible behaviours. Our communications approach will include strategically aligned national and local campaigns that will ensure the right messages target the right people, at the right time, in the right way.

3.2 *We will improve visitor services infrastructure.* Our draft budget allocation from the Scottish Government enables us to create a multi-year capital investment plan that considers what strategic investment would better support visitor management in the National Park. While that is under development we will undertake specific improvements such as car park and path improvements, as well as identify a new tenant for our Luss Visitor Centre. This includes furthering our work on income generation for the West Highland Way to embed the sustainability of this increasingly popular route. We will also deploy temporary mitigation measures to alleviate pandemic-related volume pressures.

3.3 *We will implement the National Park Litter Prevention Strategy.* This includes developing and delivering priority projects and targeted interventions, which will be informed by engagement with the Litter Prevention Action Group. To support this, we will increase our staff complement dedicated specifically to managing litter and waste. In addition, we will also develop regular, self-led volunteering activities subject to COVID-19 restrictions, complementing our staff activities and increasing litter management cover across the National Park.

3.4 *We will explore and pilot sustainable visitor transport services.* This includes developing active travel routes to and within the National Park. It also means working with partners to develop and deliver new sustainable transport pilot projects and physical infrastructure improvements that enable modal shift, subject to COVID-19 restrictions.

These actions support the following outcomes of our National Park Partnership Plan 2018-2023...

- Outcome 5: Recreation Opportunities
- Outcome 7: Visitor Economy
- Outcome 8: Visitor Management
- Outcome 11: Sustainable Growth

... and the following priorities of Our 5-Year (Corporate) Plan 2018-2023

- Priority 1: Litter
- Priority 2: Visitor Infrastructure
- Priority 4: Attractive, Accessible and Healthy Destinations
- Priority 8: Communication and Engagement
- Enablers: Estate, Service Design, Partnerships

Theme 4: Making our organisation, our people, and the National Park more resilient through a green recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic has had deep and wide-ranging impacts on our daily lives. For the National Park, we have a role to play in helping communities and the economy recover. In doing so, we will look to actions that can also create positive results for climate and nature. Recovery also presents us with an opportunity to consider how we build our organisation and our people to be resilient and focused on our Mission Zero commitments.

4.1 *We will support the resilience of communities and the local economy in the National Park.* We will engage with communities to understand their priorities and work closely with public and third sector partners to coordinate support. We will also use our Planning role and the National Park grant schemes to support green recovery projects. The Destination Group, consisting of National Park tourism businesses, will be supported to help respond to the challenges and opportunities of the year ahead.

4.2 *We will use local place-making to support a green recovery in the National Park.* This year, we will support more communities to prepare their own Community Place Plans to identify local place making priorities and actions needed to support lower carbon living and working within the National Park. We will support delivery of Callander's Landscape, a Natural Lottery Heritage Funded project which links people to the landscape surrounding Callander.

4.3 *We will implement post-pandemic ways of working for the National Park Authority.* We will develop a new model of working that overcomes some of the challenges of pandemic working while retaining the benefits of reduced commuting and better flexibility. We will also determine how our Board and Committees will use virtual meetings in the future.

4.4 *We will improve the organisation's resilience.* This includes making health, safety, and wellbeing improvements. It also includes identifying ways to continue to supplement our core funding, while recognising that this carries its own resilience challenges as demonstrated by lower generated income during the pandemic. We will also improve our digital services, including developing our skills, platforms, and disaster recovery.

These actions support the following outcomes of our National Park Partnership Plan 2018-2023...

