



Pre-Season Stakeholder Briefing 2024

Main Headlines/Actions

26 March 2024 - 15:00-16:30 Online

Attendees

Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park:

Martin Earl – NPA Board Member (Chair), Matt Buckland – Visitor Operations Manager, James Downie – Ranger Service Manager, Craig Gavigan – Visitor Operations Support Officer, Cara Thom – Support Assistant

NPVMG Partner Organisations (National Park Visitor Management Group – previously known as The National Park Safe Recovery Action Group NSPRAG):

Police Scotland L Division - Kirstin McLatchie and Colin Cameron

Forestry and Land Scotland – Andrew Clarke

Perth & Kinross Council – Arek Nowrotek and Leanne Dickson

Martin Earl welcomed everyone to the meeting

- While setting the scene for today's meeting, Martin talked about expected visitor numbers this season and funding. He also mentioned the National Visitor Levy which is currently going through the Parliament. The National Park (NPA) has made a submission to the consultation.
- National Park Partnership Plan has now been approved by the NPA Board and looks very different to previous plans. Major pillars of the Plan focus on the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis. By having these as priorities, it will shape and support visitor management across the National Park.

National Park Authority Update – Matt Buckland

National picture - There is a continued commitment to the [National Visitor Management Strategy](#), which is a Scotland-wide plan for Visitor Management, but an overall reduction in funding.

- **Visitor Management Strategy Steering Group** is chaired by VisitScotland and consists of Cairngorms National Park Authority, Forestry & Land Scotland, Highland Council,

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Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park, NatureScot, Police Scotland, Scottish Land & Estates, Ramblers, Scottish Government (tourism) and Transport Scotland.

- **Sub-groups involve:**
 - **Coordination Group** - meets on a monthly basis throughout the season and that brings together all the different strands to look at directing resources, joint communications and look at some of the updates that have come out of the other groups.
 - **Operational Group** - looks at ongoing issues and how to solve them but also looking at some of the longer term fixtures such as what can be done with enforcement in the future.
 - **Education and Marketing Group**
 - **Motorhomes and Camping** (have recently carried out a survey, see report here: [Research findings](#)). What's missing is lots of facilities, not only for safe overnight parking for these motorhomes and campervans but also waste disposal facilities. This group is working and advising Scottish Government as to what is needed for motorhome users in Scotland as we know sales of these recreational vehicles are continuing to rise
 - **Sustainable Transport** - like active travel strategies etc but increasingly looking at sustainable bus routes round the country
 - **Digital Technology** - how technology can be used for visitor management. Looking at this in a few different ways, so making sure there is good up-to-date information available through apps/websites. But also sensor technology for monitoring visitor numbers, which helps cases for additional funding and to give evidence bases for different strategies and plans
 - **Better Places Funding** – That's no longer with us this year, which is disappointing as partners/communities have accessed that fund over the last few years and carried out a huge amount of work with a relatively small amount of money.
 - **Rural Tourism Infrastructure Funding (RTIF)** – paused this year. We've seen a lot of good activity and changes to facilities based on that fund. We're hoping that it's going to be a pause and not an end.
 - **Bi-weekly monitoring** - The NPA and other areas of high pressure around the country provide information to the coordination group on a bi-weekly basis. This helps us understand where the hotspots are over the whole of Scotland and at

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the end of the year that data is compiled into a report that goes directly to Scottish Government to inform future funding.

Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park Update

National Park Visitor Management Group (Previous NSPRAG) – Matt

This is a partnership group with the NPA, Police Scotland, Forestry and Land Scotland, Transport Scotland and the 4 local authorities that cover the National Park. We meet before key weekends like school holidays and public holidays. The group will focus on coordinating our resources from lessons learnt and sharing intelligence from different organisation. We also have a weekly contact list that makes it easier for officers on-the-ground to communicate with each other. A weekly report is produced and circulated to the partner organisations to help review the outcomes.

