



Finalised National Park Partnership Plan 2024-2029 Agenda Item 5

National Park Authority Board Meeting
11 December 2023

Paper for decision

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1. Purpose

- 1.1. To present a text version of the proposed final National Park Partnership Plan 2024-2029 for the Board to approve for submission to Scottish Ministers under the terms of Sections 11-13 of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000.
- 1.2. The report also sets out the considerations that have informed the amendments to the Plan following a consultation that was held from 26 April to 19 July 2023.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. That the Board

- **Approves** the **Final** National Park Partnership Plan attached as Appendix 1 for submission to Scottish Ministers for approval under the terms of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, and
- **Notes** that officers will prepare a designed version of the document where minor editorial and presentational changes may be made.

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

3.1. Once approved by Scottish Ministers the new National Park Partnership Plan 2024-2029 will replace the current 2018-23 National Park Partnership Plan and set the context for the preparation of a new Corporate Plan for the organisation as well as the new Local Development Plan.

4. Background

4.1. The National Park Partnership Plan is the management plan for the National Park as a place. A National Park Plan is required under the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 to set out a National Park Authority's policy for (a) managing a National Park; and (b) coordinating the exercise of an Authority's functions in relation to a National Park and the functions of other public bodies and office holders to the extent that they affect a National Park, with a view to ensuring that the National Park aims are collectively achieved in a co-ordinated way. As the plan's role is to coordinate action by multiple partners it is referred to as our National Park *Partnership* Plan.

4.2. The Act also requires a National Park Authority to prepare a plan every 5 years and to submit this to Scottish Ministers for approval following consultation. The finalised National Park Partnership Plan 2024-2029 presented for approval in Appendix 1 of this report, if approved by the Board, will then enter the final stage of the process by being submitted to Scottish Ministers for approval. It is hoped that if such approval is secured then the new Plan can be adopted and launched by Spring 2024.

4.3. It is intended the content within the National Park Partnership Plan will also serve the function of being a Regional Spatial Strategy for the National Park. A Regional Spatial Strategy is a new type of Plan introduced by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. The part of the Act that requires Regional Spatial Strategies to be prepared is not yet in force and there is presently no requirement to prepare one at this stage, however it is intended that the National Park Partnership Plan also serves the purpose of being a future Regional Spatial Strategy (subject to further consideration over procedure following the implementation of this part of the Act).

4.4. Consultation on the Draft Plan took place over a 12-week period between 26 April and 19 July 2023. Members received a [report on the consultation response](#) at the September Board meeting. In summary the main points of note from the consultation were:

- 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.
- The need for stronger partnership working, including with communities, and to ensure ongoing transparency on the evidence, rationale and targets set for actions.
- Objectives, whilst largely supported, need to be more SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely) and prioritised.
- Comments that were negative served to reinforce the issues and challenges facing the National Park rather than contradict the approach set out to tackle these.
- Some respondents suggested some topics that needed a greater focus or specific acknowledgement in the final Plan, including outdoor recreation, visitor management, marine environment, cultural heritage, Gaelic and historic environment.

Activities undertaken post-consultation phase

- 4.5. When the Board discussed the consultation response at its September meeting it was noted that the number of Community Council's responding could have been higher. It was also noted that, due to the outcome of Community Council elections in some areas of the National Park, a number of Community Councils had not formed or had only formed late in the consultation period.
- 4.6. In October, we issued letters to all community organisations in the National Park to remind them of the role of the National Park Partnership Plan and how to get in touch if they had any questions or comments. More detailed versions were sent to newly established organisations that might still have been forming while we were consulting on the Draft Plan.
- 4.7. Callander Community Council subsequently submitted a response via email. Officers have taken their response into account in finalising the Plan. No further responses were received from other community organisations, nor have we received further enquiries or requests for support regarding the Partnership Plan.
- 4.8. To keep the conversation alive while we finalised the Plan, we supplied content to a number of local/community publications and used our monthly stakeholder emails to bring the issues that the National Park Partnership Plan tackles to life. [Commonplace](#) subscribers have been kept up to date with key topics from the Plan explored in news updates.
- 4.9. In the period since the Board discussed the consultation response, officers have continued analysing responses and considering feedback from the Board at the September Board meeting. Given the need for the

finalised Plan to have more focus on smarter objectives and delivery, significant time has been invested in following up with key delivery partners clarifying what actions they will commit to supporting especially where the National Park Authority cannot lead or be solely responsible for delivery.

