

LLTAF Update: 27 May 2025

Strategic Updates

Core Paths Budget

We are pleased to confirm that after last year's low budget situation, £100k has been allocated for Access capital works for the financial year 2025/6. We also have a smaller revenue budget of £10k for things like replacement signs and legal fees associated with casework.

Planned Capital Works

With the Conic Hill path upgrading project drawing to a close (see below), we are keen to address the drainage and surfacing issues on the stretch of the **West Highland Way** between the footbridge over the Burn of Mar, and the southern approach to the Conic Hill summit. Early informal estimates indicate that this work could swallow up the majority of the budget. If that turns out to be the case we may phase the work over two years to allow us to retain enough budget to replace a core path **bridge near Gartocharn** which has been out of action for several years. The feasibility of the latter project will partly depend on the reaction of one of the landowners who has previously refused to cooperate.

In addition to the above, we are in the early stages of discussing a partnership arrangement with **Forestry & Land Scotland**, which would see some of the Access Team's time focused on auditing and managing the upgrade of path furniture along the loch-side route of the West Highland Way north of Rowardennan. Currently many walkers choose to use the forestry road inland from the lochshore at this location, but this road is due to be widened and strengthened during 2026/7 so that it can be used for haulage when the coup known as Ptarmigan is harvested. The felling is due to start in 2027/8 and could take as long as 10 years. For safety reasons, this means that all walkers will be diverted onto the loch-side route for the entire duration, both of the road upgrade and the felling, so the loch-side route needs to be brought up to a robust standard.

Team News

As was mentioned at the 'special' meeting in February, Guy Keating's secondment has been extended for a further six months to August 2025. However, this time we were able to negotiate some backfill funding from the Scottish Government and I'm delighted to say that we have welcomed Mick Foran into the Access Team, on secondment from the Ranger Service. Mick is an experience Ranger Team Leader who is normally based at Balmaha. He brings a great deal of operational experience with him as well as affording us the opportunity of closer links with the Ranger Service. The downside for the wider Visitor Services team is that we've rather 'robbed Peter to pay Paul' at the busiest time of year for the Ranger Service!

Camping Byelaw Review

Due to staffing constraints in Visitor Operations, work on the Camping Byelaw review is only just starting. The review has to be completed by 2027, and it's likely the consultation phase will be later this year or early next year. The Forum will be part of that consultation.

Sustainable Travel

Our colleague, Emily Davy, the National Park Mobility Manager, has continued her work to forge a partnership of all the public bodies who are able to influence and fund transport in and to the National Park with a view to delivering the long-term sustainable transport aims set out in the National Park Partnership Plan. As the Forum is aware, she is setting up a stakeholder group and Calum Langdale has kindly agreed to represent the LLTAF on the group.

In the shorter term, Emily has focused a lot of effort in recent weeks on trying to secure a second year of the shuttle bus pilot – the Trossachs Explorer. There are still a number of hurdles to cross, so nothing is certain at this stage.

Area Reports

Loch Lomond, Breadalbane and Cowal – *N.B. This is the geographical area normally covered by Guy Keating, and much of the work here has been on hold until recently due to his secondment. However, Mick has already made a great start, as can be seen below.*

Upholding Access Rights:

Gouk Hill / Three Lochs Way

The Forum will remember that a short section of core path from Darleith Moor to Ben Bowie / Bannachra, which forms part of the Three Lochs Way and John Muir Way, has been completely blocked by windblown trees for over a year, with a very long diversion in place created by HADAT (Helensburgh & District Access Trust). Despite Guy's best efforts before he went on secondment, Scottish Woodlands (who manage the site) were not willing to clear the fallen trees until they could do it as part of their planned felling of the area, which at the time, was a long way off.

In recent weeks, a narrow but walkable route has been created through the windblown trees, on or near the original track by persons unknown, so the route is currently open. The timing is not ideal, however, as Scottish Woodlands have confirmed they expect to commence harvesting in the area from June for approx. three months. This will require the Three Lochs Way/John Muir Way to be diverted for the duration of the work along the original diversion route(s). Scottish Woodlands have indicated they will reinstate the path once harvesting is complete, and Mick will work with them to ensure the route is eventually returned to a satisfactory condition.