A return to ‘normal’, but what was that?

We are seeing Increasing visitor numbers, and a return of the international market, especially visitors from North America which is positive. However, the cost-of-living crisis means that domestic visitors are still coming to the countryside for leisure pursuits but do not have as much to spend. Although there is a good management model in place, we still have perennial issues like litter, fires, and congestion.

Boots on the Ground and more strategic investment in Infrastructure and Services

In terms of a balance, we know that having staff presence on the ground makes a difference. We're lucky to keep a similar level of ranger service as we've had in the past few years. We see that as an optimum model that goes alongside a longer-term investment in infrastructure and services. A lot of that is done through the Place Programme, which is the NPA's infrastructure programme. The newer part of that is looking at sustainable transport, which will increase over the next few years which we'll look at later in this meeting.

Quick overview of the National Parks aims for communications this season – Craig Gavigan

Our overall aim is to educate and inspire people to visit in a responsible and more sustainable way. We want to provide practical information to help visitors plan ahead, where possible. Know how to make climate and nature friendly choices for their visit and feel inspired to do so. Understand how the Bylaws affect them. Feel good about playing their part in protecting the National Park for future generations.

Key themes:

Water Safety; Wildlife disturbance; Livestock-worrying; Parking; Camping; Biosecurity; Litter and Fires.

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Types of communications:

- Regular communications will be going out encouraging responsible behaviour across our website, social media channels and press.
- For this season we will be focussing campaigns on nature-friendly visiting, sustainable transport, water safety including the Loch Lomond Bylaws.
- Communications around closures and relaunch of our visitor site at Tarbet.
- Responsive communications as well, responding to issues as they arise, for example, fire safety messaging when there's a higher risk of fire.
- Maintaining our stakeholder communications from our project teams of Conic Hill and Tarbet.

We will also continue our place-based visitor management groups; the pre-season briefing; bi-monthly stakeholder bulletins, our destination group and update to stakeholder communication webpages.

Infrastructure and Services

Facilities opening for Easter Weekend

Our camping permit areas have been open for the last month. All of the toilet facilities that the National Park Authority manage will be open for their summer hours from this weekend, which is open until 8pm going up to 9pm. Opening from this Friday will be the Balmaha Visitor Centre and our campsites in Inchcailloch, Loch Chon and Loch Achray.

Infrastructure and Place Programme

You may have heard about the Strategic Infrastructure Design Studies (STIDs) that we've been developing over the last few years, which have included West and East Loch Lomond areas. The 'Strathard and the Trossachs' and 'Callander and the surrounding area' plans will be going to the board meeting for approval this June.

Some projects that are continuing or just completed:

- **Luss Pier** – has had an upgrade with railings at the end of it to help manage anti-social behaviour
- **Tarbet** – currently being redeveloped. Phase 1 is focussing on making the car park safer from a visitor-flow perspective. Creating new motorhome facilities and making the site more accessible. Phase 2 will look at improvements to the buildings. There will be some disruption in the season but looking to minimise this.
- **Trossachs Connectivity Project** – Upgrade to Ben Venue Car Park. Work is essentially complete with some minor works to finish which will happen after the Easter holidays.

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- **Conic Hill path at Balmaha** – continuing this year and should be complete by the end of the financial year, which is a positive.

New elements

- Looking at a masterplan for Rowardennan to re-develop the site, looking at parking, links for sustainable transport, better toilet facilities etc.
- Balloch Masterplan – build on work of the charette, but there are also place plans being developed which will feed into that. There will be a focus on the Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway.

Sustainable Transport Programme

- We will be forming a Mobility Partnership Group and Stakeholder Mobility Group to drive forward the work required to improve the provision of sustainable transport options for people travelling to and from the National Park
- East Loch Lomond Mobility plan – inform infrastructure investments – supporting the gradual transition for car use to public transport alternatives
- Shuttle Bus Pilot – Callander to Aberfoyle. If we do manage to get it going it wouldn't only serve the 2 car parks in Callander and Aberfoyle, but link in with existing bus services, the X10 from Glasgow to Aberfoyle, and the 59 from Stirling, so that would give us a lot of data to inform future services going forward.

