



National Park Place Programme Delivery Update

Agenda Item 6

National Park Authority Board Meeting

12 June 2023

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1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper is to update the Board on the progress on delivery of the National Park Place Programme, [A Place-based Approach to Visitor Infrastructure Investment](#); the first co-ordinated multi-year strategic capital investment programme for the National Park's visitor infrastructure.
- 1.2. The Programme reflects priorities in the Annual Operating Plan for 2022-23 and for 2023-24 and has been expanded to include agreed priorities for partner and third-party sites as appropriate. Annual progress updates and recommended priorities will be provided to the Board as part of the Annual Operating Plan process, this update paper supplements the AOP reporting.
- 1.3. This Board update paper: provides a recap of the aims and objectives of the programme; notes progress on priorities of 2023-24 and what had been delivered; and summarises priorities and planned work for 2023-24 including an amendment, in line with the 2023-24 AOP, to the approach

to Strategic Infrastructure Development Studies across the National Park.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. Members are asked to:

2.1.1. Note the integration with National Park Authority Estates strategy.

2.1.2. Note progress in 2022/23.

2.1.3. Note the direction of budget and resources in 2023/24 including:

- a) the update to the partnership delivery programme, May 2023 (Appendix 1: National Park Place Programme: Partnership Projects Summary update May 2023)
- b) the amendment to the position statement, to reflect the move, as noted in the Annual Operating Plan (AOP) from eight individual Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Studies to four detailed studies in areas of most pressure (existing and in-progress) and a single park-wide consolidated study to set the investment priorities and support funding opportunities across the National Park (Appendix 2: National Park Place Programme: Section amendment – Geographic Priorities)

2.1.4. Consider and suggest opportunities to influence continued resourcing of public sector landowner engagement and investment.

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.

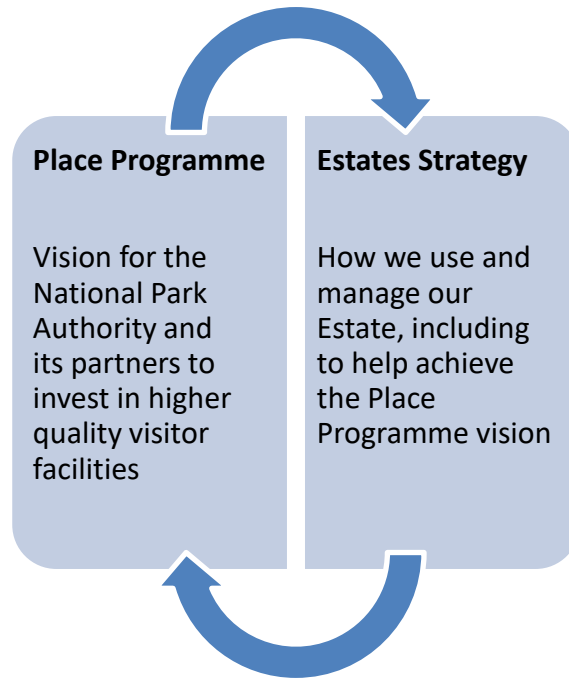
3.2. The Place Programme is also fully reflected within the Improving Popular Places and Routes content of the new National Park Partnership Plan Draft. The Visitor infrastructure Investment Priority Areas and Locations map within the NPPP Draft shows the priority areas and locations identified in the National Park Place Programme for strategic investment in visitor infrastructure as well as the key visitor hubs for facilities and sustainable transport options.

4. Background

- 4.1. As presented at the board meeting of June 2023 the Place Programme sets out a new multi-year programme for capital investment in our visitor infrastructure – the National Park Place Programme. The position statement outlines the principles, approach and priorities across public sector land ownership and aims to deliver multiple benefits for visitors, communities and businesses. Taking a strategic approach focused on where impactful change can be made, it also responds to and complements our work on Future nature and Mission Zero.
- 4.2. The Place Programme approach and the strategic tourism infrastructure Development Studies are part of the evidence base informing the National Park Partnership Plan Draft, Improving Popular Places and Routes. The place programme work will primarily be focussed in Priority Areas: East Loch Lomond, West Loch Lomond, Strathard and The Trossachs and Callander and surrounding area and Priority Locations as set out in the NPPP Draft.
- 4.3. Enthusiasm and support for the programme with partners is strong, however as we move through the programme to delivery resources needed to move from strategic planning to delivery are significant, in term of capital cash investment, staff time and ongoing operational costs.