Photos of path that has been re-opened through windblow





Uncontrolled dogs, Conic Hill

Mick and Adam Samson (East Loch Lomond Ranger) met with the tenant farmer on 8/5/25 re: ongoing issues with sheep worrying on Conic Hill. Issues of uncontrolled dogs and livestock worrying (and continual stock displacement) here are not new but appear to have increased as the number of users has continued to grow.

There are already numerous permanent NPA signs requesting walkers to keep dogs on leads at all times. The Balmaha Visitor Centre Rangers have livestock worrying messaging prominently displayed in their 'high-profile campaign area' from Feb to May each year.

A number of incidents have occurred so far in 2025 which has led to the farmers keeping their lambs off the hill later than they would usually. Specifically, an incident occurred on 3/5/25 where a witness reported to Rangers on duty at Balmaha Visitor Centre that a dog had escaped from a professional dog walker and was chasing two sheep, it caught one which was injured.

All information including the witness contact details has been passed on to the NPA Police Liaison Officer, PC Kennedy, for investigation. Some additional temporary signage has been installed highlighting that Conic is a hill farm with livestock present on the hill year-round. These signs include information explaining that there have been recent livestock attacks and advising the public to report incidents to police Scotland on 101.

Local Police officers have suggested that a byelaw requiring dogs to be kept on leads might be the answer. However, a byelaw requires policing in order to be effective, and there is already strong legislation in place around livestock worry with large fines attached, but the police don't have the 'man'-power to enforce this, so a byelaw is unlikely to be any different, even if it were affordable.

Duck Bay non-compliant signage

We were advised by Rangers this month of four signs that had been erected at Duck Bay Picnic Area stating NATIONAL PARK BYELAWS. These signs were installed by persons unknown, not erected by the NPA, and the byelaws stated do not exist. The land on which the signs are situated is owned by Argyll & Bute Council, but we do not believe the signs were erected by the Council and are currently awaiting confirmation of this. We are hopeful that the Council will see fit to remove these misleading signs, but if they are unable to do so we will arrange for their removal ourselves..

Duck Bay has been experiencing a number of ongoing visitor management challenges during the hot weather and a wider Duck Bay stakeholder meeting is planned to address this.



East Loch Lomond and the Trossachs

Upholding Access Rights:

Borland Hill path, Gartmore

An 'intention to serve notice' letter, signed by Kenny Auld as our Head of Service was sent on 16 January 2025. The letter explained that we will use the powers available to us to enter the land and replace all the padlocked and broken gates. It gave the landowner a deadline of 14 February to respond. We did receive a letter from him on that date but it didn't address the issues we'd raised or agree to a site visit. In the view of our legal advisors, his letter didn't change anything. We did reply on 26 February reiterating our willingness to work with him but also re-stating our intent to open the core path either way.

We formally requested the advice of the LLTAF at a meeting on 20 February 2025. Your advice was that it would be in the landowner's best interests to engage with the National Park Authority to identify a mutually agreeable solution for removing the obstructions. However, you recognised and agreed that the action already proposed by the NPA to resolve the matter is the 'least worst option' in the light of his current stance. The advice was agreed unanimously, including by the land management representatives on the Forum.

A site visit to measure up for all the new gates was undertaken on 23 May and we are currently arranging a date to enter the land to carry out the work. We will inform the landowner when the date

is confirmed and we will also request the presence of the NPA's embedded Police Scotland officer, for at least part of that day.

Ardchullarie

This is adjacent to the A84 at Loch Lubnaig. The landowner has fenced off the lochshore area with a new deer fence. One gate has been removed and another padlocked, so the area is now obstructed. We have spoken to landowner's agent on numerous occasions and he agrees to remove the padlock off the remaining gate but it was still locked on a site visit of 21 May 2025. The next contact with the agent will be by our Legal Team.

Access Infrastructure Projects

Conic Hill Path

The Conic Hill path repair project completed all primary path work on 31 March 2025. A small number of small snagging issues remain and the contractors are back on site this week (beginning 19 May) to finish these.

