

# National Park Place Programme Delivery Update

## Agenda Item 12

### National Park Authority Board Meeting

10 June 2024

Paper for decision

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#### 1. Purpose

- 1.1. To provide an update on delivery of the National Park Place Programme, A Place-based Approach to Visitor Infrastructure Investment. The Programme update considers priorities in the Annual Operating Plan for 2023-24 and for 2024-25 and has been expanded to include agreed priorities for partner and third-party sites.
- 1.2. This update presents:
  - a) A summary of progress in 2023-24,
  - b) Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Studies for both Strathard and The Trossachs and for Callander and the Surrounding Area (Callander),
  - c) A text version of the Place Programme Delivery Route Map – which sets out the approach to achieving the relevant priorities on the ground for the Low Carbon Place Chapter in the National Park Partnership Plan 2024-2029, and,
  - d) An outline of priorities for 2024-25.

## 2. Recommendations

2.1. Members are asked to:

- a) **Note** progress in 2023-24.
- b) **Note** the content of background reports, Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Studies, for both Strathard and The Trossachs and for Callander.
- c) **Note** the direction of budget and resources in 2024-25.
- d) **Consider and endorse** The Place Programme Delivery Route Map (Route Map) as a guide to our work to continue to assemble a multi-year delivery programme and to influence our partners to invest in their assets. The Place Programme Delivery Route Map (Route Map) is a supplement to the Position Statement for the Place Programme approved by the Board in June 2022, as amended in June 2023.

## 3. Contribution to National Park Partnership Plan

- 3.1. The Place Programme Approach and Partnership Projects Summary were developed under the period of the National Park Partnership Plan 2018-23, and the Place Programme Approach has helped inform the National Park Partnership Plan as a background paper.
- 3.2. The work detailed in this report progresses delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan 2024-2029 objective, Deliver a multi-year place programme. This objective sits within the 2045 outcome “Improving Popular Places and Routes, by 2045 the National Park has high quality visitor infrastructure and facilities”, as one of the three outcomes under the section Creating a Low Carbon Place.
- 3.3. The thematic priorities of the Place Programme are incorporated in the National Park Partnership Plan Policy for Improving Popular Places and Routes. *“We will ensure that the National Park Authority and its partners take a co-ordinated place-based approach to investing in higher quality visitor facilities across publicly owned sites to ensure a sustainable balance between local needs, environmental sensitivities, and visitor demand. There will be a particular focus on ensuring improvements that enable sustainable travel, improved accessibility, visitor safety and responsible tourism.”.*

## 4. Background

- 4.1. As presented at the board meeting of June 2022 and as amended at June 2023 the Place Programme<sup>1</sup> sets out a new multi-year programme for capital

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<sup>1</sup> National Park Place Programme <https://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org/place-programme/>

investment in our visitor infrastructure. The position statement outlined 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 National Park Partnership Plan 2024-2029 sets out the priorities and therefore the Place Programme 2024-2029 will primarily be focussed in the Priority Areas identified: West Loch Lomond extending into Balloch, East Loch Lomond, Strathard and The Trossachs and Callander and surrounding area.
- 4.3. To date the programme and the work of the National Park Authority has focussed on developing a pipeline of project activity which prioritises investment on the most impactful and deliverable sites with a clear focus on sustainable transport adaptations, taking a pragmatic approach to the implementation of strategy that reflects the capacity of partners. For example, interventions at Balmaha have slipped where Rowardennan has come forward as that was more deliverable on East Loch Lomond.
- 4.4. The Delivery Route Map within this update represents a guide to strategically manage a multi-year investment programme, but it does not prejudice any future capital budget decisions the Board, or partners, may make in future years. It updates and replaces the Partnership Projects Summary Tables of the Place Programme and is intended as a tool with which to engage with government, potential funders, communities, and business. Having a strategic plan in place will increase our likely success and that of the other partners in securing budget and external funding to projects, particularly the Visit Scotland managed Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF).
- 4.5. The Delivery Route Map has been developed from the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Studies and has also initially drawn from the Balloch Charette Report May 2016. It also reflects engagement undertaken through the National Park Partnership Plan development process. Community and business engagement will continue with further phases of work. Notably in Balloch there will be an engagement process this year to support a masterplanning exercise of the pierhead area around the Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway to better accommodate multiple demands on the site. Following this it is envisaged that more local engagement will take place when masterplanning exercises for the Balloch station area and Balloch Castle Country Park are undertaken in due course with the agreement of West Dunbartonshire Council. These may develop further projects to add to those completed by West Dunbartonshire Council in 2019 at the village square at Moss of Balloch.
- 4.6. It should be noted that the projects are part of delivering a Low Carbon Place and as such many of the projects are fundamental to realising our Net Zero National Park vision by ensuring key sites are facilitating alternative sustainable and active travel opportunities.