- Outcome 1: Natural Capital
- Outcome 3: Climate Change
- Outcome 10: Placemaking
- Outcome 11: Sustainable Growth
- Outcome 12: Sustainable Population
- Outcome 13: Community Empowerment

... and the following priorities of Our 5-Year (Corporate) Plan 2018-2023

- Priority 3: Sustainable Organisation
- Priority 5: Placemaking and Sustainable Communities
- Priority 6: Fundraising
- Priority 7: Policy-making
- Enablers: Service Design, Finance, Systems and Processes, Partnerships

AOP Activity	AOP Deliverable
1: Taking and inspiring action to address the global climate emergency	
1.1 Start to implement our Mission Zero Route Map to be a net zero organisation by 2030	Develop a detailed implementation plan for the next two to three years of investment and change within the National Park Authority
	Deliver infrastructure upgrades across our estate including heat pump installations, new electric vehicle charging points, and lighting upgrades
	Review our fleet requirements and create a new management strategy for our road vehicles to identify how we will electrify our fleet and curtail petrol/diesel along the way
	Engage our staff, Board, and volunteers to support and encourage positive behaviour changes to reduce emissions, including through a review of our organisational policies
1.2 Work with our partners to deliver strategic change across the National Park	Build momentum for coordinated climate action within the National Park
	Leverage opportunities that the UN's COP26 in Glasgow provides
	Fund and support the Countryside Trust to work with communities and other stakeholders to develop and deliver local action for climate, nature and active travel.
1.3 Integrate land use and development planning to help address climate and nature emergencies	Complete the Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy and the Strathard Framework
	Start the Regional Land Use Partnership pilot process
	Start to consider how future development could contribute to a zero carbon National Park as part of the new Local Development Plan
2: Restoring and protecting nature in the National Park	
2.1 Develop a future strategy for nature	Develop a Future Nature Route Map including more ambitious landscape-scale nature restoration projects

AOP Activity	AOP Deliverable
2.2 Deliver Nature-Based Solutions projects.	Undertake peatland restoration and native woodland expansion projects
	Deliver targeted Wild Park projects and further develop a programme of funder-ready proposals.
2.3 Broaden our engagement to lead diverse groups in valuing and taking action for nature	Provide easy ways for all visitors to the National Park to demonstrate and share their respect for nature during their visit
	Deliver our Junior Ranger programme, engage young people, and fund the education travel grant
	Support our volunteers in delivering more for nature
3: Working collaboratively on positive solutions to growing visitor numbers	
3.1 Provide clear, consistent, and accessible visitor information	Implement our Joint Response Visitor Management Plan with partners, including shared engagement, infrastructure, and enforcement actions
	Provide strategic guidance on national visitor management communications and create engaging National Park-focused campaigns
3.2 Improve visitor services infrastructure	Create a multi-year capital investment plan that considers what strategic investment would better support sustainable visitor management in the National Park
	Undertake specific improvements such as car park and path improvements, as well as identify a new tenant for our Luss Visitor Centre.
	Further our work on income generation for the West Highland Way
	Deploy temporary measures to alleviate pandemic-related visitor volume pressures

AOP Activity	AOP Deliverable
3.3 Implement the National Park Litter Prevention Strategy	Develop and deliver priority projects and targeted interventions, including those informed by engagement with the Litter Prevention Action Group
	Support regular, self-led volunteering activities, subject to COVID-19 restrictions.
3.4 Explore and pilot sustainable visitor transport services	Develop strategic thinking on how to deliver transport services and infrastructure that will promote modal shift from private car use to access congested places
	Work with partners to develop and deliver new transport pilot projects, subject to pandemic restrictions
4: Making our organisation, our people, and the National Park more resilient through a green recovery	
4.1 Support the resilience of communities and the local economy in the National Park	Engage with communities to understand their priorities and work closely with public and third sector partners to coordinate support
	Use the National Park grant schemes and our planning role to support green recovery projects
4.2 Use local place-making to support a green recovery in the National Park	Support more communities to prepare their own Community Place Plans to identify local place making priorities and actions needed to support lower carbon living and working within the Park
	Support the Destination Group, consisting of National Park tourism businesses, to help respond to the challenges and opportunities of the year ahead
	Support delivery of Callander's Landscape
4.3 Implement post-pandemic ways of working for the National Park Authority	Develop a new model of working that overcomes some of the challenges of pandemic working while retaining the benefits of reduced commuting and better flexibility
	Determine how our Board and Committees will use virtual meetings in the future

AOP Activity	AOP Deliverable
4.4 Improve the organisation's resilience	Making health, safety, and wellbeing improvements
	Identify ways to continue to supplement our core funding
	Improve our digital services, including developing our skills, platforms, and disaster recovery