

CEO Report

Agenda Item 10

National Park Authority Board Meeting

12 December 2022

Paper for information

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide a summary overview of progress on the main strategic areas of work being undertaken in the organisation as well as significant external activities involving the Chief Executive and the Executive team between March and May 2018.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Board Members are asked to note the contents of this report for information.

3. Scottish Government

- 3.1 National Planning Framework 4: A Revised Draft National Planning Framework was laid before the Scottish Parliament on 8 November 2022. This is Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) and its role is to set out the national spatial strategy for Scotland and guide spatial development and infrastructure investment. It contains a long-term spatial strategy, regional priorities, national developments and national planning policy. It plays a key role in supporting the delivery of Scotland's national outcomes and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

3.2 The NPF4 is of importance to our work here in the National Park as it will inform the development of some aspects of our new National Park Partnership Plan and, once adopted by Scottish Government (anticipated January 2023), will form part of our statutory Local Development Plan. This is a significant change for local development planning and decision making for us in our role as Planning Authority. Decision making will in the first instance require to be in accordance with planning policy detailed in NPF4.

3.3 It has three core themes:

- **Sustainable places** where we reduce emissions, restore and better connect biodiversity
- **Liveable places** where we can all live better, healthier lives
- **Productive places** where we have a greener, fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy.

3.4 Eighteen national developments are identified and regional priorities are set for different parts of Scotland. Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park falls within parts of the 'North' and the 'Central' region for which the priorities include:

North Region

- a) Sustainable places – protection of environmental assets and stimulation of investment on natural and engineered solutions to climate change and nature restoration, whilst decarbonising transport and building resilient communities,
- b) Liveable places – maintain and help grow the population by taking a positive approach to rural development that strengthens networks of communities,
- c) Productive places – support local economic development by making sustainable use of the area's world-class environmental assets to innovate and lead greener growth.

Central Region

- a) Sustainable places – support net-zero energy solutions including extended heat networks and improved energy efficiency, together with urban greening and improved low carbon transport,
- b) Liveable places – pioneer low carbon, resilient urban living by rolling out networks of 20-minute neighbourhoods, future proofing city and town centres, accelerating urban greening, investing in net zero homes, and managing development on the edge of settlements,
- c) Productive places – target economic development investment and build community wealth to overcome disadvantage and support a greener wellbeing economy.

3.5 The National Park Authority responded to consultation on the draft NPF4 last year to advise that whilst the National Park's strategic location, proximity to the central belt of Scotland, offered significant opportunity to support quality of life, health

and wellbeing outcomes for many people, alongside opportunities to connect with nature, it was felt that the regional priorities set in the draft NPF4 for the northern area were more applicable to the National Park than those for the Central region.

- 3.6 Specific narrative in relation to the National Park is contained within the Central region, where it is recognised that although a predominantly urban area, this part of Scotland benefits from a rich and diverse rural area which is a key asset for communities. In relation to the National Park it states that:

“Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park has landscape-scale opportunities 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.”

- 3.7 The Revised Draft NPF4 also identifies the housing requirement for each Local and National Park Authority across Scotland. This is a key change in the Scottish Planning system whereby previously this was established by each planning authority, rather than set within national level guidance. The new approach is intended to streamline the process and avoid lengthy, and costly, disputes and examinations. For the National Park area NPF4 requires land to be identified for a minimum of 300 new homes over a ten-year period.

- 3.8 At the time of writing this report, staff are reviewing the revised draft NPF4 and its implications for our suite of strategic plans and development strategy. Updated guidance, advice and regulations are expected to provide clarity on the operation of the updated planning system in support of the NPF4. Members will receive further updates and briefings in the months ahead.

- 3.9 COP15: The UN Convention on Biological Diversity CoP15 will be held in Montreal under the Presidency of the Government of China from 7-18 December to negotiate a new global biodiversity framework. Biodiversity Minister, Ms Lorna Slater, will attend with a focus on the Edinburgh Process with the aim of gathering State Party support for adoption of the Plan of Action for Subnational Governments. The National Park Authority was an early signatory of the Edinburgh declaration. The Scottish Government is also expected to announce

the publication of its new, draft biodiversity strategy during CoP15. The event is an opportunity for Scotland to show its commitment to working with other global partners to address the nature crisis and build commitment among devolved bodies and administrations to deliver the goals of CoP15.

- 3.10 Building on our work for COP26 where a Joint Statement by Protected Landscapes and National Parks to tackle the Climate Crisis and Biodiversity loss accumulated signatory organisations across the international family we have been in dialogue with Parks Canada to facilitate side events for our Minister Lorna Slater to attend. Such an event provides a continued platform to highlight the role that National Parks across the world can play in reversing biodiversity loss as well as address climate change.

