

Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority

Annual Report 2020 – 2021

Welcome

Like most organisations worldwide, it is difficult to summarise just how dramatic the events of the past year have been. We will always look back on the global pandemic and remember how it impacted the health and wellbeing of our people and communities, our operations as we adjusted to a completely different way of working whilst responding to significantly increased visitor pressures, and our finances as we faced new costs and lost income.

But within the past year we have also had constant reminders of the strengths that our values and culture as an organisation provide us with. Our teams pulled together to support one another and help reinforce our individual and collective resilience. Partner organisations collaborated to a level not previously experienced in order to achieve joint outcomes. Through hard work and innovation we responded to the challenges of the operating environment to keep everyone safe and balance the books. And we accomplished a large proportion of our delivery plans despite losing months to local or national lockdowns.

Safely reopening the National Park following the initial onset of the pandemic was one of our major achievements in 2020/21. To do so, we developed and implemented a phased reopening of our visitor sites and facilities in order to ensure the health of communities, visitors and staff is protected. We worked and co-ordinated with other public bodies, NGOs, communities, businesses and landowners. A particular success was our establishment of the National Park Safe Recovery Action Group with our partners to co-ordinate facilities reopening, traffic management, visitor management, and communications to visitors and communities. The group is continuing into this year and has represented a step-change in how we collaborate with delivery partners across the National Park.

Despite our shift in focus towards the pandemic, we also didn't forget about the other priorities at hand. One particular success was delivering our Mission Zero Route Map in December 2020, which sets out our target to become a net zero emitting organisation by 2030. It outlines how we will transform the land and buildings we manage by investing in green infrastructure such as air source heat pumps and solar panels. It also explains how we will continue our shift towards an electric fleet so we can travel round the National Park as sustainably as possible. Just as importantly, we will continue to support our staff, Board, volunteers, and our Youth Committee, to champion emissions reduction in their behaviour and the actions we all take.

The main body of this annual report provides further information on our other key achievements over the year, for example completing our Visitor Survey, supporting the delivery of the Callander's Landscape Partnership, and delivering peatland restoration projects.

As we look forward to 2021/22 and beyond, we have a strongly positive outlook in our ambitious agenda on nature and climate, whilst supporting ongoing recovery for the National Park's visitor services and communities. We look forward to working with our partners and stakeholders to continue to make a difference in conserving and enhancing Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park.

Most importantly, we want to thank our staff and volunteers for their perseverance and dedication to the National Park over the past year. For us all it was an extremely tough year at home, and work had its own challenges too. Working with such a brilliant team makes all the difference, and we look forward to continuing to work with you.

Gordon Watson
Chief Executive Officer

James Stuart
Convener

Our mission

...is to be the vital force in protecting and enhancing this iconic National Park.

Our aims

The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 sets out four aims:

- 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.

Our long term vision

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

Conservation and Land Management

Nature, heritage and land are valuable assets, managed and enhanced to provide multiple benefits.

Visitor Experience

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

Businesses and communities thrive and people live and work sustainably in a high quality environment.

Our plans and priorities

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 '[Protecting Scotland, Renewing Scotland](#)' programme sets out the 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 business objectives of the National Park Authority and how we will contribute to the National Park Partnership Plan and to the broader National Park aims.

The Annual Operational Plan (2020/21) describes the specific business priorities and objectives for the year.

Highlights of the Year

Delivering and Facilitating a Safe Reopening of the National Park

Developing a phased reopening of National Park Authority visitor sites and facilities which ensures the health of communities, visitors and staff is protected. We created and implemented a phased reopening plan for National Park Authority facilities, aligning with the Scottish Government COVID-19 Route Map and implementation of its relaxations. All facilities other than the Balmaha Visitor Centre opened, including public toilets, campsites, and the Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway. Summer services were extended until the end of October.

Working with other public bodies, NGOs, communities, businesses and landowners and national bodies towards a safe recovery. One of our major successes from the year was establishing a National Park Safe Recovery Action Group with our partners to co-ordinate facilities reopening, traffic management, visitor management (including enforcement) and communications to visitors and communities. This partnership working was a key success factor in delivering a safe reopening of the National Park. The group continued to meet through 2020/21 and remains active. We also ensured regular communications with National Park community organisations both directly and working collaboratively with the Community Partnership. This included holding regular and well attended virtual meetings with all stakeholders both on a park-wide basis and in sub-areas of the National Park to facilitate discussion of specific visitor management and community issues.

Working with business, agencies, local authorities, communities and other partners towards the recovery of our visitor economy. By facilitating regular meetings of the National Park Destination Group, we helped to ensure awareness of issues facing tourism businesses, communicate these to Scottish Government and identify future actions.

Ensuring the continuity of our planning service to determine applications and provide advice to assist applicants: We continued to determine planning applications, provide pre-application advice and operate the planning helpline throughout the period. There was a high volume of planning applications and enquiries. Nevertheless, for tourism businesses seeking adaptations to their premises to aid re-opening, we have been able to provide pragmatic advice and relaxations in line with Government guidance.