- 4.7. Delivery is subject to funding availability and endorsing it does not represent a Board budget decision. We will continuously review the Route Map against progress made and new opportunities that may arise.

## 5. Place Programme Delivery Progress 2023-24

- 5.1. The delivery of the Place Programme has two main strands: strategic development, largely informed by Strategic Infrastructure Development Studies, and then delivery which takes project development through a design and funding stage to then move to delivery on the ground.
- 5.2. The capital investment by the National Park Authority in Place Programme Activity in 2023-24 was £1.6 million, this was focused on delivery at Tarbet Loch Lomond, Conic Hill, Luss Pier and development work across the park. This presents a significant uplift from previous years, as the chart below shows. Investment at Tarbet in 2023-24 and 2024-25 is supported by a £750,000 grant from VisitScotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF).

Year	Investment by NPA	Cumulative total
2021-22	£0.1 million	£0.1 million
2022-23	£0.9 million	£1.0 million
2023-24	£1.6 million	£2.6 million

- 5.2.1. In Year 3, 2023-24, The National Park Authority committed to the priorities focussed on finishing those projects that were nearing completion at the close of 2023 and 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 in the AOP:
- a) *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.*
  - b) *Commence detailed design work for a series of visitor infrastructure projects along East Loch Lomond, allowing development of detailed planning and funding applications.*
  - c) *Undertake year two of the Conic Hill Path upgrades.*
  - d) *Complete Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Studies (STIDs) for Callander and Strathard and Trossachs, and undertake a final park-wide review and consolidation Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Study STID.*

Further projects for the NPA set out in the Partner Summary tables at June 2023 Board included - Luss Pier safety and accessibility improvements and subject to funding, design work at Falls of Falloch for biodiversity and visitor management benefits.

- 5.2.2. Partner body commitments in the paper of June 2023 for the period included: The Trossachs Visitor Management RTIF project completion, Design Work at Arrochar Glen Loin car park; A82 signage design; Benmore Botanic Garden design work; Tyndrum Infrastructure Group improvements at design stage.

- 5.3. The delivery of the Place Programme in 2023-2024 is set out in the table below. The table shows what was expected to be delivered / progressed for Year 3 and what has and hasn't been achieved. Unless otherwise stated in the table then the lead partner is the National Park Authority.

Type of activity and delivery progress at 31 March 2024	Projects/activities committed to in Year 3, 2023-24
Strategic work completed (2)	Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Study for Callander and Surrounding Area.  Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Study for Strathard and The Trossachs.
Strategic work underway (2)	Park-wide Delivery Route Map to combine infrastructure partnership priorities and a multiyear action plan due to complete in Spring 2024, June NPA Board report.  National Park Design Guide (internal and for briefing of consultants) sections on Furniture and Signage completed, remaining sections drafted and due to complete in Spring 2024, June NPA Board report.
Design Stage (6)	Rowardennan Visitor Site Masterplan supported by a £20,000 grant from Visit Scotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF).  Falls of Falloch design for biodiversity and visitor management benefits.  Tyndrum Changing Places Toilet, led by Tyndrum Community Infrastructure Group  Benmore Botanic Garden (delivery body Benmore Garden).  Glen Loin Cobbler car park; progress made with a draft design supported by a £20,000 grant from Visit Scotland's

	Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) (delivery body Argyll & Bute Council).  A82 signage design underway (Transport Scotland)
Site work completed (4)	Conic Hill Path upgrade Year 2.  Luss Pier safety and accessibility improvements.  The Trossachs Visitor Management RTIF project (delivery body Steamship Sir Walter Scott Trust).  A82 and Arrochar; support to temporary facilities (delivery body Argyll & Bute Council).
Site work underway (2)	Tarbet, Loch Lomond - Phase 1 of a multiyear plan to redevelop the site, due to complete in Summer 2024.  Trossachs Connectivity - sustainable Travel Hub at Ben Venue car park in partnership with FLS, due to complete in Spring 2024.
Area where progress has been slower than planned owing to lack of partnership resource (1)	Balmaha, developing projects from the STID and masterplan processes, both supported by RTIF.

5.4. For Partnership activity where the National Park Authority is not the clear lead then scoping conversations have started with joint projects with West Dunbartonshire at Balloch Pierhead area and Stirling about how to make progress at Balmaha and Drymen.

5.5. The National Park Authority supported Tyndrum Infrastructure Group with the design and planning stage of the Changing Places Toilet, in addition Stirling Council provided support to the group to source funding.

5.6. At Benmore Garden, Argyll and Bute Council awarded £50,000 from their UK Shared Prosperity Fund Vibrant & Living Spaces Grant. The grant is to support redeveloping the Walled Garden space through installation of a reflecting pool that will add a striking centrepiece, improve pathways, plant a pictorial meadow and introduce a sustainable water supply. The project will help Benmore attract new audiences from near and far, unlock new events, educational and cultural programming, and pave the way for wider development of the surrounding spaces at Benmore.

5.7. Perth and Kinross Council tourism infrastructure work in 2023-24 has focussed on areas outside the National Park. As part of a range of improvements the council has worked with partners to provide two motorhome waste disposal points that should also help ease pressure within

the east of the Park – one in Aberfeldy (RTIF supported) and one at Broxden, Perth on the A9, growing the network surrounding the National Park.

- 5.8. In summary, when activity is compared with that planned in the National Park Authority AOP 2023-24 and the delivery tables (Year 3) in the Place Programme Report to Board of June 2023, then of the seventeen activities we set out to deliver then The Parkwide review study is one quarter behind, and further design work has not progressed at Balmaha. All other fifteen activities have been/are being delivered by the partnership as planned. The eighteenth additional activity which we had hoped to bring forward into 2023-24 plan is in partnership working at Balloch at the Pierhead, this is programmed in to start Spring 2024.

## **6. Progressing Place Programme Thematic Priorities – Design Guide.**

- 6.1. The National Park Authority has been working on a Design Guide for Visitor Infrastructure to support delivery of the themes of the Place Programme, now incorporated in the Policy of the National Park Partnership Plan.
- 6.2. Delivering against the National Park Partnership Plan Policy is vital so that *people have a high-quality experience visiting the National Park and are able to use great services, facilities and routes with less impact on nature or contributing to climate change. Communities see fewer impacts of tourism on everyday life. Nature is recovering more rapidly in less visited areas, where priority has been given to non-motorised access and recreation activity.* The Design Guide is a case study in actions taken to deliver on thematic principles across all live and potential projects. The design guide was noted in the place Programme Approach as a Park-wide strategic piece of work to support delivery of themes.
- 6.3. The Design Guide, due to complete in 2024-25 Quarter 1, will assist the National Park Authority in delivering the aims and objectives of the Place Programme with a clear focus on accessibility, inclusion, and sustainability. It will assist project teams to deliver visitor infrastructure projects of a consistently high quality. It has been developed in-house by the Place Projects team commencing in late 2022 and following thorough engagement with Estates, Access, Communications, Visitor services, Ranger and Planning internal teams.
- 6.4. The Design Guide will be used as part of the procurement process to ensure appointed design and consultancy service providers understand the National Park Authority requirements in relation to the design of our visitor infrastructure. It will also improve efficiency by providing clear guidance to design teams on common questions about the design and specification of our visitor infrastructure. The Design Guide can also be shared with partners.

