



## CEO Report Agenda Item 8

### National Park Authority Board Meeting 12 June 2023

#### 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.

#### 2. Recommendation(s)

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

#### 3. Scottish Government

3.1. The Future for National Parks: Following the election of a new First Minister for Scotland, it has been confirmed that the Bute House Agreement with the Scottish Green Party remains in place as does the commitments contained therein. Lorna Slater MSP remains as Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity with Mairi McAllan MSP now appointed as Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition.

3.2. Included in the Bute House Agreement is the commitment to designate at least one new National Park within this parliamentary term. On 11<sup>th</sup> May Ms Slater visited Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park to launch the next stage of the process where communities across Scotland are being asked to consider whether their local area could be designated as the

country's newest national park. Nominations will officially open later this year once the appraisal framework has been finalised. A [new National Parks appraisal framework](#) with broad selection criteria for new national parks was also published for consultation. It is understood that Scottish Ministers are still considering whether amendments should be made to the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 to strengthen the role of new and existing National Parks. It is anticipated that a consultation on proposed amendments will take place in the near future. No precise timescales have been confirmed as yet and Board Members will be updates as details become clearer.

3.3. The visit by our Minister also included a meeting with the Convener and CEO to discuss the draft National Park Partnership Plan and related priority work areas. The Minister was also able to join the partner event to launch our Future Nature Strategy.

3.4. Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill : The Scottish Government has announced a Bill to enable councils to invest more in local tourism facilities and services through a levy on overnight stays. If passed by the Scottish Parliament, the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill will give councils the power to apply a levy on stays in overnight accommodation based on a percentage of the accommodation cost. All money raised would have to be reinvested locally on facilities and services substantially for or used by visitors enhancing the visitor experience and benefitting local communities and their economies.

3.5. Under the plans, councils would be required to consult communities, businesses, and tourism organisations before putting a visitor levy in place. They would also have to consult on how any revenue raised should be spent. It is understood that National Park Authorities are not able to raise a visitor levy as they have no powers to raise local taxes. How the arrangements would work for disbursing visitor levy income raised within National Parks is not clear. Given the role that National Park Authorities play in providing a wide range of visitor services this will require clarification. Officers are currently reviewing the draft Bill to consider how this issue might best be addressed.

#### **4. Loch Lomond Navigation Byelaw Review Update**

4.1. The Project Team are progressing Phase 2 of this work following the extensive public consultation. The period for any objections to be raised with Scottish Government ends in mid-June and following that we will await any queries or final decision from Scottish Ministers. In parallel the team are progressing necessary preparatory work around registration and database systems, infrastructure and procedures with the aim of amended byelaws being brought into force for the 2024 visitor season.

## 5. Draft National Park Partnership Plan Consultation

- 5.1. The consultation on the Draft National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) began on 26<sup>th</sup> April. The 12-week consultation runs until 19<sup>th</sup> July 2023.
- 5.2. Responses, comments and suggestions are being captured via Commonplace at <https://lomondtrossachsfuture.commonplace.is/> during the consultation period.
- 5.2. Our launch announcement secured national, local and broadcast media coverage for the launch of the consultation, including lengthy articles in [The Herald](#) and an opinion piece by Convener, Heather Reid in [The Scotsman](#). Gordon Watson, CEO, was interviewed on BBC's Good Morning Scotland and there was pick up in local press including [The Helensburgh Advertiser](#), [Dumbarton Reporter](#) and [Lochside Press](#). Links to the consultation page were included in some of the coverage and quotes from CEO and Convener encouraging people to get involved.
- 5.3. 900+ stakeholders were sent a launch email to promote the consultation period kicking off. Tailored emails from our CEO were also sent to delivery partners, community representatives and recreation stakeholders about key areas of the Draft Plan. Briefing slides were issued to Communications Teams in partner organisations to help promote the plan.
- 5.4. Condensed 'mini plans' were distributed to all staff and Board members who were present on the launch day. Three staff 'lunch & learns' were held to give an opportunity to all staff to understand more about the key on Restoring Nature, Creating a Sustainable, Low-Carbon Destination and Enabling a Greener Economy and Sustainable Living. Collectively the three Lunch & Learns had audiences of c.150 (with some staff attending more than one event).
- 5.5. Board members have been provided with briefing materials and slides to help them speak with confidence about the Draft Plan and to encourage people to get involved.
- 5.6. This initial period of the consultation has been focused on raising awareness of the Draft Plan and ways to be a part of conversation around the future of the National Park.
- 5.7. CEO-to-CEO meetings with key partner organisations are underway and engagement so far has been encouraging. Operational staff across the organisation will pick up relevant NPPP conversations with their contacts with partners.