The mild and dry winter has led into a very warm and dry Spring from Easter onwards. The people counter we have on Conic Hill broke down on 26 December 2024 and was repaired on 21 March 2025. In the two months since, 62,000 walkers have been recorded which is roughly 1,000 people every day for 60 days. This then leads to the longer-term issue of path trampling and trying to keep people on the pitched stone surface. The photos below show trampling pressure already eroding the path edges and the rope and stakes used to cordon these areas off. We have also installed a series of please 'stay on the path' signs.

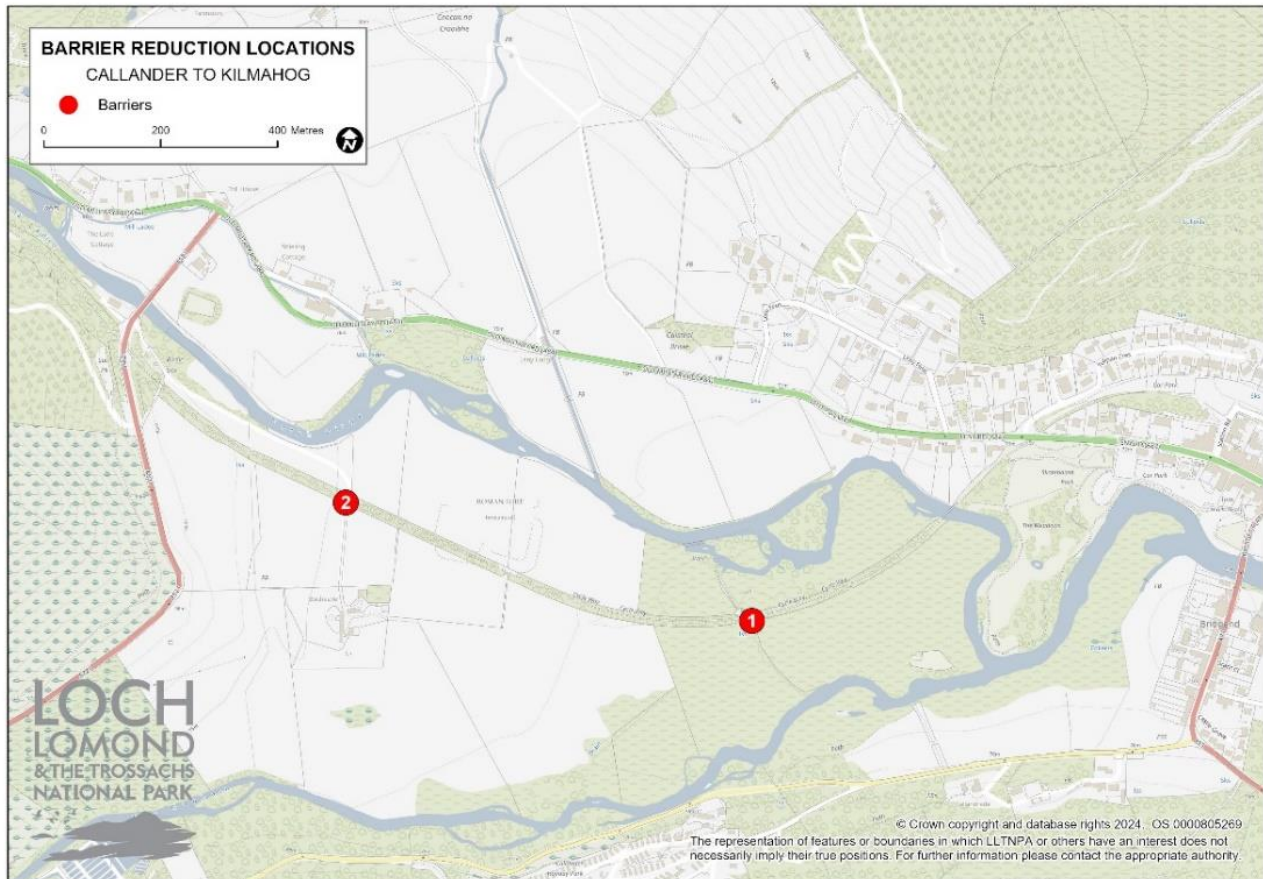




In terms of future work, the maintenance plan will be updated to include the upper path sections. Path inspections and maintenance will take place four times a year with a mix of Volunteers, Rangers and Land Operations staff. A full photographic record will be taken once a year.

