



CEO Update

Agenda Item 8

National Park Authority Board Meeting

13th June 2022

Paper for information

1. Purpose.....	1
2. Recommendation(s).....	1
3. Scottish Government.....	1
4. National Park Partnership Plan and related Strategic Planning Work.....	3
5. Future Nature Vision Document.....	5
6. Balloch West Riverside Planning Application.....	6
7. Legal Cases Update.....	6
8. Board Forestry Field Visit.....	6

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

- 3.1. Visit by Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity:
Lorna Slater MSP, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity made her first official visit to the National Park on 6th April. The visit was an opportunity to show the Minister examples of nature restoration projects on the ground, such as peatland restoration and woodland regeneration, and discuss partnership working to support biodiversity in the National Park. The projects visited included RSPB Loch Lomond National Nature Reserve, The Great Trossachs Forest and Woodland Trust Glen Finglas peatland restoration funded by Peatland ACTION secured by National Park officers.

- 3.2. New National Park Consultation Ministerial Launch: The Minister returned for a second visit to the National Park on 13th May to launch the process which is planned to lead to the creation of Scotland's first new National Park in almost 20 years. As part of the Bute House agreement with the Scottish Green Party and the Programme for Government, the Scottish Government committed to the establishment of at least one new National Park in Scotland during 2025. The visit initially focussed on Luss Primary School where the pupils talked about their experiences of the National Park Routes to the Future school COP26 legacy tree planting project and also read an excellent [poem](#) they had composed.
- 3.3. The initial 3 week public consultation is intended to gather views on what people value about Scottish National Parks, and what these areas should deliver in future – in particular, how they can help to protect and restore nature, tackle climate change and promote sustainable land use. NatureScot has been asked to lead a further initial phase of work to provide advice, on this framework for evaluating candidate areas as new National Parks, to Scottish Ministers by the end of October. This will include engaging with a range of stakeholders in developing its advice and formally consulting on proposals and an evaluation framework at the end of the summer period. Ministers will then approve the framework and carry out further consultation on proposed candidate areas for National Park status.
- 3.4. The Minister has indicated that this process could lead to change for the existing two National Parks if there is felt to be a need to update the relevant legislation. The Minister has stressed she considers that both existing National Parks are already doing good work and she wants to use this exercise to explore whether any improvements can help us achieve even more positive change especially for climate change and reversing the decline in nature. Both CEOs are advising Scottish Government officials who are working on the process. Areas that might be explored for improvement include National Park aims, governance arrangements and powers/functions.
- 3.5. The process for more formal consultation is still being designed and in the meantime officers are considering what might be the most helpful improvements that would involve change to the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000. Further updates and advice will be provided to Board members once the process for engagement is clarified.
- 3.6. Scottish Government Resource and Capital Spending Review (RSR/CSR): Scottish Ministers have made a commitment to publish a 5 year spending review to provide a better forward look for resource

(revenue) budgeting. For many years Grant in Aid allocations to public bodies have been made on an annual basis making strategic budget planning very challenging for the National Park Authority. Members will recall that a similar 5 year picture for capital allocations was published last year which has allowed the National Park Authority to develop strategic capital spending plans. It has recently been announced that this capital spending review will also be 'refreshed' which may mean some change for our previously announced allocations.

- 3.7. This announcement is expected before the June Board meeting and a verbal update will be provided at the meeting. The announcement comes at an extremely challenging time for public finances following the COVID pandemic and in the context of a cost-of-living crisis. It is expected that this will impact negatively on Grant in Aid allocations and officers have made submissions to our sponsor Department setting out the important work being developed to deliver national priorities particularly for nature and climate as well as to ensure continued service delivery on the ground to support visitors and communities in the context of COVID recovery.
- 3.8. The impending announcement is not expected to be at organisational level but will set out allocations to our sponsor department in Scottish Government. Subsequent announcements will clarify our allocations for the next 5 years and the timings for this are yet to be clarified.

4. National Park Partnership Plan and related Strategic Planning Work

- 4.1. Our National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) is the overarching strategic plan for the National Park as a place. The current plan due for renewal in 2023. Our work to begin preparing the new Plan comes as we recover from the seismic impacts of COVID-19, and when the National Park, Scotland as a nation and the wider world is facing unprecedented challenges for the future, where nature must be restored at scale and action to mitigate the very real impacts of a climate emergency needed within the next decade. As one of the first nations to declare a global climate emergency in April 2019, Scotland made a bold statement when it committed to being a Net Zero Nation by 2045. Urgent action is needed now in order to make that a reality. COP26, hosted in Glasgow, brought parties together to accelerate action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, resulting in the [Glasgow Climate Pact](#).

