

2024-25 Annual Operational Plan Progress to November

Agenda Item 13 – Appendix 1

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Monday 10 March

Paper for information

Annual Operational Plan 2024/25: Progress to February

Rating Key:

Complete	On Track	Behind Schedule	At Risk	Postponed to 2025/26	Cancelled
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AOP Activity	AOP Deliverable	February 2025 Update	Rating
Chapter 1: Restoring Nature			
Restoring Nature for Climate	Continue to expand the delivery of the Peatland Action programme of work, aiming to deliver 690 hectares of restoration at sites across the National Park	Projects 1 to 5 all fully completed, inspected and mapped, including data reports submitted . They total 505 ha. Projects 6 and 7 are underway with project 8 commencing wc 24 Feb. Monthly reporting to Scottish Government Peatland team continues. Internal Audit of peatland funding competed and report is on Audit and Risk Committee agenda for 04 March.	On Track
	Work with partners and stakeholders to create a 5-year woodland delivery and monitoring plan to increase and record the rate of woodland creation and improve woodland quality.	The final draft of the woodland delivery plan is now complete and will be taken to the next Future Nature Operational Group at the end of April for sign off.	On Track

	Produce a joint vision and shared ways of working for a landscape-scale approach to improving our water environment with key Future Nature partners including local Rivers and Fisheries Trusts.	Delivery work is complete and we are now finalising the annual review of progress and planning for the next year's program.	
Restoring Nature for Healthy Ecosystems	Continue to deliver key landscape partnership projects including beginning large scale delivery in Wild Strathfillan and applying for development funding for a Loch Lomond Rainforest project.	In Wild Strathfillan the Countryside Trust and partners are working hard to complete work despite tight and inflexible funding timelines. We have been successful in securing NRF development funding for Loch Lomond Rainforest and the expression of interest for National Lottery Funding has been accepted.	
	Finalise a National Park Priority Area Herbivore Action Plan with support from agencies and relevant Deer Management Groups and continue with programme of Herbivore Impact Assessment training for land managers.	The Herbivore Statement is ready to be published and work continues with partners on the Herbivore Delivery Plan. We have also been exploring opportunities for a community deer larder project with the East Loch Lomond Land Management Forum, and have delivered three Herbivore Impact Assessment training days this quarter.	
	Deliver a capital programme of Nature Restoration including projects such as Invasive Non-Native Species control in The Great Trossachs Forest and habitat restoration and water course tree planting with the Rivers and Fisheries Trusts.	There is no confirmation regarding next year as of yet but we are in positive liaison with Scottish Government and are optimistic about receiving an allocation of NRF funding in the coming year.	
	Development of a National Park Nature Network and an approach to securing biodiversity enhancement through the use of developer gains through the planning system, for inclusion in the draft Local Development Plan.	The report on Biodiversity Enhancement for Local Developments was successfully commissioned. The draft report has been submitted by the consultants and final report is on track to be completed by the end of March.	
	Develop the regenerative land use programme covering soil health, biodiversity audits and soil carbon knowledge exchange for year 1	We have continued to raise the profile of the programme with stakeholders. We have also had discussion with partners, including Nature Scot, to	

Regenerative Land Use	and trial on 3 pilot land holdings working with the owners / managers.	explore joint working opportunities within future agricultural policy discussions. Resilient Farm Network Land Use Programme is behind schedule due to a vacancy and team resource being used to support wider organisational objectives.	
	Working with the Palladium group continue the exploration of a trial ethical green finance mechanism to bring additional carbon market funding for woodland creation in the Park.	The Guidance document has been published on the website, and we have delivered press coverage and an event at Carrochan to share knowledge and understanding regarding green finance.	
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Chapter 2: Creating a Low-Carbon Place			
Connecting Everyone with Nature and Climate	Implement the updated Loch Lomond Byelaws – including fully operational user database and operational readiness for 1 November 2024.	<p>Digital Assurance Office assessments took place between the 20 Nov and 10 Dec and a positive and complimentary Assessment Report was received on 8 Jan 2025 with no 'showstoppers' identified.</p> <p>New system penetration test took place and found no major issues that would stop, or delay launch any further and found medium and small issues are being addressed by the developer prior to launch.</p> <p>Following previous timeline delay in Sep 24 a new 'Go-Live' date was identified in a phased approach with a 'Soft Launch' on Monday 17 Feb with the NPA Admin system and the Full Launch of Public portal the Registration Gateway on Monday 24 Feb.</p> <p>Re-registration letters' quick guide were created and distributed ahead of proposed launch date.</p>	