NCN7 Barrier Reduction Project

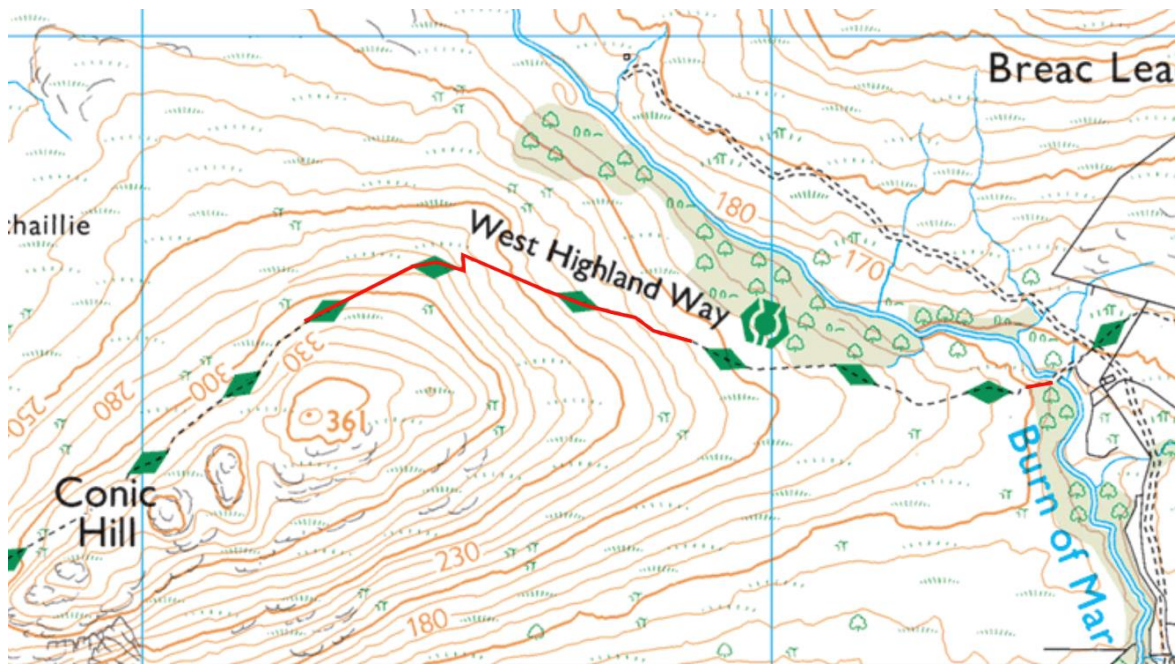
The contract awarded to local consultants Raeburn, Farquhar & Bowen (RF&B) to design replacements for an ageing bridge and cattle grids on NCN7 between Callander and Kilmahog has reached the planning application stage (see map below). Neither the existing bridge or cattle grids meet current Cycling by Design standards and are narrow and difficult to use for normal bikes and are not passable by certain types of adaptive bikes or larger motorised wheelchairs. The cattle grids are being removed and infilled, and the bridge will be replaced by a new 2.5m wide structure which requires additional steel beams. This project is funded 100% by Sustrans through their 'Barrier Removal Fund', with design work worth £25K carried out last financial year and construction taking place this financial year. RF&B will also oversee and manage the construction contract this year.



West Highland Way Improvements: Burn of Mar to Conic Hill East

This section of the West Highland Way (WHW) is on the east side of Conic Hill, away from the main path from Balmaha (see red lines on below map).

There are two sections that require repair work. The priority is a 400metre section from where the WHW starts to descend down from Conic Hill summit towards the Burn of Mar. Side ditches were not cleaned out and from 2020 onwards water has drained onto the path and washed the surface away. In the intervening five years this has resulted in high steps between anchor bar stones, a loose and rough stone surface and significant trampling and widening of the path edges. The following set of photos shows the evolution of the path from 2013 to the current day. Unfortunately, a lack of historical maintenance has meant this section is back to 2013 conditions in places (see photos below).