Regulation and Enforcement

Boots on the ground - Jim Downie

- We currently have 20 permanent Rangers and 18 permanent seasonal rangers and have recruited an additional 27 seasonal Rangers.
- Our summer deployment will be much the same as last year with patrols focussed on the priority days with normal and late cover on land patrols on the weekends. ELL, WLL, Trossachs, Breadalbane, Strathard and Three Lochs Forest Drive all have associated patrol routes.
- All our field staff, as well as carrying out their visitor management role give out key messaging on water and fire safety and how to behave responsibly in the outdoors.
- Check safety and rescue equipment and carry out site condition monitoring on permit sites.
- Boat patrols will continue enforcing the Loch Lomond Byelaws. We will also be undertaking work maintaining and installing hazard buoys and aids to navigation.
- We are staffing and providing public facing facilities at Balmaha Visitor Centre, Duncan Mills Slipway, Loch Achray and Loch Chon campsites. We also provide regular Ranger presence on Inchcailloch.
- We will continue to engage with Practical Conservation Volunteers and support our Future Nature programme as well as supporting our Access functions providing inspection and light touch maintenance on our key path network.

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- We support our Outdoor Learning programme offering 4 Ranger days per week to education bookings.
- We are also supporting Pop up Water Safety events at various hotspots throughout the park.

National Park Police Officer – Matt Buckland gave the following updates

Scott Kennedy is continued to be funded this year and seconded to the National Park. The National Park Police Officer operates out of C Division (Striling area) and he supports the Rangers with the Camping Byelaws but also helps in training police officers in understanding the camping byelaws and Loch Lomond Byelaws. Scott can work across the National Park and liaises with other police colleagues. Scott is also the Secretariat for the Partnership for Rural Crime in the National Park.

Volunteering

In terms of volunteers, we have 202 volunteers this year. 99 Volunteer Rangers and 103 Practical Conservation Volunteers. Last year there was 7,500 hours of volunteer work alone and more than 1000 volunteering opportunities. The volunteers continue to be extremely important to us and we're very grateful for the time that they're able to give us.

Loch Lomond Byelaws

Preparation throughout the season for changes coming into effect on November 1st this year, so the current 2013 Byelaws will remain in place until that date. Over the summer there will be increased communication to make loch users aware of what those byelaws will look like and some of the Buoys will be put in place in an advisory basis to help people get used to them.

Camping management Byelaw Review

This will be the first year that we'll undertake a review of our Camping Management Byelaws. This year will be very much an internal focus of the NPA to understand what has worked and hasn't worked. Towards the end of the year, we'll carry out some early stakeholder engagement before we go to a more formal public consultation.

Partner Updates

Police Scotland L Division – Kirsten McLatchie, Area Commander and Deputy Colin Cameron.

Operation Ballaton – Plan is in place for Balloch plus shores of Loch Lomond, including Luss for the season. Review & monitor. Everything is in place and with all our partners working together we'll be able to minimise any anti-social behaviour or disruption on the communities around Loch Lomond Shores for the summer and fair weather period.

Muck-Up Day is taking place on 19 April which the first day of Exam Leave for Senior pupils in WDC, learning from past experiences there will be extra vigilance in place.

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Forestry and Land Scotland – Andrew Clarke

Unfortunately, we've got a reduced ranger resource this year so we're having to prioritise that to key weekends where we have overtime resource available.

We'll have a duty management system on-call to liaise with partners for anything.

Stay the night scheme for motorhomes will continue on the designated sites through the National Park.

Argyll & Bute Council – Matt gave a brief update

They have 6 enforcement officers that cover the whole of their area. With the new Transport Regulation Order (TRO) that's in Luss, they are going to have a particular focus in Luss and put resource in there, especially at the start of the season to manage that TRO.

