



CEO Update

Agenda Item 8

National Park Authority Board Meeting

14th March 2022

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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.

2. Recommendation(s)

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

3. Scottish Government

Meeting with Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity

- 3.1. A planned visit to the National Park by our Minister Lorna Slater earlier this month unfortunately had to be postponed due to adverse weather conditions. However, this was rearranged as an online meeting which allowed the opportunity to share some of our work and plans for the future. The session allowed lead staff and Board Members to talk about how we are reflecting Scottish Government priorities and ambitions through the work on our new National Park Partnership Plan, Future Nature strategy, Mission Zero and our work to develop sustainable transport options for our visitors.
- 3.2. The Minister highlighted that two of her priorities were to progress the process to identify at least one new National Park and to develop a new Environment Bill with a focus on measures to help reverse the decline in nature. She emphasised the opportunity to consider how these processes could be used to help strengthen the

role that National Parks can play in leading the restoration of nature at landscape scale. The Minister is expected to reschedule a visit to the National Park in the near future.

New Scottish Biodiversity Strategy

- 3.3. Work is underway to develop a new Scottish Biodiversity Strategy during the course of 2022. The CEO sits on an Advisory Group supporting its development. The purpose of the strategy is to establish a shared vision for biodiversity in Scotland and agreed outcomes which will deliver that vision. The strategy provides a framework that will enable collaborative work, ensures the most efficient use of available resources, and allows collective identification of opportunities, overlaps and gaps in activities.
- 3.4. Scotland published its first Biodiversity Strategy in 2004, with an update and supplement in 2013 and a delivery plan in 2015, to take account of the global biodiversity framework, goals and targets agreed in 2010 in Japan. In Scotland, the evidence base on biodiversity decline is strong (e.g. [State of Nature Report for Scotland 2019](#)) and demonstrates very clearly that Scotland has seen a dramatic decline in its biodiversity. The starting point of developing the new strategy is the recognition that the decline of biodiversity is very long-standing and that it has continued in the most recent decade. Despite some isolated highlights, Scotland, in common with the rest of the UK and the world, has not done enough since 2004 to prevent the decline in biodiversity. A public consultation on the new Strategy is expected in late Spring 2022. The National Park Future Nature Strategy presented elsewhere on this agenda recognises these issues and the significant potential for the National Park to contribute significantly to reversing the decline in nature in this part of Scotland.

Scotland 2045: Draft National Planning Framework 4

- 3.5. As previously reported, the Scottish Government published Scotland 2045: Draft National Planning Framework 4 (draft NPF4) on 10th November for consultation up to the 31 March 2022. This sets out the Scottish Government's approach on how planning and development will help to achieve a net zero, sustainable Scotland by 2045. It will inform our work to prepare our new suite of plans and strategy for the National Park as we move towards preparing our next National Park Plan, Regional Spatial Strategy and Local Development Plan.
- 3.6. The draft NPF4 is clear on the level of ambition and change needed and the role of the planning system in Scotland to support this. It highlights that:

“Scotland in 2045 will be different. We must embrace and deliver radical change so we can tackle and adapt to climate change, restore biodiversity loss, improve health and wellbeing, build a wellbeing economy and create great places.”
- 3.7. It was intended that a more detailed report on the draft NPF4 would be brought to this March Board meeting, however given the document's scope and strategic significance, officer consideration remains ongoing. A proposed formal response to the draft NPF4 will now be reported to the Planning and Access Committee for

consideration and approval on 28th March 2022. This update seeks to flag several key points for consideration which may form part of our response and Members comments are welcome as part of finalising our view.

3.8. Reference and role of National Parks: The draft NPF4 sets out a National Spatial Strategy for Scotland which is split into five geographic action areas. Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park is currently included within the 'central urban area' with priorities for this area summarised as being on transforming and pioneering a new era of low carbon urban living. This area includes the Glasgow city region and the Ayrshires in the west to Edinburgh city region in the east, including the Tay cities, the Forth Valley and Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. Whilst mainly an urban area, the narrative for this section highlights that this part of Scotland benefits from a rich and diverse rural area and there are many areas where town meets countryside, including Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park.

3.9. The narrative for the National Park includes the following:

“There are landscape-scale opportunities within Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park to restore and enhance nature and respond to climate change, including through woodland creation and peatland restoration, as well as natural flood risk management. The National Park will continue to support the quality of life and health of the urban population and its future priorities include new infrastructure provision to provide a quality visitor experience and support people to connect with nature, as well as a greener tourism sector supported by innovative low carbon transport solutions. Long-distance active travel and rail routes have untapped potential to provide sustainable tourism solutions. The area's communities can adapt to support more localised living and working opportunities, with improved digital connectivity and affordable housing. More integrated planning and land management offers opportunities to support land use change and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The approach also links with and relates to the action area to the north.”

3.10. The north action area includes the Cairngorms National Park and has priorities around revitalisation including growing low carbon rural communities, capitalising on digital innovation and making the most of exceptional natural and cultural heritage. In terms of area draft NPF4 states that this includes *“Highland with parts of Argyll and Bute, Moray and **much of the national parks**. There are links west and north to the island communities.”*

3.11. Regarding the reference to Scotland's National Parks in the section above, there are some differences between the narrative for these two area strategies, which raise some concerns.

3.12. Our draft Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy submission to the Scottish Government earlier in 2021 (prepared to help inform the draft NPF4) was asked to consider the role of the National Park in the wider region. This has clearly been picked up on in the draft NPF4 with clear recognition being given to the Parks strategic location and relationship with the central belt and west of Scotland.

However many of the locational priorities and actions identified for the northern spatial area in draft NPF4 are more relevant to the Park than the central urban area. An alternative approach could be to request that NPF4 provides a separate section on National Parks and a clearer statement on the role and contribution of National Parks within Scotland and their national significance. This will be discussed with Members at the March Planning Committee.