	Conduct an internal review of the Camping Management Byelaws and begin early stakeholder engagement in preparation for the statutory review due to take place in 2026.	The internal review has begun with workshops scheduled and Q4 tasks developed and programmed. Revised resource mapping exercise for Q4 and 25/26 largely complete.	
	Continue to develop and support the West Highland Way management group to enhance the sustainability of the route. With the group, set up a new charitable organisation to establish an expanded programme of fundraising to support the maintenance of the path.	<p>Work continues to transition the West Highland Way assets to the Trust with a target date of 1 April.</p> <p>The Trustees have met to discuss governance and priority requirements for the Trust to become operational. A business plan and strategy for the first one-two years are also being developed and work continues to identify potential funding sources.</p> <p>The local authority partners in the Management Group have been consulted re the transfer of assets, two have provided Trustees and discussions are ongoing re the commitment of funds to support the establishment of the Trust over the next two financial years. It is intended that a MOU/Terms of Reference be drafted to cover the relationship with the Trust once it is operational and the Management Group will continue to meet quarterly to focus on access, infrastructure and route management.</p>	
Improving popular Places and Routes	Complete the upgrades to the path on Conic Hill, concluding all works on the ground and fully reopening.	The primary path work has been completed and the path is now stone pitched from top to bottom. The contractors are working their way back down the Hill completing a substantial amount of snagging works as they go. These include drainage work and improving the landscaping and blocking to keep people on the pitched path surface.	

		<p>They will move to the stone storage site in early March for the restoration work which was part of the legal agreement with Montrose Estates. They will return to Conic for the additional landscaping of path sections 2 and 3 and final snagging before the 31 March deadline.</p>	
	<p>Complete Phase 1 of the works at Tarbet and complete the design of Phase 2.</p>	<p>Apart from EV charging the site is open and operational, with some grassed areas protected with temporary wire fencing.</p> <p>The EV charger installation and associated network upgrade is delayed due to various reasons including those caused by Storm Eowyn. This is now scheduled for late spring/ early summer 2025.</p> <p>Tarbet Phase 2 design work is due to commence in the spring.</p>	
	<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>Rowardennan Masterplan now has in principle Forestry and Land Scotland landowner approval and is on track for both planning application and funding application submission in Q4. These applications relate to a first phase of works focussed on inclusion and active travel through better visitor facilities, including toilets.</p> <p>Stirling Council continue to work on short-term interventions at Balmaha car park, with plans to upgrade parking meters. In parallel, as part of the emerging Mobility Partnership, the NPA is working with Stirling Council and Forestry and Land Scotland on a Car Park Study to consolidate data across car park owners along the East Loch Lomond corridor and explore economics of future car park operations. This draws on data from the NPA led car park usage surveys undertaken in</p>	

		September and will be the first part of a broader study in 2025/26 which will ultimately start to better manage demand to improve the local environment and visitor experience along the East Loch Lomond corridor.	
	Establish a partnership to oversee the preparation of a masterplan for the Balloch Pierhead area, which will also consider wider linkages and co-ordinated actions.	<p>The Improvement Action Plan for Balloch Pierhead report will be complete in March.</p> <p>The engagement with stakeholders continued through this period with a public event 30 November, along with targeted stakeholder walk over meetings and a final presentation of the draft findings and proposals to the stakeholder group in late February. An engagement summary has been prepared.</p> <p>As intended, the plan aims for a balance between local needs, environmental sensitivities and visitor demand to better accommodate the multiple demands on the site. There is a focus on improvements to the Pierhead to get it working better for its multiple users as well as improving accessibility, movement and connections to Balloch and Loch Lomond Shores.</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.	The Route Map final draft was included in the June 2024 Board Report and was approved.	
	Continue work to maintain and improve the Core Paths Network within the National Park, including priority sections at Gartmore and the West Highland Way.	The focus remains on externally-funded projects such as the design stages of the remaining sections of the Lochearnhead Railway Path and the barrier reduction project on the NCN7. The former is a multi-year, ongoing project. The design	