Stirling Council – Matt gave a brief update

They've already had their enforcement officers out last weekend at East Loch Lomond. They'll continue to try to do that wherever possible at hotspots like East Loch Lomond and also in the Trossachs. But it's very challenging as they're competing with other areas in their region out with the National Park. Stirling Council have been working with us on some of the place programme work, like Rowardennan, and if the shuttle bus pilot runs this year, they will also be supporting us with their expertise on that.

Perth & Kinross Council – Arek Nowrotek

We will have some Rangers this season, but it was down to the wire with the budget settings, and our budget is down this year with the loss of the Better Places funding.

We are in the process of recruiting Rangers but only be on a casual basis rather than a seasonal basis. However, we do have some returners that will start to be on patrol from Easter. At the moment we are only running a skeleton crew and it's unlikely that we will have capacity to get into the Lochearnhead area which is our overlapping area with the National Park. If there are any issues these will have to be done reactively, so please contact us.

West Dunbartonshire Council – Matt gave a brief update

Again, in terms of WDC, the main focus for them is Balloch and working closely with Kirsten on Operation Ballaton. They have secured funding for additional wardens that will be mainly focused around Balloch Castle Country Park which is an area where you can get anti-social behaviour and youth disorder. They have also put in some additional CCTV in Balloch Country Park and are also working on strengthening their alcohol byelaws.

Martin thanked the Partner Organisations for attending and giving updates.

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Q&A

Kate Bovill, Development Officer, Strathard Community Trust

- Question 1

Asking about the wider strategies that Visit Scotland are leading on and when we expect to get those published. The transport one, digital tech and waste disposal. There's quite an issue with black water disposal across the National Park.

Matt Buckland: They are not individual strategies but working groups. The overall strategy is the National Visitor Management Strategy. The camping and motorhome study is available on the [Visit Scotland website](#).

In terms of feedback loops, I feed back issues to these groups and also sit on some of them. There is an action plan on the Visit Scotland website as well as more information. Those groups are very much trying to solve those types of problems. If there's a next project that comes of it, for example, if Scottish Government want to try and run an Aires programme, and look at something across Scotland, that would be the next step. If published documents come out of that, they would go on the Visit Scotland website.

- Question 2

Are there timescales for this kind of work?

Matt Buckland: No timescales but it doesn't stop work happening on the ground. So, through the STID process and the Place Programmes, motorhomes are being considered. The two things the National Park really needs to support motorhome users are safe haven overnight camping spots and waste disposal points. When we undertake the Camping Management Byelaw Review we are going to include motorhomes as part of that wider picture. No timescales, but things we know have been really needed for a number of years. In redoing the site at Tarbet, which has proved to be very successful, there's been quite a lot of lessons learned there about design. We at least need disposal points at the National Park entrances, at the very least.

Simon Miller, CEO, Luss Estates

- Question 1

Asked about the Moss O Balloch Slipway owned by West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC). Do you know, has any agreement been reached with WDC to try and control the number of idiots getting onto the Loch on jetskis?

Matt Buckland: We have been talking to WDC, but no agreement has yet been reached on that. They obviously have a difficulty as they have a couple of public slipways in WD as they have one in Dumbarton as well. If they did look to close it, it would need to go up to the committee to do that. Through talks with us, they have put some additional signage up, but it's a conversation that we still want to have with them this year to do more than that. Something is better than nothing, but it is not an effective control. You are right that it is the place we are worried about unregistered loch users. They tend to be jetskis purely because

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the size of the slipway makes it far easier for them compared to bigger boats which are difficult to launch on the Leven.

- Question 2

On Luss Pier, I think what you've done is fantastic. The question I have is how are you going to use the gate, and when?

Matt Buckland – If there's an antisocial behaviour issue, then call 101 for Police Scotland. There's a multi-agency water safety approach that we have, and there will be a very simple protocol for that. I think it would have to be a very extreme situation to shut the gate. But the Ranger Service will be working with the Police to make a call on that. I will send you information to before the weekend about that.

