



Draft National Park Partnership Plan 2024-2029: Consultation Update Report

Agenda Item 6

National Park Authority Board Meeting
11 September 2023

Paper for Noting

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1. Purpose

1.1. The purpose of this Report is to provide an overview of the recent consultation undertaken on the Draft National Park Partnership Plan ('Draft Plan') and a high-level summary of the level and nature of responses received.

1.2. A separate Consultation Update Report has been prepared and provides details on the engagement activities undertaken and a summary of the consultation responses received to the Draft Plan and in relation to people's views and experiences of the National Park. This is appended to this report alongside an additional report which contains verbatim copies of all the comments received (with individual respondent details anonymised). The verbatim responses report is lengthy and is therefore best viewed online.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. It is recommended that Members:

2.1.1. Note this report and

2.1.2. Note the publication of Appendix One to this Report - Draft National Park Partnership Plan: Consultation Update Report subject to making

design improvements and editorial amendments prior to formal publication on our website.

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

- 3.1. The review and digest of responses received to the consultation phase of the Draft Plan will inform the next stages in the process to prepare a final version of the National Park Partnership Plan to cover the period from 2024-2029, including any further engagement required over the Autumn months.

4. Background

National Park Partnership Plan – Purpose

- 4.1. Members will recall that the National Park Authority is required to prepare a National Park Plan every five years to coordinate our own work and that of all those who have a role to play in managing the Park. Since this work requires working with others, we refer to this as our National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP).
- 4.2. Earlier this year, a Draft Plan for 2024-2025 was published for consultation and comment from all of those who have a role to play in its delivery and those who will be impacted by the outcomes and actions set out within it.
- 4.3. This Draft Plan differs from previous National Park Partnership Plans. It outlines a significant step change required to tackle the twin crises of the climate emergency and nature loss and outlines the actions to be taken over the next five years to achieve a longer-term **vision for the National Park to be ‘a climate-resilient place, where people and nature thrive together’**. It was informed by partner and stakeholder engagement, national and commissioned research, good practice examples and practitioner knowledge.
- 4.4. The Draft Plan has been prepared in accordance with the legislative requirements set out in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, however full cognisance has been given to forthcoming anticipated changes to the current legislative environment. This particularly relates to the Scottish Government’s commitment to establishing at least one new National Park in Scotland over this parliamentary term and associated consideration of any amendments required to strengthen the role, purpose, powers and functions of National Parks in Scotland, especially in relation to delivering for climate and nature. Details of the anticipated matters to be consulted on in the Biodiversity Framework and Natural Environment Bill (including The Future for National Parks) are provided in the separate CEO Update report to this meeting.

Consultation and Engagement

4.5. Consultation on the Draft Plan took place over a 12-week period between 26 April and 19 July 2023. A tailored engagement strategy was developed to ensure that whilst stimulating responses to the Draft Plan we also used the consultation as an opportunity to engage a broad range of people to raise awareness of the issues facing the National Park and to hear their views on how to help shape its future. This was informed by independent user research with key stakeholders we work with and with people whose voices are less often heard during consultations to co-design our approach to engagement.

4.6. The primary channel for engagement, consultation and receipt of responses was the digital platform called Commonplace, complemented by a range of online and in-person events, activities and meetings and an overarching campaign to promote engagement.

4.7. Our dedicated Commonplace site was designed to provide a variety of different ways for people to engage - from lighter touch opportunities to share their views and experiences of the National Park to responding to the Draft Plan content either in full or just by specific section ('Restoring Nature', 'Creating a Sustainable Low-Carbon Destination' and 'Enabling a Greener Economy and Sustainable Living'). An interactive map was available for people to make place-specific comments. People and organisations also were able to respond via email.

Responses Received

4.8. Headlines from the consultation, in addition to face-to-face engagement, include:

- More than **276,000 people reached** with Partnership Plan content on social media
- More than **3500 views** of the Partnership Plan page on the National Park website.
- **2260 visits** to the dedicated Commonplace platform
- **233 responses to the consultation** (either via the full survey, quick survey or via email) and a **further 75 contributions** made via comments on the interactive map or within the key sections on Commonplace.

This is compared to 120 consultation responses to our previous National Park Partnership Plan in 2017.

While not all engagement methods provided specific responses to the content in the Draft Plan, this approach has helped to gather a wider perspective on

people's experiences of and aspirations for the National Park. This has ratified the approach reflected in the Draft Plan and brought more depth to our understanding of people's views. This approach has also provided useful learning opportunities both on how to engage and how to track engagement in future.

4.9. All responses have been reviewed and are summarised within the Consultation Update Report to provide an overview of the nature of the comments received (Appendix One). This report does not contain any analysis of the responses or respondents, this work will follow over the Autumn months. Comments can also be viewed in full in the Verbatim Report (Appendix Two). A list of the organisations that responded to the consultation is provided (in Appendix Three) for information.

4.10. Overall, the vast majority of those who engaged with the consultation were supportive of the Draft Plan and the aims and objectives set out within it.

4.11. A key theme arising across many comments was in relation to delivery and funding – making it all happen. Many respondents reflected on the need for stronger partnership working, including with communities, and to ensure ongoing transparency on the evidence, rationale and targets set for actions, as well as working with areas around and adjoining the National Park boundary. Objectives, whilst largely supported, need to be more SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely) and prioritised.

4.12. As is to be expected, responses showed differing views between stakeholders on some topics. Where there were more negative comments, these primarily served to reinforce the issues and challenges facing the National Park rather than contradict the approach set out to tackle these in the Draft Plan.

4.13. There were also some topics raised which stakeholders felt needed a greater focus or specific acknowledgement in the final Plan, including outdoor recreation and approaches visitor management, marine environment, cultural heritage, Gaelic and historic environment.

4.14. A few people chose to reflect their views via the consultation on the role of the National Park and National Park Authority, as well as other public agencies, with points of concern/dissatisfaction noted in general or regarding a particular decision or proposal.

Draft Strategic Environmental Assessment

4.15. These generally agreed that the objectives set out within the Plan are too high level for full assessment and that those assessed are unlikely to have significant negative environmental impacts. Many of the objectives will be fully assessed through the development of other plans, for example the next Local

Development Plan and this approach was supported. Whilst there was general agreement, Historic Environment Scotland stated that the assessment had not adequately accounted for the environmental effects on the historic environment. This is something that will be considered further in the next stages to finalise the SEA Environmental Report.

5. Risks

5.1. While the level of support for the proposed objectives and actions in the Draft Plan was positive, many of the responses received are quite high-level statements of support and further follow up will be required with partners to establish the more specific delivery details to be included in the final Plan. This is in relation to already established key work areas as well as some new areas requiring more focus, such as green skills and jobs.

6. Next steps

6.1. Over the coming months all responses will be digested further and used as we engage further with stakeholders to inform preparation of the final Plan. This will be presented to the December Board meeting for approval and submission to the Scottish Ministers.

6.2. Aligned to the finalisation of the National Park Partnership Plan is the development of the next Local Development Plan for the National Park in 2024. The Local Development Plan will provide more detailed guidance on spatial development and land use activities in accordance with the strategic context set by the National Park Partnership Plan.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft National Park Partnership Plan: Consultation Report

Appendix 2 – Draft National Park Partnership Plan: Consultation Verbatim Comments [[link to website](#)]

Appendix 3 – Organisations that responded to the Draft Plan

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