- 5.8. Our Education Advisor, Ali Cush spent time with our Junior Rangers and young volunteers to help them learn more about the content of Draft Plan and the changes we need to see in the National Park.
- 5.9. The National Park Destination Group meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> May included a discussion about the Draft Plan and planning wider engagement for businesses during the remaining 8 weeks of the consultation.
- 5.10. We are now moving into the second phase of the consultation which will see a more concentrated period of external engagement. A number of events and activities are being planned over the next 4-5 weeks, including a [webinar](#) to learn more about the basics of the Draft Plan and further meetings with partners to discuss shared areas of interest and action needed to deliver the outcomes within the Draft Plan.
- 5.11. In the first four weeks, Commonplace has received c.700 visits with c. 50 contributions so far. This is in line with expectations at this stage in the consultation. From experience, most responses tend to be submitted in the final week(s) of the consultation period. We expect further contributions once engagement events begin in June.

## **6. Sustainable Transport Research**

- 6.1. We were delighted to receive our commissioned Sustainable Transport and Modal Shift Study and Options Appraisal at the end of March. The study is comprehensive and comes with a significant background information appendix which collates a wide variety of data, views and perceptions.
- 6.2. The Study was funded by ourselves, SPT and Transport Scotland and I was delighted to see the partnership discussions develop through last year as part of this exercise culminating in a positive governance workshop with Local Authorities, Regional Transport Partnerships and FLS which I chaired alongside the consultants.
- 6.3. The Study highlights and explores issues, barriers and opportunities which give us and partners a base to build from. Unsurprisingly the Appraisal outlines a compelling argument for change, that there are issues around car dependency, emissions and congestion which need to be addressed. It finds that a step change is required, neither business as usual or small changes will not have the required impact.
- 6.4. Governance changes and better formal partnerships are recommended as key first steps to create a system which is sustainable and delivers:

- 6.4.1. Gateways and hubs (Strategic capital investment already started through RTIF work);
  - 6.4.2. Public transport (investment in coverage, connectivity and capacity);
  - 6.4.3. Active travel and recreation;
  - 6.4.4. Parking & traffic management (Behaviour change and revenue generation);
  - 6.4.5. Visitor communications and promotion (including integrated ticketing);
- 6.5. We are still digesting this comprehensive Study and Appraisal but I look forward to taking forward this work with Board members in the Futures Group, partners and wide stakeholders. The case is compelling but a joined up and shared approach is the only way to achieve real change and address the challenge.

## **7. Shuttle Bus**

7.1. At the time of writing we await the results of a tender process to gauge capacity and interest from the market. Although we know market capacity and constraints exist we are hopeful that ourselves and partners will be able to work with an operator to provide a new targeted seasonal service in the National Park from mid-July through to mid-September.

7.2. We are delighted to have been able to match our own budget to secure significant match funding from Transport Scotland and our partnership with BMW. However the biggest risk remains market capacity and interest for a new seasonal service.

7.3. There has been continued positive public and partner interest in new bus services across the National Park area and the intention around this summer's work is to build stakeholder and market confidence around new services and sustainable economic models that could work moving forward. Scotland is a bus building nation and there are clear opportunities across the National Park to support national targets around less car kms, new services and zero-emissions bus engineering.

## 8. Vacant National Park Asset at Luss

- 8.1. Further to the update provided to the Board in March 2023 (and the Board's decision in September 2022) officers continue to progress the disposal of the vacant former visitor centre and associated land in Luss.
- 8.2. A joint valuation of the asset was instructed by the National Park Authority and Trust in accordance with Scottish Government Community Empowerment Asset Transfer guidance.
- 8.3. The joint-valuation was carried out by Ryden and as at 2nd May 2023 the asset was deemed to have a gross market value of £180,000 based on current condition and outright ownership.
- 8.4. The Trust is considering the outcome of the joint-valuation and whether it wishes to submit an Asset Transfer Request.
- 8.5. Dialogue remains ongoing with the Trust, whilst it reviews whether it has sufficient capacity and wider community support to take on ownership of the asset.
- 8.6. Simultaneously, officers continue to progress negotiations with Argyll and Bute Council, to secure the necessary servitude rights of access and wayleave for the asset. We have proposed a timescale of the end of June 2023, to have the deed of servitude signed by the Council and we await confirmation from the Council regarding whether this will be feasible. When the deed of servitude has been registered, officers will be able to submit the Property Pack to the Scottish Government – which will trigger the process for disposal of the asset via the public sector 'Trawl' / open market.

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