

Future Nature – Update Paper

Agenda Item 1

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Date 11th March 2024

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1. Purpose

1.1. The purpose of this paper is to update the Board on the progress on Future Nature: an ambitious multi-year strategic programme for restoring nature in the National Park.

1.2. The paper will outline activity and further progress since the last annual update in [March 2023](#).

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. Board are asked to note progress to date.

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

3.1. The Future Nature programme forms a key element of the strategic background, delivery plans and monitoring framework for the new National Park Partnership Plan and in particular the ‘Restore Nature’ pillar of the plan.

4. Background

- 4.1. In March 2023 the Board were presented with the final draft of the Future Nature Route map ahead of final design and editing, and subsequent adoption by all the partners.
- 4.2. The [final Route Map](#) was published and launched on 11th May 2023 at an event attended by Minister Lorna Slater and representatives from many of the twenty-nine organisations who signed up to the vision and pledged to continue to work together to develop and deliver the projects and monitoring required to reach that vision.
- 4.3. This paper outlines progress and key highlights of the work to develop and deliver the plans laid out in the Route Map.

5. Progress to date - Development of the delivery plan and governance

- 5.1. The Route Map identified a range of initial actions which have now been developed into a delivery plan. Within the first “Action for Nature” pathway the associated delivery plan includes actions such as:
 - Develop Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) reporting and extend our programme of delivery and monitoring
 - Publish a long-term peatland restoration strategy and delivery plan
 - Expand staff capacity within The Great Trossachs Forest and develop the vision and funding for delivering the Wild Strathfillan Landscape Project
- 5.2. It also contains a second pathway to “Mainstream nature friendly processes and practices” which includes:
 - Embedding Future Nature in the new National Park Partnership Plan and Local Development Plan
 - Develop ethical green finance opportunities including feasibility research for green finance for Wild Strathfillan
- 5.3. The third pathway focuses on “Raising awareness and inspiring action for nature” and includes:
 - Development of nature literacy and connection behaviour change model and programme
 - Review and realign our educational and outreach resources to deliver Future Nature priorities.
- 5.4. Good progress has been made on the establishment of this delivery plan with progress underway on all key elements – key highlights are detailed in section 6 below. Progress reporting has been carried out internally through the High Priority Programme Board. Externally we have well attended quarterly meetings of all the organisations signed up to Future Nature. This has established full terms of references and membership of

an Operational Working Group, as well as Scientific Advisory and Funding subgroups.

5.5. The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act (2011) requires public bodies in Scotland to provide a publicly available report every three years on the actions which they have taken to meet their biodiversity duty. The development and delivery of Future Nature is covered in detail in the National Park Authority's latest report finalised in February 2024 and included in Appendix 1 for reference and further detail.

6. Progress to date – Delivery Highlights

6.1. The Future Nature strategy was designed to build on existing and ongoing core work and as such has allowed us to establish and extend delivery plans such as those to deal with Invasive Non-Native Species management. Ongoing work by National Park Authority staff and funding agreements with the Fisheries and Rivers Trusts have continued to progress the monitoring and control of riparian INNS to achieve good coverage and control in more than half of the National Park. Results show that 60% of sites surveyed showing improvements including 21% of sites in which riparian INNS were likely or possibly eradicated.

6.2. The National Park Authority is one of the delivery partners for the national Peatland ACTION programme and over the last year we have developed a draft peatland strategy and delivery plan and have scaled up our staff resource to a team of four, with a commensurate increase in the scale of delivery. Between April 2020 and March 2023, 1,034ha of peatland was put on the road to recovery, and in the current financial year we are aiming to have completed up to a further 450ha. By way of context our previous annual peatland restoration rates have been on average between 200-300ha, so we are gradually scaling up delivery towards the new target in our new National Park Partnership Plan of 750ha/yr.

6.3. We receive direct funding from Scottish Government to resource this important work which helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from exposed peatlands across the Park, as well as improving their water storage capacity and downstream water quality.

6.4. Over each of the last two financial years we have been successful in securing an annual allocation of Nature Restoration Funding directly from Scottish Government. This has facilitated a capital programme of over £500,000 to deliver Future Nature priorities and action on the ground. We have been successful in establishing a strong system to collate project ideas, allocate funding and deliver projects. To date this

has ranged from actions including the removal of invasive *Rhododendron ponticum*, Western hemlock and Sitka spruce from 110Ha of new native woodland in The Great Trossachs Forest, to Japanese knotweed control on the shores of Loch Lomond. They also included the creation of a new living riverbank revetment in Loch Goil and support of 400m² of new montane scrub development at the Cashel Forest Woodland Regeneration Project. Current projects in delivery include Invasive Species control (in particular on the Blane and Endrick rivers and in The Great Trossachs Forest), meadow management at RSPB Loch Lomond, grazing management projects with a number of land managers including on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) on the Blackwater Marshes and Ben Vorlich as well as two smaller wildlife ponds with local schools.