## **7. Place Programme Delivery Route Map**

- 7.1. The Delivery Route Map aims to show a coordinated joined up strategic approach to investment by the Public Sector Partnership (National Park Visitor Management Group – NPVMG), replacing the Partnership Projects Summary tables that were provided in the 2022 Place Programme Approach position statement and subsequent 2023 update.
- 7.2. It is an update from the Partnership Projects Summary of the Place Programme based on the learning over the first 3 years of the capital investment programme, to reflect the priorities in the new National Park Partnership plan 2024 – 2029 and fully reflect visitor infrastructure investment priorities in a post Covid funding landscape.
- 7.3. The Delivery Route Map focuses on delivering the National Park Partnership Plan objective, Deliver a multi-year place programme. It is focussed on public assets that really change visitor, community, and business experience. Sitting alongside this is the regular maintenance /minor works of partners and other community projects. The Route Map sets the direction of travel in delivering the National Park Partnership Plan 2024-2029.
- 7.4. Evolution and refinement of the Partnership Projects Summary to move to a Delivery Route Map aims to set out the direction of travel in a clearer more accessible format tailored to each area, and clearly showing delivery priorities at a local level and also the overall strategy for the National Park.
- 7.5. The Route Map is to be read in conjunction with the Place Programme Approach and the National Park Partnership Plan and sets out priorities for investment for the period 2024 – 2029, with an indicative extension to 2034, for visitor infrastructure across the National Park focussed on:
  - a) Following the National Park Partnership Plan policy and mapping that is focussed on priority areas and primary and secondary hubs,
  - b) Putting the Policy for Improving Popular Places and Routes via the Place Programme into action,
  - c) Delivering accelerated projects on East and West Loch Lomond which are already well developed and have funding packages well progressed.
- 7.6. The Delivery Route Map provides a clear statement of intent as to where investment is prioritised with indicative timelines and investment need. It is intended as a tool with which to engage with government, potential funders, communities, and business.
- 7.7. This change ensures that the additional work undertaken through The National Park Partnership Plan development process and the additional Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Studies at both Strathard and The Trossachs and Callander are taken into account.



- 7.8. Further Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Studies have not been planned for the National Park Partnership Plan period 2024-2029 as the Infrastructure Investment Priorities in the National Park are shown clearly in the National Park Partnership Plan. Feedback from Visit Scotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) fund managers has been that these priorities are clear enough and what they require to see is a high level plan for investment park-wide. Balloch is already recognised as a priority key gateway to the park, with the Balloch Charrette Report of May 2016 still giving a good framework for visitor infrastructure investment, future community engagement will focus on master planning and design stages.
- 7.9. In Balloch, following on from the Charette in 2016 and the improvements implemented by West Dunbartonshire Council at the village square at Moss of Balloch of 2019, further rounds of community engagement are planned. We are committed to masterplan the pierhead area around Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway with partners, including West Dunbartonshire Council, to better meet user needs and will engage with the public on that this year. At Balloch Station and Balloch Castle Country Park we are reliant on commitment from West Dunbartonshire Council to take engagement forward.
- 7.10. We will continuously review the Delivery Route Map against progress made and new opportunities that may arise. The Delivery Route Map will also be refreshed in line with future National Park Partnership Plans.

## 8. Priorities for 2024-25

- 8.1. The investment by the National Park Authority in Place Programme activity in 2024-25 is planned to continue at £1.6 million, with 95% of this funding secured, with potential to rise to £1.7 million, and is focused on delivery at Tarbet Loch Lomond, Conic Hill, completion of Ben Venue car park sustainable travel amendments and development work across the park. This presents sustained investment from 2023-24 as the table below shows.

Year	Investment by NPA	Cumulative total
2021-22	£0.1 million	£0.1 million
2022-23	£0.9 million	£1.0 million
2023-24	£1.6 million	£2.6 million
2024-25	£1.6 million	£4.2 million

- 8.2. The priority projects with the National Park Authority as the lead partner are as set out in the Annual Operating Plan 2024-25 and in line with NPPP priorities. They are summarised in the table below.