4. End of Visitor Season Report 2022

- 4.1 A team of National Park staff across various teams have once again coordinated an excellent report on the season experienced, lessons learnt and with a look towards future years. The End of Season Report for 2022 is attached as Appendix 1 and builds on the excellent partnership working and reporting built since 2020.

- 4.2 Overall, the Report confirms that we have witnessed a less challenging than in 2021 with visitor patterns more reflecting what we were experiencing in 2019. This sits alongside a welcome consensus that there generally seemed to be a reduction in negative visitor behaviours but with some challenging issues remaining in focussed areas. The Park was still busy with core issues of littering, fires, toileting and irresponsible parking still requiring continued management and innovative solutions.

- 4.3 The additional funding from Scottish Government to support visitor management presence made a significant difference to support well managed visitor experiences especially in lieu of significant infrastructure investment. The enhanced presence on the ground has coincided in less enforcement of byelaws being required and fewer details requiring to be taken. Some communities and local charities also benefited from another round of Better Places funding through NatureScot and well as contributions from the National Park Authority. This presence and improvement in behaviour, along with strong collaborative campaigns also led to less reliance on Police Scotland presence compared to previous seasons.

- 4.4 More enduring improvements to the visitor and community experience are being pursued through the development of Place Investment programmes to provide quality infrastructure across sub-destinations in the National Park. Excellent progress is being made in this strategic work on both the Strategic Tourism Investment and Development plans for sub-areas and the Sustainable Visitor

Transport Strategy. As these begin to be implemented they can deliver significant changes as part of a rolling 5-year investment programme.

4.5 The Report does look ahead and highlights key concerns and opportunities.

There is no doubt the financial landscape is challenging but we and partners are working to ensure that collectively we do not lose the gains that have made over the last two years. There will also be an elevated focus on longer-term sustainable solutions as we need a visitor experience and transport system that is fit for purpose as we address the climate and nature emergencies.

4.6 In 2023 the 'cost of living crisis' has the potential to see an increase in UK staycations. At the same time international travel is expected to continue its recovery. This is important to the rural tourism economy and must be supported by consistent messaging, high quality facilities, efficient and effective regulation and supported staff and communities to welcome and advise visitors to ensure this special place remains so. As we develop plans in co-ordination with our partners the focus for 2023 is expected to include the following;

- Continuing to build on the national partnerships that have been working towards a consistent approach to sustainable visitor management across Scotland.
- Continuing the National Park Safe Recovery Action Group and developing a 2023 Joint Response Visitor Management Plan and Communications Plan.
- Continue to develop relationships and joint working with communities of place, with a focus on developing projects as part of the Place Programme.
- Ensure that there is a coordinated approach to the deployment of seasonal staff where and when they are needed for the purposes of prevention, regulation and reassurance.
- Implement actions from the Place Programme including the further development of Strategic Tourism Design Plan studies and visitor infrastructure improvement projects such as the redevelopment of Tarbet.
- Launch the Sustainable Visitor Transport Strategy alongside a multi-year actions plan aimed to enable and equitable transition from the use of cars which will reduce congestion and help the National Park to work towards carbon neutrality.
- Work with Transport Scotland to improve signage on the A82 corridor and additional measures to reduce instances of dangerous parking.
- Launch the Aires scheme that has been developing at Tarbet and Arrochar to provide safe overnight parking for users of motorhomes and campervans and monitor it to learn lessons and replicate it in other areas if appropriate.

- Work with the Partnership Against Rural Crime group and the National Park Police Officer to instigate days of action to tackle issues of antisocial behaviour at Luss, Balloch and Loch Earn and reduce livestock worrying at key locations such as Conic Hill.
- Work with the newly formed Loch Recreation Stakeholder Group to work on actions for the implementation of the new Loch Lomond Byelaws to ensure that any changes are clearly understood by all and to work towards reducing carbon emissions and improving the natural environment.
- Continue to develop the use of technology to help to reduce visitor pressures and monitor visitor services and share initial findings with partners and communities to help develop a strategic joined up approach to the use of this type of infrastructure and the information that it can provide.

4.7 Details of these actions will be included in the 2023 Joint Response Visitor Management Plan to be presented to the National Park Authority Board in March 2023 following engagement with all key stakeholders and partners.

