



National Park Place Programme

Agenda Item 5

National Park Authority Board Meeting

13th June 2022

Paper for decision

1. Purpose.....	1
2. Recommendation(s).....	2
3. Contribution to National Park Partnership Plan and/or Our 5-year Plan.....	2
4. Background.....	2
5. Context / Operating environment	3
6. Proposed approach.....	4
7. Risks	5
8. Conclusion	5

1. Purpose

1.1. This report updates the Board on progress being made to prepare the first co-ordinated multi-year strategic capital investment programme for the National Park’s visitor infrastructure. To ensure the maximum benefit is secured over the long term across different outcomes a ‘place-based’ approach has been taken. This is a holistic approach to solving some of the challenges and identifying solutions working with stakeholders and partners.

1.2. This paper sets out how this new approach, a new National Park ‘Place Programme’, has been developed to deliver on the commitment included in the Visitor Management Joint Response Plan approved by the Board in March 2021. The proposed Programme is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

1.3. The new Programme reflects priorities in the Annual Operating Plan for 2022-23 and has been expanded to include agreed priorities for partner and third-party sites as appropriate. It has therefore been presented as a position statement, “National Park Place Programme, A Place-based Approach to Visitor Infrastructure Investment”, taking the same approach

as Future Nature and Mission Zero Route Map. It complements these organisational priorities and will support their implementation whilst also informing the forthcoming review of the National Park Partnership Plan and Local Development Plan. Annual progress updates and recommended priorities will be provided to the Board as part of the Annual Operating Plan process.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. Members are asked to: approve the content of the position statement, Appendix 1 National Park Place Programme, A Place-based Approach to Visitor Infrastructure Investment, setting out a longer-term strategic approach to raising standards of infrastructure in the National Park, and therefore the way in which investment of the National Park Authority budget will be directed, and that of funders and partners influenced.

2.2. Members are asked to: note the contents of background reports; Appendix 2 – Joint Response Visitor Management Plan 2022 – Extract; Appendix 3 – West Loch Lomond Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Study (Consultants Technical Report to inform the work of the Programme); and Appendix 4 – East Loch Lomond Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Study (Consultants Technical Report to inform the work of the Programme).

3. Contribution to National Park Partnership Plan and/or Our 5-year Plan

3.1. The work detailed in this report and the appendices contributes directly to Outcome 8 (Visitor Management) and Outcome 10 (Placemaking) of the National Park Partnership Plan 2018-23.

4. Background

4.1. The National Park's visitor infrastructure is in many cases out of date or requires upgrading. It is not coping with peak demand, not meeting user needs and not supporting the people who live and work in the National Park our nature or our climate change adaptation work including Mission Zero.

4.2. Recent summer seasons, impacted by the pandemic, have highlighted the critical need for co-ordinated investment and has also established a new partnership approach with partners and stakeholders. It is unclear if the visitor season in 2022 will follow the same pattern of unprecedented

visitor numbers driven by the pandemic of the previous two years, but the need for co-ordinated investment remains clear.

4.3. The Season Review from 2021 outlined the ambitions that “*The partners will continue to work together in 2022 to improve current practices and undertake short term actions whilst also developing longer-term sustainable solutions. This will be done in collaboration both at national level and with communities of place and interest within the National Park. A 2022 Joint Response Visitor Management Plan will be developed in tandem with longer term plans including a Five-Year Visitor Infrastructure Investment Plan and Sustainable Visitor Transport Plan.*” The 2022 Joint Response Visitor Management Plan was presented at Board on 14 March 2022.

4.4. There is now the opportunity, to capitalise on a number of positive changes to take a longer-term strategic approach to raising standards of infrastructure in the National Park, supporting a modal shift for transport and where appropriate developing our destinations. This is an opportunity to look beyond our own sites to develop a place-based strategic investment plan for the National Park’s visitor infrastructure

The supportive environment for this includes:

- Significant budget uplift 2021/22: Includes five-year capital budget allocation for the National Park Authority.
- Strong public sector operational partnership and understanding of shared issues via the Safe Recovery Action Group
- Greater profile of visitor pressures and national activities, i.e., Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF)
- Increased community and business activity, including establishment of Visitor Management Groups and proactive investment and visitor management across the Park.