5. Place Programme and the Estates Strategy

- 5.1. The Place Programme Approach paper (May 2023) notes that “The Place Programme will run in parallel with our forthcoming Estates Asset Management Strategy whose purpose is to establish an agreed approach for how we manage our estates and some specific non-estates infrastructure.” The Place Programme focus will be on strategic investment in assets in the Park, where this goes beyond regular maintenance and management works.
- 5.2. Since the publication of the Place Programme, the NPA has advanced development of the Estates Strategy. The interaction between the Place Programme and the Estates Strategy is set out below.



6. Place Programme Delivery Progress 2022-23

Priorities and commitments in 2022-23

6.1. Priorities and commitments for 2022-23 as of June 2022 made by the Park Authority to develop this programme include:

- 6.1.1. Resourcing a Place Projects Team including making contracts permanent.
- 6.1.2. Leading the Strategic tourism Infrastructure Studies and identification of Visitor Infrastructure Investment Priority Areas and Locations as shown in the National Park Partnership Plan Draft, with an aim of unlocking investment, such as the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) for strategic public and third sector partner projects.
- 6.1.3. Commencing a programme of capital investment.

Delivery in 2022-23

6.2. The scale of capital investment by the National Park in the Programme within 2023 was around £0.9M and focused on the following delivery projects as per 2022-23 AOP and Place programme Summary of projects: Bracklinn Bridge replacement, Phase 1 of a Sustainable Travel Hub site at Ben Venue, undertaking improvements to the Conic Hill path to create a sustainable path which caters for modern high footfall and protects the landscape and nature of the site, engaging with stakeholders to begin the preparation of the Strategic Tourism

Infrastructure Development Studies for Strathard, the Trossachs and for Callander and the surrounding area. Also, progress has been made with development of Tarbet Visitor site and design work for Falls of Falloch Upgrades and RTIF supported Balmaha masterplan.

- 6.3. Partner investment over the period has included engagement from all partners with a focus on delivery in the areas of pressure coming under Argyll and Bute Council, Stirling Council, and land in ownership of Forestry and Land Scotland and under the remit of Transport Scotland. A summary of progress of projects within the programme is noted below, with 17 projects making good progress in 2022-23

Project progress in 2022-23	Total
Completed projects	5
Projects nearing completion year	5
Design work progressed	7
TOTAL where good progress has been made	17
Projects planned but unable to progress	4

- 6.4. Projects completed in year 2022-23 by the NPA include: Bracklinn Bridge replacement, Conic Hill Path upgrade Stage 1, RTIF Funded Balmaha Masterplan and Trossachs Connectivity Phase 1 (Ben Venue) on Forestry and Land Scotland Land. Work by partners includes The Changing Places toilet in Aberfoyle (Stirling Council) and the support to temporary litter and toilet facilities on the A82 and in Arrochar (Argyll and Bute Council).

- 6.5. Projects Nearing completion in year 2022-23 by the NPA include: Study - Strathard & Trossachs, Study - Callander Area, Tarbet and Arrochar Motorhome Strategy, National Park Design guide – furniture and sites. The Trossachs Visitor Management RTIF project is nearing completion, this is a partnership project between the NPA, SS Sir Walter Scott Trust and Forestry and Land Scotland; with the SS Sir Walter Scott Trust leading delivery.

- 6.6. Design work progressed 2022-23 by the NPA include: Luss Pier safety and accessibility improvements, Tarbet Pier Visitor Site, Falls of Falloch biodiversity and site improvements, Trossachs Connectivity Further Phase at Ben Venue, and Strathard Shuttle Bus pilot - Aberfoyle to Loch

Katrine. The NPA is also supporting the community in Tyndrum to develop a Changing Places toilet. Argyll and Bute Council have made progress with the Glen Loin Cobbler car park and a draft design is awaiting sign off to then progress to development of funding bids.

6.6.1. It is noted that for Tarbet Visitor site the design work made sufficient progress in 2022/23 to enable a planning application to be submitted and to meet the RTIF round 6 deadline. The National Park Authority has secured a conditional offer of RTIF funding of £750K over 2 years, dependent on planning approval this July.

6.7. Despite the best efforts of partners the following projects were not able to be progressed owing to resource and capacity constraints: Strathard Shuttle Bus pilot (NPA) – summer 2022 (unsuccessful tender exercise at a time of nationwide bus service resourcing shortages), Milarrochy Bay facilities (insufficient staff resource), Trossachs Connectivity Further Phase (intervention for 2022-23 reduced to Ben Venue car park hub), and Arrochar and Tarbet Station Links to widen the path under the bridge (funding not approved and so the NPSRAG partnership will review next steps).