<b>Type of activity: strategic; design or delivery on the ground (site)</b>	<b>Projects/activities committed to 2024-25</b> <i>Note this is year 1 of The Delivery Route Map (this would have been year 4 of original 5-year plan)</i>
Strategic work	<p>Complete the Park-wide strategic tourism infrastructure consolidating study in the form of an overview Route Map, focused on the priority areas identified in the National Park Partnership Plan, to deliver the Place Programme.</p> <p>Establish a partnership to oversee the preparation of a masterplan for the Balloch Pierhead area, which will also consider wider linkages and coordinated actions.</p> <p>National Park Design Guide (internal and for briefing of consultants) sections on Furniture and Signage completed, remaining sections drafted and due to complete in Spring 2024 (non-AOP).</p>
Design work	<p>Continue the masterplanning work to be undertaken at Rowardennan and explore the works to be undertaken at Balmaha as part of the Place Programme.</p> <p>Tarbet, Loch Lomond –complete the design of Phase 2.</p>
Site work	<p>Complete the upgrades to the path on Conic Hill, concluding all works on the ground and fully reopening,</p> <p>Complete Phase 1 of the works at Tarbet.</p>

8.3. Following National Park Authority support for the design and planning stage of the Changing Places Toilet, the Tyndrum Infrastructure Group is now working with Stirling Council to secure construction funds with an aim to commence works by November. This project is a vital step in creating a more inclusive society and will realise the Place Programme thematic priority of supporting inclusion and improving accessibility in the National Park and would increase the network in the Park, adding to the Changing Places Toilet Stirling Council installed in Aberfoyle in 2022-23. The work of the Tyndrum Infrastructure Group is to be commended and shows a clear place-based approach.

## 9. Risks

- 9.1. 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.
- 9.2. Risks to delivery of both programme and the projects within, for the Park Authority and delivery partners 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, continued resourcing of joint partner working, and managing external expectations with prioritisation of works. In 2024-25 we saw the risk of resourcing of siteworks materialise with tender returns coming back higher than estimated for both Luss Pier and Tarbet, Loch Lomond.

- 9.3. It is noted that Visit Scotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund RTIF position is that while work on a range of projects continues in 2024-2025, the fund is not currently accepting any new applications. RTIF is currently our main funder outside of National Park Authority Capital Funds and requires applications to be supported by a strategic plan, therefore the preparation of a strategic programme is essential in unlocking the level of resources and the support required from partners.
- 9.4. We are seeking to take the opportunity to be ready to access Visit Scotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) and a range of other funds using the Delivery Route Map, stating the case for the National Park in the overall business case for tourism infrastructure investment in Scotland. This is underpinned by Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Studies, Local Place Plans and in Balloch Charette Report, along with design and planning work developed with the primary aim of securing funding to deliver change on the ground.
- 9.5. It should be noted that whilst all partners will use their best efforts to prioritise and progress the programme, at a time of challenging national revenue budgetary positions there is a risk we are unable to adequately staff the programme within the partnership, all partner delivery. Without sufficient resource across the partnership there is a risk that we are unable to leverage funding or to have the core resources required for effective management of those projects.
- 9.6. Development work in 2024-25 is an essential risk control measure as should the programme falter on site delivery in future years 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.
- 9.7. Developing a pipeline of projects with flexibility of scale and delivery is key to a long-term approach to investment. The partnership will use its influence to support and promote the opportunities and benefits in investing in a place-based approach to visitor infrastructure and will seek to identify where private investment can complement and help deliver further works, for example, through the Local Development Plan.

## 10. Next steps

- 10.1. The National Park Authority priority projects within the Place Programme will be reported to Board through the Annual Operating Plan Updates.
- 10.2. An indicative summary update of all partner activity against the Route Map Priorities will be provided annually within the 2025 Board programme. Formal monitoring will be through the National Park Partnership Plan.
- 10.3. The Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development studies for both Strathard and the Trossachs and for Callander will be published on the National Park Authority website and updates will be provided to partner organisations and stakeholders in these areas.
- 10.4. The approved Place Programme Delivery Route Map will be designed and then published as a communication tool for the partnership, to be used with government, Visit Scotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF), other potential funders, communities, and businesses.

## 11. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Strathard and The Trossachs Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Study (Consultancy Report)

Appendix 2 – Callander Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Study (Consultancy Report)

Appendix 3 – Route Map

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