5. Context / Operating environment

5.1. Place is a term to describe where people, location and resources combine to create a sense of identity and purpose and is at the heart of addressing the needs and realising the full potential of communities. A more joined-up, collaborative, and participative approach to services, land and buildings, across all sectors within a place, enables better outcomes for everyone and increased opportunities for people and communities to shape their own lives.

5.2. Meeting the needs of People and Place, Climate, and Nature are key principles of the approach, and this has been informed by the National Park Board's Futures Group informal considerations of this topic. The Futures Group are preparing their closing Statement on their exploration of the Place Programme, however there was support for a Place-led approach: shared working with partners, shared working with communities and business – exploring and delivering solutions together in a coordinated way.

6. Proposed approach

- 6.1. This report introduces a new multi-year programme for capital investment in our visitor infrastructure - the National Park Place Programme. Appendix 1 sets out the proposed position statement encompassing the programme; outlines the principles, approach, and priorities across land ownerships and aims to deliver multiple benefits for visitors, communities, and businesses. Taking a strategic approach, focused on where more impactful change can be made, it will also respond to and complement our work on the twin climate and nature crises over the long term.
- 6.2. The Place Programme will inform the upcoming update to the National Park Partnership Plan and the Local Development Plan. While it includes priorities and projects identified through our work with partners and engagement with stakeholders, it is not an exhaustive list. The delivery element will be annually reviewed and updated by the National Park Safe Recovery Group Partners, linked to the budgetary process, thus developing a rolling multiyear programme.
- 6.3. The visitor infrastructure measures within the Place Programme follow a **strategic approach** that is both **thematic** and **geographic** within a place-based framework that is joined-up, collaborative, and participative.
- 6.4. Assembling a full deliverable programme will take time and the level of investment required is significant. The preparation of a strategic programme is essential in unlocking the level of resources and the support required from partners. For example, additional funding such as Visit Scotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund requires applications to be supported by a strategic plan. As part of a national initiative seeking to ensure a co-ordinated and proactive approach to improving Scotland's visitor infrastructure in 2021/22 they supported, via the Scottish Government Covid Recovery Fund, the development of Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Studies to help identify priority sites for investment and indicative costs to influence future funding rounds.

- 6.5. Much of the Park Authority's Programme development focus in 2021/22 has been around assembling a Place Projects Team, further developing collaborative working with partners to foster collective ownership of the programme, technical investigations, and stakeholder engagement focussed around the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Studies for Loch Lomond.
- 6.6. The estimated funding required for East and West Loch Lomond is indicated in the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Studies which note an anticipated total investment of between £3.15M and £3.95M excluding VAT, spread over a five year plus period for East Loch Lomond and between £4.50M and £5.65M excluding VAT, spread over a five year plus period for West Loch Lomond. The studies are at Appendix 3 and 4. The scale of investment needed, for capital budgets alone, if we consider the improvements needed across the park is clearly beyond the Park Authority's capital budget allocation for its own sites. This emphasises the need for joint working with partners towards delivering this strategic programme.

7. Risks

- 7.1. Delivery of the programme presents an opportunity as outlined above. Overall, there is a reputational risk should the National Park Authority and the partners be unable to deliver the programme however, the reputational risk of not taking this opportunity and not acting would be greater.
- 7.2. There are very real risks to delivery of both programme and the projects within, for us and delivery partners. These are: budget settlement, external funding availability, staff capacity, availability of consultants, availability of contractors, availability of materials, landowner agreements where required, planning permissions where required and continued resourcing of joint partner working.
- 7.3. It should be noted that whilst all partners will use their best efforts to prioritise and progress the programme, delivery is dependent upon sufficient resources and capacity being available, a favourable working environment and availability of materials post pandemic and other operating environment circumstances.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1. Members are therefore asked to agree the recommendations in this report and the attached position statement: National Park Place Programme, A Place-based Approach to Visitor Infrastructure Investment.

Appendix 1 – National Park Place Programme, A place-based approach to Visitor Infrastructure Investment

Appendix 2 – Joint Response Visitor Management Plan 2022 - Extract

Appendix 3 – West Loch Lomond Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Study (Consultants Report)

Appendix 4 – East Loch Lomond Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Study (Consultants Report)

Author: Deborah Sandals, Place Projects Manager
Executive Sponsor: Stuart Mearns, Director of Place
Board Sponsor: Bob Darracott