2012 pre repair condition



2013 immediately after repair



2021 condition



March 2025 condition

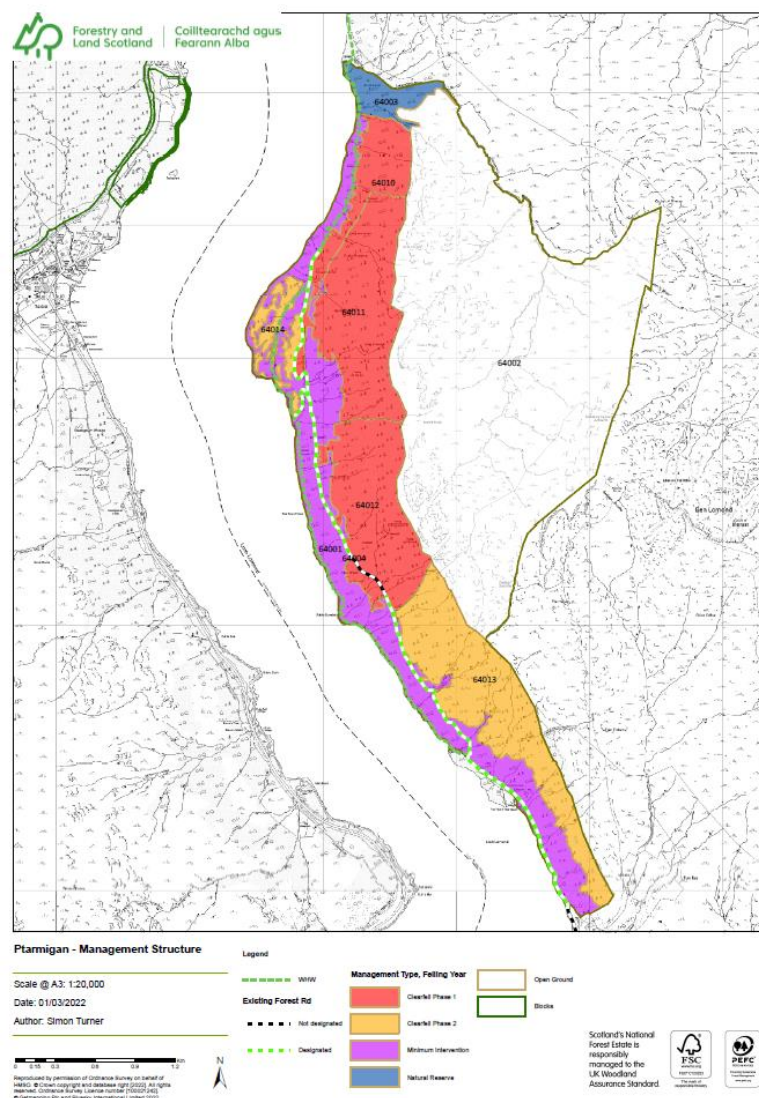
We will tender for a design and build upland path contract later this summer. The path will be an aggregate path as before and will bring the path back to its 2012 width and appearance. The existing ditches will all be cleared and new drainage features installed where deemed necessary.

Subject to confirmation, the advice from planners is that a planning application will not be required as the works will all be within the current route footprint. A secondary piece of work will involve repairs to the steep exit from the Burn of Mar bridge. This is a mix of stone pitching and timber steps in varying states of repair and there is evidence of path braiding. We will price this work separately because of potential budget constraints and this will be held over for future years if need be.

Rowardennan to Cailness

FLS have approached the NPA to fund the scoping and deliver some path improvements on this section of the West Highland Way 'Lower Path' during 2025-26. FLS are not able to employ additional staff themselves to undertake this work due to headcount restrictions.

Work is required to improve this section of the low path route in preparation for haulage road upgrades and harvesting which is expected to be commencing over the coming years. This harvesting is expected to continue for around a decade. FLS are currently working on plans to maintain WHW access for walkers.



Current plan for phased felling of Ptarmigan – WHW shown in green

Recreation & Access Team, May 2025