Taking and inspiring action to address the global climate emergency and nature crisis

Maximising our role and action in the climate emergency: We created a Mission Zero Route Map with a target of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030. The route map outlines our trajectory towards net zero, and the types of changes and investments we need to make to get there. We also trialled a new RAG rating tool as part of our internal budgeting process in order to prioritise activity based on climate impact.

Supporting our communities, land managers and businesses in the transition to zero carbon:

Our National Park Grant schemes provided assistance to our communities and land managers to deliver local actions that help address the global climate emergency and nature crisis. 23 grant new agreements were progressed in total and £112k was paid. This included 11 agreements under the main scheme, 9 small scale tree planting grants and 3 community capacity grants.

Support habitat management and improvement by working with partners to better manage land for climate and nature within the National Park:

Through the year we provided advice and support to landowners, partners and communities to establish new woodlands, and tackle invasive non-native species. Our Wild Park projects included direct work or work with partners on the removal of invasive rhododendron, and Riparian INNS control. We also supported and funded research into woodland creation, as well as direct tree planting. Engagement with all the Deer Management Groups across the Park continued to support management for deer that will help to promote natural regeneration of native woodlands.

Delivering peatland restoration projects: We set out to develop a programme approach to increase the scale of project delivery in line with Scottish Government ambitions, and three peatland restoration projects were successfully undertaken.

- Moor Park totalled 68 hectare of moorland and had 7.4 km of grips blocked.
- Glen Finglas included a 100 hectare site on the Moine nan Each where 22.7 km of hags were reprofiled and 3.7km of grips blocked.
- Glenfalloch included an 82 hectare site on the Gleann Nan Caorainn where 18km of grips were blocked and 1km of hags reprofiled.

Enhancing our visitor experience, volunteering, and active living opportunities

Celebrating the West Highland Way's 40th Anniversary: Our initial plans for celebratory events were curtailed by the pandemic. Instead we pivoted to online and media celebrations including a 40th Anniversary Virtual Exhibition of video and stories from the West Highland Way's history.

Developing and delivering volunteer, education and outreach opportunities, to ensure people from a wide range of backgrounds are enjoying, valuing and helping to manage the National Park:

We worked to further embed climate change and nature crisis education in all of our outdoor learning activities. An Education Padlet was produced with a focus on climate. We also supported our Junior Ranger, Youth Committee, educational travel grant and volunteer programmes. Due to the pandemic our delivery had to be very different than previous years. Youth Committee meetings continued and we were able to support volunteers to deliver for the National Park even during challenging restrictions. We had over 1800 volunteer hours in 2020/21.

Supporting delivery of the Callander's Landscape Partnership to improve the natural and cultural heritage of the area: Despite the pandemic's impact on delivery, progress did continue. Particular highlights included online lectures held on archaeology and wild swimming that were extremely popular, and four Modern Apprentices (MA) completing programmes in Hospitality and Adventure Tourism.

Addressing the changing challenges posed by substantial visitor numbers

Undertaking a Visitor Survey to identify visitor types, behaviour, and tourism market trends. The Visitor Survey 2019/20 informed our efforts to work with partners to provide services that enable visitors to enjoy the National Park in a responsible and sustainable way. The final report was completed in December 2020 and the data is being used for visitor management planning; tourism business engagement; performance monitoring of NPPP outcomes; and grant funding applications and evidence reporting, plus other applications.

Developing effective approaches to the sustainable management of visitor pressures in the National Park: We worked with partners and communities right across the National Park to address visitor pressures. One such example is the East Loch Lomond Visitor Management Group, looking to sustainably reduce visitor pressures along the route from Drymen to Rowardennan, with a view to transport provision and litter reduction.

Working with partners on litter and waste prevention: We established a National Park wide litter prevention steering group. Meetings were held to discuss immediate priorities. We also developed and test litter prevention initiatives. This included a pragmatic approach in light of the expected additional visitor numbers to focus effort on enhancing litter services and ability to deal with litter. Alongside our own Love It Like A Local campaign, we also advised on the development of the national litter prevention campaign, launched in spring 2021.

Continual improvement in delivering our core functions, including how we plan and use our resources, and meet our statutory requirements and duties

Supporting place making at regional and local community level: We prepared and submitted our Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy to the Scottish Government in September 2020. We also supported communities in developing Community Place Plans, including ongoing support to three communities.

Exploring opportunities to lever in external funding to help deliver our priorities. Despite the challenging operating environment last year, we still had some success in leveraging in funding, including by working in partnership through Callander's Landscape and the Countryside Trust. We were also approved as a pilot for Regional Land Use Partnerships.

Continuing to address Health and Safety risks to our staff and the public: COVID-safe measures for our people and for the public was our key health and safety priority through the year. We put in place significant COVID-safe measures to help support communities, visitors, and staff, and to help support the global fight against the pandemic. We also reviewed and updated a number of our other health and safety policies.