5. Loch Lomond Byelaw Review

5.1 The Loch Lomond Byelaw Review has progressed well against a very tight timetable to ensure the process is completed by March 2023. The hard work of the project team and good engagement with stakeholders has ensured a thorough consideration of the issues being addressed. The public consultation on the proposed byelaw amendments closed on the 19th of October 2022 with a welcome 383 responses received from a wide range of organisations and individuals. The volume and breadth of views received was not unexpected and reflects the broad range of stakeholders who enjoy a range of pursuits on Loch Lomond. Consultants are currently finalising the analysis of responses and unsurprisingly not all respondents agree on all proposals.

5.2 The most complex and contentious proposal was around the introductions for new low powered zones at the busiest bays which can help reduce conflict and dangerous situations between recreation interests, and prioritising vulnerable low speed non-motorised recreation. Views received include; demands for larger zones, zones which exclude all power craft, zones focused on further reduced speed limits, zones which exclude some craft, loch wide zones, and on the other end of the spectrum requests for no zones or exclusions at all. The project team are digesting and reviewing all these well considered positions and the Board will be presented with a final set of proposed byelaw amendments for the Special Board meeting on January 30th.

5.3 To assist with this work, the Loch Lomond Stakeholder Group has been established to facilitate advisory discussions around the emerging proposals, the implementation of the final proposals signed off by the Minister, and longer term

thinking around activity on Loch Lomond as we collectively address the climate and nature emergencies.

6. Sustainable Travel

6.1 Despite the disappointment of being unable to progress a pilot shuttle bus service in 2022, it is pleasing to see momentum building around our sustainable travel programme. Investigations around a viable shuttle bus have unearthed useful learnings which can help us and others consider enhanced bus services next year and beyond. The Journey Planner pilot with Tactran has surpassed expectations with over 10,000 users. We are working with Tactran and Transport Scotland to try to extend the pilot to build upon the initial positive results. The third thread of the existing programme is the development of a comprehensive Sustainable Travel and Modal Shift Study and it was great to see the energy and expertise at the well attended visioning workshop in November. I look forward to the Published report in spring next year building consensus for priorities that we need to address to move away from car dependency and shift to an inclusive low carbon visitor and residential experience.

7. Strategic Plans development

7.1 Our recent focus on Strategic Plans has been on internal engagement, with our staff and with our Board, as well as a session with our Youth Committee. With in-person meetings now possible again, we were able to host two full-day workshops to discuss the different challenges (and opportunities) for the National Park as we develop our next suite of Strategic Plans, to share views on these and to surface early thinking on how the National Park Authority, alongside others, could respond to the changing context.

7.2 Staff working on the development of our Strategic Plans found both sessions helpful to get a clearer picture of Board/staff level of ambition and appetite for action on our key priorities, particularly tackling the climate and nature crises in the National Park.

7.3 This early internal engagement, plus a recent Agile 'sprint' working on the Plans' development, has helped to refine and frame our thinking to progress to the drafting stages of the next National Park Partnership Plan, including identification of stakeholders we want to engage further with and strengthening of our knowledge base.

7.4 Plans are in place for drafting to begin in the new year, with a draft National Park Partnership Plan due to be presented to the Board in March 2023 for approval to proceed with consultation. Subject to Board approval, the formal consultation will take place over 12 weeks from April to June 2023. This will also inform the evidence base for preparing a new Local Development Plan for the National Park

next year, which we anticipate will have a stronger focus on land use, alongside planning, than previous plans.

8. National Parks Partnerships

8.1 National Parks Partnerships works on behalf of all 15 National Parks in the UK to secure beneficial commercial partnerships helping bring additional funding and resources to our work. This has seen partnerships such as with Columbia Outdoor clothing who have supplied our uniforms for free for the last 5 years and others which have seen contributions to nature and education work. NPP have also led the development of the Revere partnership which is breaking new ground exploring how green finance can support our work on nature restoration and carbon sequestration.

8.2 In October a new partnership between the UK National Parks and BMW UK was announced which will support and develop sustainable travel through EV infrastructure provision and biodiversity, sustainability and wellbeing projects. The **Recharge In Nature** project is a three year initiative that commits to help improve the electric car charging infrastructure and support vital nature restoration, biodiversity, sustainability and well-being initiatives across all 15 National Parks. This collaboration reinforces our own commitment to stepping up our efforts for climate and nature. BMW have committed to install or upgrade EV charging posts across all 15 of the National Parks. The partnership will see the installation of charging points in priority locations in every National Park between 2022 and 2025. Priority locations and the number of charging points is being planned with each National Park.

8.3 Through the Recharge in Nature fund, BMW UK will also directly support locally-led projects in each National Park in a range of areas including biodiversity, nature restoration, sustainable travel, improving sustainability and improving visitor wellbeing. Loch Lomond & The Trossachs will be one of the first group of National Park projects, along with Snowdonia and Dartmoor, in 2023. We will share more details on this project as this is developed.

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