Priorities for 2023/24

6.8. The priorities for 2022-23 will be focussed on finishing those projects that were nearing completion at the close of 2023; developing those at design stage further on the route to delivery on the ground. For the NPA the highest priority projects are as set out the AOP:

- Deliver phase 1 of a multiyear plan to reconfigure the Tarbet Visitor/ picnic site to better serve users (including better campervan and motorhome management), whilst also making greenspace improvements.
- Commence detailed design work for a series of visitor infrastructure projects along East Loch Lomond, allowing development of detailed planning and funding applications.
- Complete Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Studies (STIDs) for Callander and Strathard and Trossachs, and undertake a final park-wide review and consolidation STID.

6.9. Appendix 1 sets out the updated partnership projects summary tables; indicative delivery programme for 2023-24. The tables are not exhaustive and focus on larger, strategic actions where we are making

changes to how the National Park assets are used and experienced, infrastructure development rather than running and repair. Strategic projects will bring a benefit on their own however smaller projects also collectively bring great benefits.

- 6.10. The revised approach to the completion of the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Studies will accelerate the completion of the strategic approach and support funding opportunities across the National Park. The amendment to the position statement, to reflect the move, as noted in the Annual Operating Plan (AOP) from eight individual Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Studies to four detailed studies in areas of most pressure (existing and in-progress) is set out in Appendix 2: National Park Place Programme: Section amendment – Geographic Priorities)
- 6.11. It is important to note that project delivery will depend on development, lead -in times and resources and whilst all partners will use their best efforts to prioritise resources and progress the actions listed in the programme, this is dependent on sufficient resources, staff and stakeholder capacity being available.

7. Budget and Resourcing

- 7.1. The June 2022 Board Paper Appendix (section 6) gave examples of the scale of overall funding required to deliver a co-ordinated multi-year strategic capital investment programme for the National Park's visitor infrastructure, which is likely to be in excess of £10 million of pounds over the coming decade, and around £5 million across the first five-year period.
- 7.2. 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, noting our investment of £0.9M in 2022/23. This emphasises the need for joint working with partners towards delivering this strategic programme and the leveraging in of external funding, in particular, RTIF.
- 7.3. The National Park Authority and its partners will need to commit ongoing resources to specific areas of the delivery plan as well as working to secure additional external funding and partner commitment. Officers are working on more detailed resourcing plans on a project-by-project basis. For example, the flagship projects from the West Loch Lomond RTIF funded Study; Tarbet Pier Visitor Site and Glen Loin (Cobbler Car Park)

are being developed by the NPA and Argyll and Bute Council respectively, with RTIF.

7.3.1. The Tarbet Pier Visitor Site is the first of the large scale co-ordinated multi-year strategic capital investment projects from the Place Programme for the National Park's visitor infrastructure. The NPA application to Visit Scotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) was successful with a grant award of £750K (conditional on securing Planning Permission by 31 July 2023) to undertake works across 2023-24 and 2024-25. The Planning application for the masterplan was submitted in January 2023 and, due to the timing of protected species surveys in June, the application will be determined in July 2023. The funding package is for a first phase of investments.

7.3.2. Tarbet Pier Park project is the flagship in the West Loch Lomond STID Study and is noted within our Place Programme as an early deliverable. As an important destination investment at the National Park's own site the project will deliver a significant positive impact on visitor experience and enhanced sustainability/Mission Zero objectives.

8. Risks

8.1. The risks noted in the Board Paper of 2023 remain and are noted below for ease of reference.

8.1.1. 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.

8.1.2. 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.

8.1.3. 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 within current operating environment circumstances.

8.2. At a time of challenging national revenue budgetary positions there is a risk we are unable to adequately staff the programme both within the partnership, all partner delivery. Without sufficient resource across the partnership there is a risk that we are unable to leverage RTIF funding or to have the core resources required for effective management of those projects.

8.3. In common with our programmes across the National Park, such as Future Nature, at this stage of the development there is a risk of lost momentum once the strategic plans are in place, and we move to a delivery model. It will be crucial to retain momentum by leading the way with work on our estate to inspire and provide exemplars to partner bodies to help them then capitalise on opportunities on their sites. Board members are asked to support us maintaining this momentum through their networks and contacts.

9. Next steps

9.1. The National Park Authority priority projects within the Place programme will be reported to Board through the Annual Operating Plan Updates.

9.2. An indicative summary update of all partner activity will be provided annually with the next report due at June 2024 Board.

10. Appendices

Appendix 1: National Park Place Programme: Partnership Projects Summary update May 2023

Appendix 2: National Park Place Programme: Section amendment – Geographic Priorities

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