6.5. Strong progress has been made on the three key landscape scale projects identified in the Future Nature strategy:

- In The Great Trossachs Forest funding has been secured from Scottish Water and the other NNR (National Nature Reserve) partners to create a new coordinator post employed through the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs Countryside Trust to carry out an extensive review of progress so far and plans for the next phase of this flagship landscape partnership.

- The National Park Authority has worked closely with the Countryside Trust to secure funding and then successfully carry out a development phase of the [Wild Strathfillan project](#). This work has developed a full suite of worked up delivery plans and subject to confirmation of funding from both National Lottery Heritage fund and the Nature Restoration Fund it is hoped work will shortly be underway on a major delivery phase with a value of over £1million.

- The Route Map also identified the Loch Lomond Rainforest as the next landscape scale project for development and the National Park Authority has funded and supported work by Land Use Consultants to scope this project. The scoping report will be complete in March 2024 with the aim to secure development funding on the back of that to develop the detailed site surveys and delivery plans which aim to protect and restore the internationally important and very rare temperate rainforest woodlands found around the loch. As this proposal develops further, we will through our reporting keep Board members abreast of progress.

6.6. We have supported the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in undertaking consultation exercises and stakeholder engagement for two separate translocations of Eurasian beavers released at RSPB Loch Lomond in 2023. We were delighted to have some Board and staff members present at both releases. This action has helped to consolidate

the expansion of beavers into the Loch Lomond catchment, following sightings of individual beavers in 2020. The upper Forth, Earn and Fillan-Dochart catchments have been home to beavers recolonising naturally since 2012 and we have continued to collect records of their presence.

- 6.7. We continue to support local land managers through enabling and facilitating project development and delivery both at an individual holding and collaborative landscape scale level. Sustainable herbivore management that reduces grazing and browsing pressures on native habitats, largely from wild deer and sheep is a key area of focus and we have been working with other agencies to develop a new Priority Area Action Plan (supported by Scottish Government) to focus efforts to enable the delivery of sustainable grazing management of herbivores across the National Park. We have worked closely with deer management groups across the Park and in particular supporting East Loch Lomond Land Management Forum to enable collaborative delivery of herbivore management efforts through more effective deer counts, impact assessments and cull targets. We are also supporting a new piece of work to explore a Loch Lomond venison project to incentivise and increase the value-added benefits of deer management.
- 6.8. Under Future Nature Pathway 2, we recognised the need to scale up nature restoration delivery and therefore to secure a mixture of core government funding, traditional grants, sponsorship, and innovative development of new ethical green finance opportunities. Through the UK-wide [Revere partnership](#), the National Park Authority and Palladium are exploring potential for private investment into woodland creation as part of the carbon credit market. We have secured Scottish Government and other grant funding to develop a range of research and pilot projects which, in the coming year, will aim to develop a woodland carbon credit platform to deliver high integrity woodland schemes which also deliver wider community and biodiversity benefits. We also secured a £95,000 grant from Investment Ready Nature Scotland (IRNS) and are just reaching the end of a substantial review with consultants Landscape Finance Lab which will inform the National Park Authority's upcoming delivery plans on how we can step up nature restoration funding in line with the aspirations of our new National Park Partnership Plan. Board should note however that this is still work in development and as yet has not led to active delivery of woodland creation on the ground so far.
- 6.9. Following the completion of work on the new National Park Partnership Plan, work on the new Local Development Plan has also received new focus in relation to Future Nature Pathway 2. Work is underway on our

approach to developing a Nature Network¹ for the National Park that will incorporate our approach to supporting Scottish Government's 30 x 30 commitments² and will make use of existing biodiversity audit information for the National Park. National guidance on nature networks is also being developed by NatureScot that will further inform our work. Our approach to achieving positive outcomes for nature from development, as required under NPF4 (National Planning Framework 4), is also being progressed and we plan to include further details as part of the LDP evidence base submission scheduled for June 2024. Our engagement with large infrastructure projects in the National Park including electricity generation and transmission and trunk roads has led to discussions about the possible application to these projects of the [DEFRA Metric for Biodiversity Net Gain](#) which is routinely applied in England as part of a new legal requirement south of the border. These discussions have proven insightful into how we could develop an approach for use in the National Park and for ongoing discussions nationally about the development of a similar metric for Scotland.