4.10. As was the case during the preparation of the Draft Plan there continues to be significant developments in Scottish Government policy and legislative proposals that have had to be taken account of during the finalisation of the Plan.

4.11. The most significant of these is discussed elsewhere on this agenda, namely Scotland's Strategic Framework for Biodiversity which includes proposals which may lead to significant changes for National Parks. While this Plan is prepared under the terms of the current National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 and the statutory aims as currently cast, it also seeks to respond to the direction of travel of national policy still under development.

4.12. In particular, this latest round of Scottish Government consultation stresses the important leadership role of National Parks in tackling the interlinked crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, whilst also welcoming visitors and supporting local communities and businesses. The finalised Plan seeks to rise to this expectation whilst also supporting many other important national priorities such as supporting sustainable tourism and greener economic growth, wider engagement, and participation in the outdoors to support a wellbeing economy and enabling more resilient communities and businesses to be successful while adapting to a changing climate.

Summary of key amendments made in the Final Plan

4.13. Having considered the feedback from the consultation, from meetings with partners since and the link to national priorities and policies, a number of changes have been made to the Plan.

4.14. It has been strengthened to include additional content and reference in relation to several topics including the freshwater and marine environment, cultural heritage, including Gaelic, historic environment, regenerative land use, managing (and securing improvements to) recreational opportunities, housing delivery, climate mitigation and adaptation and community wealth building. Two responses were received requesting the identification of rewilding areas in the National Park, and identifying targets for this, however this terminology has not been incorporated. The language and targets for nature restoration

established already in the Future Nature work programme have been retained instead.

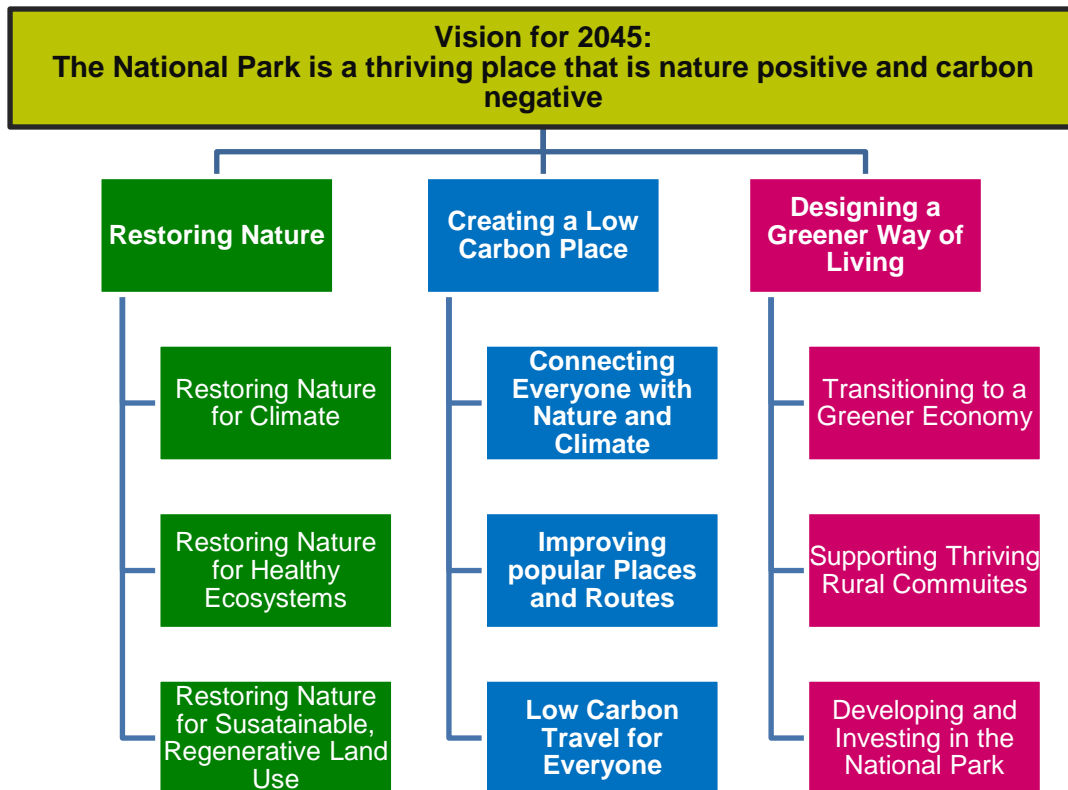
- 4.15. In terms of the overall tone and style of the final Plan, significant amendments have been made to ensure that the Plan shows leadership, sets clear priorities and direction on the coordinated actions needed by both the Park Authority, public bodies and a range of other partners.
- 4.16. The content has been reduced to be clearer, more definitive, and concise, with briefer narrative used to explain the context which is driving the Plan's direction and to provide the rationale for delivery priorities.
- 4.17. This Plan has primarily been designed for National Park Authority and other delivery partner staff and Board to use to guide and track the progress of their work together for the duration of the Plan. Once approved, alongside the final Plan itself, there will be wider communications to bring the priorities in the Plan to life to different audiences.
- 4.18. The finalised Plan now forms two parts:
- **The Why** – explaining the context for this Plan, the challenges facing the National Park, Scotland and the world, and the role the Park must play in addressing these.
 - **The What, Who, How and When** – setting out a framework for delivery through clear Outcomes, Objectives, Actions, and Measurements.
- 4.19. Cross cutting themes, such as green skills and training, volunteering, young people, public transport and community empowerment are now hosted in one place to avoid repetition across different sections, and we have worked hard to minimise jargon. Overall, the content has not changed drastically within the three main sections of the draft Plan, however, some of the section headings, outcomes and objectives have changed following feedback and to provide greater clarity. The number of objectives has also been reduced by condensing and consolidating these more. In some places, objectives have moved to another section where they fit better with others as a package of measures against an outcome.
- 4.20. The Plan's vision to 2045 has been reframed to use more explicit and concise terminology of 'nature positive' and 'carbon negative' and a 'thriving place'. Incorporating an evidence led approach, the final plan includes more information and links to data, metrics and measures, particularly in relation to achieving Net Zero in a way that is aligned with [The Paris Agreement](#), informed by the carbon modelling work for the