		and planning stage of the current phase of barrier reduction on NCN7 will be completed by the end of March with an expectation that the improvement works will be carried out in 25/26. Further upgrading of the West Highland Way has not been possible due to limited budget and staff resource.	
Low Carbon Travel for Everyone	Working with partners such as Transport Scotland, Sustrans, Local Authorities and Regional Transport Partnerships produce targeted sustainable travel and mobility strategies and action plans.	<p>A second meeting of the Leadership Group, comprising of representatives from the NPA, Local Authorities, Regional Transport Partners, Forestry and Land Scotland, Transport Scotland and VisitScotland, delivered in February as planned.</p> <p>Officer Working Groups being established to focus on specific areas with Transport Scotland offering graduate support where opportunities contribute to shared aims and objectives.</p>	
	Develop and deliver partnership arrangements around targeted shared resources which enable a new National Park Mobility Partnership and create a Route Map for enhanced sustainable transport in the National Park	<p>Continuing to build relationships with strategic partners through the Leadership Group, and ongoing engagement with wider stakeholders such as local transport operators, community groups, businesses, third sector organisations and young people is continuing in preparation of forming a Stakeholder and Insights Group in May.</p> <p>Relations also being built with national bodies including Public Health Scotland and Community Transport Association to widen support and opportunities.</p> <p>Early development work on a Mobility Route Map underway.</p>	
	Work with partners to establish a multi-year programme of piloting and developing new sustainable transport services, including	A comprehensive Evaluation Report has been independently produced by Strathclyde University on the Trossachs Explorer pilot to understand the service's impacts, areas for improvement and	

	community transport alongside land and water bus initiatives.	opportunities for future development. In parallel, support is being provided to Stirling Council's C60 pilot. Ongoing discussions with partners, funders and operators underway to explore opportunities for a 2025 pilot but challenges remain.	
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Chapter 3: Designing a Greener Way of Living			
Transitioning to a Greener Economy	Work with partners to explore new funding models in the areas of natural capital and green investment, including developing understanding of impacts and governance requirements. Including exploring Green Finance mechanism for the NP with partners such as Revere.	Work continues to explore the potential for green finance investment but the major current focus, having had the Expression of Interest accepted, is the opportunity for large scale National Lottery Heritage fund grant.	
	Develop green tourism action plans in conjunction with local tourism and hospitality industry partners, working in partnership with the National Park Destination Group.	A proposal to the UK National Parks Sustainable Tourism Officers group has been received and will be discussed at the March group meeting. The National Park Destination Group climate and nature subgroup has been a critical part of our strategic engagement and development of nature-based tourism New members have joined, including our first focused nature-business tourism provider, developing new ideas for the year ahead, such as developing green champions, and link with Visit Scotland's recently appointed Net Zero Manager to further develop their capacity. The West Highland Way storymap that was launched at the end of last year is proving popular with visitors, and we have seen people sharing their own photos and stories, as well as engaging with our content.	

Supporting Thriving Rural Communities	Write, design and undertake consultation on an updated Gaelic Language Plan.	Consultation on Gaelic Language Plan closed on 13 th May. Final recommended Plan presented to Board for approval in June 2024.	
	Support remaining communities to produce Local Place Plans - including Croftamie, East Loch Lomond, and Balloch & Haldane.	Community Steering groups continue to make progress against agreed milestones on their LPPs for Croftamie, Ardentinnny, East Loch Lomond, Port of Menteith and Trossachs. East Loch Lomond have needed to find new consultant support when those previously engaged became unavailable but are still confident of delivering a first draft this financial year. We are providing additional independent support to Balloch & Haldane CC as they establish their steering group in readiness to commence their LPP in the next financial year.	
	Scope out options for delivery support for community-led projects, Local Place Plans and programme activity - such as Community Climate Action Hubs - in collaboration with partners and the Local Place Plan Advisory Group.	Provided strategic support for Climate Action Hubs to ensure support delivered to NP communities; also hosted joint NP hubs event at Carrochan in January providing presentations on 'Net Zero National Park', and our INNS work; also supported Argyll & Bute Hub members with advice on eradicating INNS. Provided support on an emerging Lottery Climate Action Fund application and other joint working opportunities involving communities in McLaren and Balfron school catchments. Submitted project proposals to our Future Nature Lottery application to maximise opportunities to deliver Local Place Plan aspirations.	
Developing and Investing in the National Park	Prepare, and submit to Scottish Government, the Evidence Report for the Local Development Plan.	The timeline is being reviewed again to take account of resourcing available, and a further revised Development Plan Scheme is being prepared. This will note expected dates for preparation of Evidence Report for approval by the National Park Authority Board and subsequent submission to the Scottish Government.	