6.10. In relation to Future Nature Pathway 3, the strategy has also enabled the development of our work to engage with visitors and schools to align with Future Nature messaging as well as refocusing time of our Ranger Service to deliver elements of the Future Nature workplan. This has contributed significantly to our control of invasive Himalayan balsam as well delivering volunteer sessions with 55 volunteers, collecting 13Kg of native tree seeds to contribute to the Wild Strathfillan tree nursery. We have also supported the Local Plan Plan/sub-Regional Land Use Plan pilot at Lochgoilhead to assist community engagement with biodiversity.

7. Progress to date – Monitoring and Evaluation

7.1. The Future Nature Route Map committed to establish a clear baseline of the State of Nature in the National Park as well as an ongoing monitoring framework to ensure the delivery plan remains evidence led.

7.2. This commitment was completed with the commission and review of the [State of Nature](#) report for the National Park. Carried out by the

¹ A Nature Network connects nature-rich sites, restoration areas, and other environmental projects through a series of areas of suitable habitat, habitat corridors and stepping-stones. As well as supporting regional and national approaches to protect and restore nature, they provide local benefits to wildlife and people.

² A global target to protect 30% of the planet for nature by 2030 (known as '30x30') is included in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and was agreed at the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at COP15.

independent consultancy Ecosulis this report has enabled us to review a complete baseline for nature across the National Park.

7.3. In summary this report shows that whilst the National Park has seen some improvements in nature and is generally doing better in this regard than Scotland overall, it is still falling short of the scale of nature restoration required to tackle the nature crises, and below the scale of ambition that our targets and plans have set.

7.4. Board members may recall from the presentation at their offsite session in September 2023 that we have also built a structured monitoring programme as a key element of the Future Nature Route Map. This combines an annual delivery plan which monitors the actions and deliverable outputs of the programme, with a logic model³ and set of long-term indicators. The long-term indicators have been developed in consultation with the full Future Nature working group and then independently reviewed. We aim to launch a new dashboard of baselines indicators in the next six months. Then on a five yearly cycle we will rerun these indicators as well as commissioning an update to the State of Nature report.

8. Risks

8.1. Whilst we have achieved a scaling up of our own internal resourcing and secured external funding there is considerable ongoing uncertainty about the availability of longer-term Scottish Government funding both in terms of our core grant and that of dedicated funds such as Nature Restoration Funding and Peatland Action funding. The national budget for forestry grants has also been significantly cut for 2024/25 and this *may* have a significant impact on the ability to meet our woodland creation targets over the next two to three years. Whilst the availability and annual value of this central funding remains uncertain, planning long term strategic programmes will remain challenging.

8.2. There also remains considerable uncertainty over the development of biodiversity gain through the planning system and the potential for private investment and ethical green finance. Moreover, the future of agricultural support and its potential ability to help fund farmers to tackle the biodiversity crisis at scale is now uncertain with the recent Scottish Government announcement signalling that there will be little change to the current system of direct payments to farmers with a relatively modest proportion targeting the enhancement the natural environment. The effective development, legislation and management of these key funding

³ A logic model is a structured way to represent the theory of how a programme of activities and outputs combine to produce longer term outcomes.

areas and others will have a fundamental impact on our ability to meet the ambitious aims of the Future Nature Strategy

8.3. Many of the resources, levers and control of future land use change in the National Park remain with other organisations, individuals and agencies. Whilst the National Park Authority continues to build positive relationships, facilitate positive progress and support others, we continue to be reliant on others as the main deciding influence and the practical agents of delivery. Whilst those land managers, agencies and NGOs themselves face funding and policy uncertainty and conflicting drivers, their efforts and those of the National Park Authority will remain constrained and struggle to fully realise the level of ambition required to successfully deliver nature restoration at scale.

9. Next steps

9.1. Key priorities for the year to come will include delivery of the next phase of the major landscape scale projects, the development of the Local Development Plan and its potential to deliver nature restoration through the planning system. We also hope to secure a further allocation of Nature Restoration funding to continue to expand this programme.

9.2. Over the coming month we will review progress this year both by the National Park Authority and partners and, alongside the finalisation of budgets, we will use this to review to prioritise and update delivery plans for the coming year.

10. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Biodiversity Duty Report

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