- 4.2. The preparation work to date has had to consider what areas the new Plan can make the biggest impact on as the National Park's contribution to this national and global challenge. Areas being explored include:
- The opportunity to put green skills and jobs at the heart of Scotland's long term recovery given the need for action on climate and nature
 - Scotland's new draft Biodiversity Strategy is due to be published imminently and we expect it to set out how we can best deliver its targets. Our [Future Nature vision](#) recognises that *'If we are to demonstrate real progress in reversing the decline in biodiversity in this National Park a systemic step change in action is required'*.
 - [Scotland's draft National Planning Framework 4](#) puts climate and nature at the heart of planning policy more than ever before.
 - We know that land use change, landscape scale collaboration and a just transition are key to Scotland's response to both the nature crisis and the climate emergency. Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park is currently one of five areas in Scotland piloting [Regional Land Use Partnerships](#) to learn what works and what is needed to deliver the scale and ambition of change needed.
 - With a [national conversation beginning on the potential for another National Park\(s\) in Scotland](#), as we approach 20 years since being designated, there is an opportunity to consider whether any changes to our role and functions will help better realise these ambitions.
- 4.3. The National Park Partnership Plan will crystallise the long-term vision for the National Park as a place, that more spatial plans (including the Local Development Plan) will then provide more detail on where and how development and land use can help achieve that vision. We anticipate the next National Park Partnership Plan being bold and ambitious given the context we are operating within and the potential for this National Park to lead the way and pilot national policy at scale. Support and action will be required from a large range of partners, which is why engagement upfront will be key. We will lead a coalition of the willing with a shared goal of achieving the vision set out in the Partnership Plan.
- 4.4. In order to better align policy at a strategic level, officers have been busy working on ways to bring together evidence gathering, stakeholder mapping and planning early engagement on our Strategic Plans: our National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP), Local Development Plan (LDP), Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and, where possible, the Regional Land Use Partnership/Framework. It is hoped this will avoid duplication of

effort and the danger of 'consultation fatigue' amongst stakeholders. Alongside this, officers will be working on own developing our own Corporate Plan, as a plan that sets out the type of organisation we need to be, the skills we will need and the investment needed to help us deliver outcomes set out in the National Park Partnership Plan, Local Development Plan and the delivery plans associated with them. We are aiming to rationalise our Plans, making it easier for staff, Board, partners and members of the public to navigate and understand how they work together, and where they play a role in delivering that overarching vision.

- 4.5. Most recently, the Strategic Plans project team has been focused on evidence gathering, internal engagement, establishing a timeline, building the knowledge base to help develop a draft vision and scoping the engagement needed. The Project Team had a productive working session with the Steering Group co-chairs in May and officers are now focused on pulling together a more detailed timeline and plans for engagement, including with our Board and wider stakeholders.
- 4.6. Taking learning from the approach adopted in the Futures Group, there will be opportunity for Board members to work with officers on some of the trickiest issues being faced by the National Park as we approach our next generation of Strategic Plans and having had the experience of the first 20 years of National Parks in Scotland.
- 4.7. Exact dates for early Board/stakeholder engagement will follow in due course, but we anticipate using the period between now and September to finesse our thinking, understand our stakeholders and their needs, secure a solid knowledge base (and a plan to fill in knowledge gaps where needed), test out hypotheses and design our engagement. A draft NPPP is planned to come to the December 2022 Board for approval, with early-stage engagement to shape the draft Plan between now and then.

5. Future Nature Vision Document

- 5.1. A designed version of our [Future Nature vision document](#) has now been published. This also includes a dedicated [web page](#) which help to engage people on our ambitions. To coincide a short [Agenda piece](#) was published in the Herald and it has been promoted through our social media channels. Having this accessible and engaging document will help engage people in developing the projects that will help make this vision happen and increase the scale at which we can restore nature in the National Park

6. Balloch West Riverside Planning Application

- 6.1. A major planning application for a proposed tourism development at Woodbank House and West Riverside in Balloch as now been received and validated. This follows the withdrawal of a first planning application following an officer recommendation of refusal a couple of years ago. The applicant has revised the proposals for this new application. The target determination time for major applications is 4 months and it is expected that the significance of the proposal will mean that a recommendation will be presented to the full Board for decision rather than the Planning and Access Committee. Timings may mean that a Special Board meeting date will need to be identified. It this stage consultations have been set out to statutory bodies including local Community Councils.

7. Legal Cases Update

- 7.1. As previously communicated to Board Members, we currently have two live legal cases before the courts.
- 7.2. Core Path Plan: Gartmore House Judicial Review: Members will recall that Gartmore House sought a judicial review of our Core Path Plan in respect of two proposed Core Paths within the grounds of the House. Following Lord Clark's decision in our favour, Gartmore House have since lodged an appeal against this decision. A hearing for this appeal is yet to be set and is expected to be towards the end of 2022. In the meantime our claim for expenses for the initial court proceedings has been granted and our costs are currently being quantified before confirmation in the High Court.
- 7.3. Glenoglehead Site: We continue to defend the legal action raised in the Court of Session by The Forestry Partnership 2008 LLP in relation claimed access rights through our Glenoglehead site for the unrestricted transportation of extracted timber from significant adjacent forestry plantations. We are currently gathering evidence for an expected Court hearing which supports the denial of this claim. The claim, if successful would not only detrimentally affect the enjoyment of the visitor site but also significantly disrupt the use of the Rob Roy Way Long Distance Route and National Cycle Route 7. The claimants have refused any offer of negotiation meaning proceeding to a formal Court hearing is the most likely next step.

8. Board Forestry Field Visit

- 8.1. On 17th May several members of the Board undertook a field trip into the Trossachs to learn more about the evolution of productive forestry in

the National Park. Hosted by local Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) staff, along with colleagues from Scottish Forestry and Scottish Water, the trip focused on the Loch Katrine area which is currently the subject of a consultation on the [Loch Katrine Land Management Plan](#). Members learnt about the different roles of FLS and Scottish Forestry, and how Scottish Water as owners of Loch Katrine were supporting large-scale forest and peatland restoration work as part of their net zero plans. Alongside looking at plantations of different ages, members heard about the economics of timber production and discussed in detail how forest and native woodland expansion are key to the plans of all the organisations present in to helping deliver home-grown timber-based products and jobs, as well as contributing towards climate and nature-related targets for Scotland.

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