National Park as a place and pathways that identify our best route towards achieving a net zero National Park by 2035 and being carbon negative beyond that. It also draws on the extensive body of work undertaken through the recent Future Nature programme to set targets to halt decline in nature by 2030 and see nature restoration by 2040. To reflect and measure the National Park as a Thriving Place the Plan reflects the findings of communities' views through their Local Place Plans and use of the Place Standard tool as an indication and starting point for future monitoring. It proposes that further work is undertaken with communities to agree measures used alongside this in the future.

4.21. The Plan is structured around the vision to 2045, delivered by three sections – **Restoring Nature, Creating a Low Carbon Place and Designing a Greener Way of Living**. Each section has three identified high-level outcomes to 2045 (nine for the Plan in total) which in turn are supported by a package of objectives and actions over the next five years (2024-2929) in order to drive and track progress towards achieving the longer-term vision and outcomes.

4.22. Figure 1 illustrates the high-level vision and nine core outcomes for the Plan to 2045.

Figure 1: National Park Partnership Plan 2045 Vision and Outcomes



4.23. Each of the **nine 2045 outcomes** is supported in turn by **three objectives** to frame a delivery programme and **76 actions** over the five-year duration of the Plan (2024-2029). These are summarised as follows:

Restoring Nature

2045 Outcome Title	Restoring Nature for Climate	Restoring Nature for Healthy Ecosystems	Restoring Nature through Sustainable, Regenerative Land Use
2045 Outcome Intent: <i>By 2045 the National Park is/has ...</i>	A natural carbon sink	A restored landscape for nature	An exemplar of regenerative land use
Plan Objectives for 2024-2029	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce Peatland Emissions • Increase Tree Cover • Restore the Water Environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting Nature at Landscape Scale • More Land Managed for Nature • Reduce key pressures on Nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support more Regenerative Land Use • Invest in Nature Restoration • Encourage land use that benefits everyone

Creating a Low-Carbon Place

2045 Outcome Title	Connecting Everyone with Nature and Climate	Improving popular Places and Routes	Low Carbon Travel for Everyone
2045 Outcome: <i>By 2045 the National Park is/has ...</i>	A place for all to enjoy safely and responsibly	High quality visitor infrastructure and facilities	An inclusive, low carbon, travel network
Plan Objectives for 2024-2029	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspiring action for nature and climate • Supporting diversity and inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver a multi-year place programme • Improve travel infrastructure • Provide a high-quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a new strategic transport partnership approach • Make sustainable

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support safe, responsible access 	recreational path network	travel choices more attractive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve travel routes and services
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Designing a Greener Way of Living