- 3.13. Policy and Strategy Guidance: Other points of interest to planning in the National Park include,

Links with land use - As previously highlighted to Members, the NPF4 strategy will be relevant to wider policies and strategies relating to planning and land use. However, we have noted that there isn't specific links made in the document to the Land Use Strategy or Regional Land Use Plans which we propose to highlight in our response as opportunities.

Policy Scope and Requirements - Consideration from staff across all NPA teams broadly welcomes many of the aspirations set out in the strategy, particularly around the significant weight to the global climate emergency and nature crisis when considering development proposals. The new nature crisis policy is a significant shift for the development industry and focuses on biodiversity gains which will be a new but welcomed approach. Other notable shifts in emphasis include placing a greater focus on developments coming forward utilising brownfield rather than greenfield land. There is also many positive aspirations in terms of community wealth building and encouraging local living.

Policy Intent and Detail - However, with the enhanced status of NPF4 as part of the Development Plan and its use in planning decision making there is a concern that as currently drafted many of the planning policies in draft NPF4 could potentially be open to interpretation and require further clarity, detail and supporting guidance to enable effective implementation and deliver the NPF4 strategy effectively.

Resource Considerations - From close examination of draft NPF4 it is clear that as currently drafted several of the policies will place a number of additional duties and requirements for both Development Management and Development Planning functions, all of which will have resource implications on the planning service and will also require applicants to provide additional supporting information. Planning fees will be increased across Scotland from 1st April 2022, which is a recognition by Government, however our response is likely to reiterate the importance of ensuring there is a well-resourced planning system to deliver these additional duties and requirements.

4. National Park Partnership Plan

- 4.1. Following agreement from the Board in December 2021 to proceed with the development of the next National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP), officers have begun the initial stages of planning out this programme of strategic work. A number of workshops have taken place to help identify opportunities for the NPPP, Local

Development Plan (LDP), Regional Spatial Strategy and, in time, the Regional Land Use Partnership/Framework to take a shared approach to evidence gathering, stakeholder mapping and early engagement. It is hoped this will avoid duplication of effort and the danger of 'consultation fatigue' amongst stakeholders, and better align policy at a strategic level.

4.2. As nominated Co-Chairs of the NPPP Board Steering Group, Sarah Drummond and Chris Spray have met with lead officers to share early thoughts on how the group can help support officers (and vice versa) during the development of the next NPPP. Some initial conversations have taken with other Board members who've expressed an interest in being involved including Bob Darracott, local member for Cowal and North Loch Lomond.

4.3. Priority for the next phase of programme development for officers is:

4.3.1. A overall programme timeline for NPPP/LDP/other plans that identifies opportunities for work to come together, and where the plans subsequently may need to follow their own timeline for development and approval.

4.3.2. A clear plan for how the Steering Group fits with the overall governance of this programme of work to better inform its membership and any relationship with wider advisors that we might want to bring in throughout.

4.3.3. An agreed approach to engagement - both early stage, informal engagement, including ensuring lesser heard voices have a chance to contribute as we develop our strategies and on how we conduct a formal consultation.

5. Joint Response Visitor Management Plan 2022

5.1. As we approach the 2022 visitor season, it is very welcome that we do so in the context of minimal COVID restrictions. The previous two years were marked not only by various forms of restriction but also dealing with the significant effects of moving out of extended periods of lockdown, with very significant influxes of visitors putting unprecedented pressures on popular destinations in the National Park. While the prospects for 2022 cannot be predicted with certainty, planning for a very busy visitor season is considered prudent. It is welcome that all public body partners remain committed to addressing these pressures by participating in the National Park Safe Recovery Action Group (NPSRAG) for 2022 under the leadership of National Park Authority.

5.2. The main features of the Joint Response Visitor Management Plan for 2022 are set out in Appendix 1 of this report. As Members will be aware the National Park Authority has been able to invest the uplift in its Grant in Aid in staff capacity. This has enabled the development of more strategic responses which will provide more sustainable solutions and options for our visitors. This includes running pilot shuttle bus services linked to better promoted public transport options, strategic infrastructure development planning including a investing in new facilities at Loch Achray and targeting resources at the most under pressure locations. At the time of preparing this report, there has been no equivalent of the additional COVID made

available in 2020 (£400k) and 2021 (£500k) confirmed for 2022. This means that as things currently stand there will be less seasonal resources available this year both through the National Park Authority and NatureScot's Better Places Fund. The national Visitor Management Steering Group continues to be in dialogue with the Scottish Government over this situation.

6. New Ways of Working

- 6.1. As previously reported to the Board, for the past year we have been working on our New Ways of Working project looking at how we will work as an organisation as we emerge from COVID restrictions. This include the balance we will seek to achieve the benefits of both remote and office based working.
- 6.2. The project's vision is to establish a model that enables us to feed the energy and inspiration of our people and places, whilst supporting our Mission Zero goals, individual wellbeing, and work-life balance. There are three key elements to it:
 - We will re-establish the **connections** we've lost between each other and the National Park as a place.
 - We will enable and encourage a form of **flexible** working that supports well-being and work-life balance
 - We will work in a way that enables us to **deliver** on the National Park outcomes – including on carbon reduction – effectively and efficiently.
- 6.3. We are delighted that from 1 March 2022 we launched our hybrid working model (Phase 2 of our office return, after the Phase 1 interim changes we made in the autumn). Under this model a mix of home and office working are available to staff, depending on their role. The result is a model that will see staff working different hours and at different locations, but in a way that sets appropriate boundaries to ensure delivery, productivity, and collaboration needs.

Appendix 1: Joint Response Visitor Management Plan 2022

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