		Work continues drafting a series of topic papers and associated Local Development Plan specific Geographic Information System (GIS) tools. The topic papers are expected to be ready for engaging and sharing with external stakeholders in partner bodies within Q4, ahead of any required updates prior to public engagement in spring/early summer.	
	Begin to prepare an innovative and engaging draft Local Development Plan for consultation which drives forward the Outcomes of the National Park Partnership Plan.	Work focus remains on the Evidence Report stage. Consultancy support to inform the approach towards supporting an increase in renewable energy technologies in the National Park is at final draft stage.	
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Chapter 4: A Developing and Efficient National Park Authority			
Mission Zero	Continue to undertake the capital works required to meet our Mission Zero commitments, including the conclusion of work at Carrochan.	<p>Balmaha Visitor Centre: meter issue still to be resolved before Elective Vehicle chargers can become operational, this has been escalated within EDF energy as it seems there has been a mix up regarding which teams have been dealing with it.</p> <p>Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway: carrying out electrical upgrades for EV chargers continuing to be delayed due to legal wayleave issues, NPA have supplied draft servitude plan to Scottish Power for review which needs to be agreed by both parties before electrical upgrade & metering works can be carried out and EV chargers can become operational.</p> <p>Monitoring kit is being installed before year end, with Loch Chon already completed. DMMS and BVC heat pumps and solar PV still to be installed with monitoring kit.</p>	

	Review priorities and timeline for the second phase of our 10-year MZ programme to be a net zero organisation by 2030.	Project Initiation Document (PID) contents have been presented to Exec. Invitation To Tender formulation work to begin March 2025.	
Net Zero National Park	Continue the development of the National Park Authority's Climate Adaptation Plan.	Assessment of Climate Change Risks being included in the evidence base and topic papers of the Evidence Report for the Local Development Plan. Otherwise work focus remains on mitigation, as with the previous update.	
	Start the development of a draft Net Zero National Park Route Map outlining the approach to achieving a net zero national park.	<p>Work has begun on Action Planning with officers from the 15 UK National Parks, with detailed work sessions planned for early March.</p> <p>Our approach to tackling the climate emergency is being embedded in the Evidence Report for the Local Development Plan, drawing on the strong evidence base for Mitigation and Adaptation for the National Park.</p> <p>Feedback on our first annual submission to CDP on progress on net zero has been delayed to Q1 25/26.</p>	
	Undertake the migration of services into the cloud, removing need for local disaster recovery for critical services/infrastructure.	<p>Go-ahead received from Cairngorm National Park Authority for IDOX in late 2024. Accountable Officer Template now with Scottish Government. Health & Safety Reporting services in testing phase.</p> <p>Server tidying continuing with further services ready to be removed near year end.</p>	
Becoming a More Efficient Organisation	Undertake a strategic review of our assets, alongside our business processes and structures, to progress our Estates Strategy	<p>Updated Estates Structure in place and efficiencies being realised in terms of ways of working.</p> <p>Feedback on Site Management Plans has been received and is being reviewed. In tandem, we are updating land-based Preventative Planned Maintenance which will sit within Site Management</p>	

		Plans – this is seeking to drive efficiencies in ways of working alongside biodiversity improvements on sites owned and managed by the NPA.	
	<p>Develop/invest in our digital skills and infrastructure and review our manual processes to achieve at least 5% efficiency saving by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leveraging workflow tools to automate cross organisation processes - Enhancements to existing systems, such as finance, estates and HR to maximise automation opportunities <p>Exploring potential benefits associated with creating central data repository to be used for reporting</p>	<p>Health and Safety Reporting Automation testing went well – feedback from users is being reviewed and final improvements being made before rollout to the organisation.</p> <p>Asset Management Solution rollout pushed back to coincide with the end of the financial year – will be in use for 1st April 2025. This allowed further development work to be brought forwards, such as issue reporting and tracking for wider staff.</p> <p>Digital Strategy work is progressing well, with positive feedback from staff. Report for Phase 1 will be complete by 31st March 2025.</p> <p>Ongoing conversations into the use of automation within the organisation to increase efficiencies, e.g. budget monitoring.</p>	