2045 Outcome Title	Transitioning to a Greener Economy	Supporting Thriving Rural Communities	Developing and Investing in the National Park
2045 Outcome: <i>By 2045 the National Park is/has ...</i>	A greener, more diverse, rural economy	More resilient rural communities	A responsive approach to new development
Plan Objectives for 2024-2029	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase sustainable tourism Support low carbon businesses Grow green & nature based jobs and skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enable more local living and working Meet housing needs Build community wealth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver strategic development needs Help adapt to climate change and restore nature Make the best use of land and assets

4.24. The Delivery Framework part of the Plan (see Appendix 2) provides more detail than the Draft Plan in relation to the how the objectives will be delivered including detailed actions, named delivery partners and detail of the delivery stage of each objective at the start of the five-year plan period from 2024-29. Many of these are already in delivery however for some aspects of the Plan where it is been identified that new or increased focus is required (such as on green skills) these are recorded as being at scoping or early initiation stages.

4.25. Measures of success have been identified linked to tracking progress towards targets Vision and Outcome level of the Plan (by 2045 and interim targets by 2030). Regular monitoring will be undertaken against these. At the more detailed objectives and actions level, each objective has been tested against measurable outputs and indicators will be used internally to track and report on progress.

Accompanying Statutory Assessments

- 4.26. Accompanying technical assessments were prepared and consulted upon alongside the draft National Park Partnership Plan, namely a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). Their role was to identify any potential significant positive and negative environmental impacts from implementing the Plan (the SEA) as well as assessing the impact of the plan on European designated sites (the HRA).
- 4.27. The high-level nature of the Plan meant that many draft objectives, policies and actions were screened out from the SEA. This is mainly due to the strategic level of the draft Plan and that it does not specify locational detail. Further assessments will be made of more detailed plans, such as Local Development Plan and at project level, to ensure a more appropriate and informed assessment can be undertaken once the locations for the actions are identified.
- 4.28. Responses from the consultation authorities (NatureScot, SEPA and Historic Environment Scotland) broadly agreed with this approach and advice was received in relation to strengthening aspects of the assessment, including undertaking some high level, generic assessment where possible and further consideration of the likely impacts of implementing the Plan on the historic environment. The Strategic Environmental Assessment has been updated to include this additional consideration and this has also informed amendments made as part of finalising the Plan.
- 4.29. In regards to the Habitats Regulations Appraisal, NatureScot agreed with the conclusion that the Plan will not adversely affect the integrity of any European site in, or connected, to the National Park.
- 4.30. In terms of next steps, once the Plan is adopted a SEA 'Post Adoption' statement will be produced that will outline how the assessment and consultation responses have been taken into account within the finalised NPPP. Monitoring will form an important component of both the NPPP and the SEA in seeking to ensure that the Plan avoids generating any unforeseen adverse environmental impacts.

5. Risks

- 5.1. There is a risk that the finalised Plan is not approved by Scottish Ministers after submission. This is considered to be a low risk in the light of the consultation work carried out with the draft Plan and the largely positive feedback from a wide range of stakeholders. The Plan responds positively to many areas of Scottish Government policy and in particular the stated aspirations for existing and potential new National Parks in Scotland

5.2. There is a risk that the Plan does not lead to the actions being realised or achieve the targets set out. Clearly this depends on the capacity and resources of both the National Park Authority and its many partner organisations with a role to play. The finalisation of the plan has tried to balance between being ambitious but focussed on those actions most likely to achieve the 2045 vision. As with previous plans progress will be monitored and this will help with decision making on priorities and resources across the five-year delivery period. Where the National Park Authority leads delivery, this will also be considered in our forthcoming Corporate Plan.

6. Next steps

6.1. The National Parks (Scotland) Act requires that the plan is submitted to Scottish Ministers for approval. Should Members be minded to approve the Final Plan it will be submitted together with the background information including the consultation report and assessment reports as soon as practically possible. The Plan presented as Appendix 1 is in a text format. Work will continue to develop the document into a more visually engaging format including more illustrative material including maps and case studies to bring the plan to life. This will include the development of online materials to summarise the plan for different audiences.

6.2. It is envisaged that once Scottish Ministers have indicated that the Plan will be approved, arrangements will be made to formally launch the Plan and it is hoped this will be by early Spring 2024.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Finalised National Park Partnership Plan 2024-29

Appendix 2 – Examples of how the 2045 Vision could be brought to life visually, Delivery Framework and Measures of Success

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