- Question 3

Have you managed to find a temporary solution yet to have CCTV on Luss Pier?

Matt Buckland – no, we're still working on a temporary solution.

General Points raised - Simon Miller raised awareness of a meeting to discuss litter management on the A82 that is being chaired by Jackie Baillie MSP. Kenny Auld will be attending and Martin Earl requested to see a copy of the notes of that meeting. Simon also raised the issue of the lack of toilet provision in Luss which is leading to people toileting in the bushes in the village which is not pleasant.

Katy Lamb, Kinlochard Village Hall

Question for Andrew about the Stay-the-Night scheme. Can people stay overnight in campervans in forestry sites that aren't designated 'Stay-the-Night' sites?

Andrew Clarke – Overnight parking is not permitted apart from our designated 'Stay the night' sites.

Katy Lamb – And do you have any signage to indicate that as our local tiny wee site I couldn't get my car in it the other day as it was full of overnight parking.

Andrew Clarke – If you drop me an email and let me know which site it is we can put specific 'no overnight parking' signs out, but we tend not to due to costs for the number of car parks we provide across the region.

Fergus Duncanson, RYA Scotland

- Question 1

Can I ask you the boat launching regime at Duncan Mills Slipway this year, is it going to be the same broadly as last year in terms of ranger support?

Jim Downie - Slipway will be running much the same and staffed at the same levels as last year.

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- Question 2

In terms of transport will the waterbus plan going to be the same as last year?

Matt Buckland – We don't have any additional waterbuses running this year, despite a number of conversations. There's going to be a bit of a gap this year, especially as we wanted a service that was going to run from Balloch to Balmaha and didn't manage to make that work with the operator in the end. But we are going to be continuing those conversations through the summer. You are quite right to bring it up as it's not just about buses at Loch Lomond. It really is about having that network and it's not where it should be at the moment and needs more improvements. There will be a limited [waterbus](#) running and I'll make sure to put details in the minutes.

- Question 3

You mentioned the feedback inbox, is that an email inbox or on the website?

Matt Buckland – it's an email inbox. So to raise any issues, please email feedback@lochlomond-trossachs.org. I'll also make sure this goes out in the minutes.

James Fraser, Steamship Sir Walter Scott, Loch Katrine

Question to Martin about getting advanced warning of any roadworks/road closures and that the signage is effective and true to the picture. Last year they had a nightmare with road closures linked to the Cycle events, and then welcomed roadworks in September which had inaccurate signage that led to significant income losses.

Martin Earl – So all 4 local authorities work to a very similar modus operandi that now that they've set their revenue budget, their Road Service Officers in each of the local authorities will be finalising their programme of upcoming works in the financial year. That will then go to the relevant committee in each local authority and we would expect in the next cycle of meetings, the month after Easter, we would expect to see that list of roadworks. We will then know what's coming. There's an opportunity then to have the conversations that where there are sensitive works, and this is across the NPA, of being aware of the roadwork notifications for everybody and making sure that they are flagged up early. For councillors, Community Councils to be on the case early. Just for people's information, one area of real concern, again, probably across all 4 local authorities, is the difference there is between how internal works are processed, so re-surfacing works for a section of road and how public utility works are processed. There is a big discrepancy in the amount of information that is required, and the processes to communicate public utility works and this can be a problem because all the people at the other end just see that it's council roadworks. And it often isn't. It's often public utility works. That's just for awareness. Electively be aware of planned works and flag them up to your councillors nice and early and that will help. Good point about signage though as it needs to be spot on and it hasn't.

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General point - raised by Christopher Roads, Strathard, about the closure of B&Bs in the area due to new Scottish Government Short term licensing regulations, so he would welcome more facilities for motorhomes, and would ask that this work be accelerated.

Martin closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.