

Draft minutes of meeting held on 10 March 2025

Agenda Item 3

National Park Authority Board Meeting
9 June 2025

Paper for approval

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Present
Heather Reid (Convenor) (HR)
Hazel Sorrell (HS)
Maurice Corry (MC)
William Sinclair (WS)
Colin Lee (CL)
Sid Perrie (SP)
Richard Johnson (RJ)
Ronnie Erskine (RE)
David Mackie (DM)
Martin Earl (Depute Convener) (ME)
Claire Chapman (CC)
Christopher Spray (CS)
Iain Shonny Patterson (ISP)
Gerry McGarvey (GM)
Rhona Brock (RB)
David Fettes (DF)
Sarah Drummond (SD)
James Messis (JM)

Apologies
Kenny Auld (KA)
In Attendance - National Park Authority Staff
Gordon Watson (GW), Chief Executive Officer
Stuart Mearns (SM), Director of Place
Anna McLean (AM), Director of Engagement and Innovation
Simon Jones (SJ), Director of Environment and Visitor Services
Dougie Smith (DS), Corporate Performance Manager & Proper Officer
Annie Fitzpatrick (AF), Governance and Information Advisor (Minute Taker)
Jane Kemp (JK), Head of Governance and Performance
Sam Stubbs (SS), Head of People and Assets
Nik Turner (NT), Behaviour Change Manager
Dom Hall (DH), Future Nature Development Manager
Emily Davie (ED), Mobility Partnership Programme Manager
Mark Ridyard (MR), HR Manager

Items and Actions
<p>Item 1: Welcome and Apologies</p> <p>The Convenor opened the meeting by welcoming all attendees to Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Headquarters in Balloch.</p> <p>HR reminded all Members to speak clearly into the microphones provided and not to speak over each other so that those following online are able to follow proceedings with clarity.</p> <p>The Convenor welcomed the members of the public observing the meeting online through a livestream on our website.</p> <p>HR asked Members and National Park staff participating in this meeting to introduce themselves.</p> <p>Full attendance with no apologies noted.</p> <p>HR restated the Board's commitment to ethical standards in public life and highlighted Members' responsibilities under the Code of Conduct, emphasising section 3 on bullying and harassment and the Convener's role in upholding those responsibilities.</p> <p>HR welcomed JM to his first Board Meeting and he gave a brief statement on his background and why he was interested in joining the Boardroom Apprentice Scheme.</p>

Items and Actions

Item 2: Declarations of Interest

CS mentioned his role as a Board Member at Environmental Standards Scotland, which is listed in his register of interests, in relation to the organisation's work regarding the Natural Environment Bill and Biodiversity Strategy. There is no conflict arising from this declaration for any of the items on the agenda for this meeting.

Item 3: Minutes of Meeting held on 9 December 2024

The minutes were proposed by CS and seconded by RJ. The minutes were approved by Members present.

DECISION: The minutes of the Board Meeting held on 9 December 2024 were approved by majority vote.

Item 4: Matters Arising

DS presented the paper.

DS stated there was a further action missed from the minutes; SJ to catch up with RJ regarding peatland figures. DS confirmed this has also been completed and closed.

Item 5: 2025/2026 Budget and Annual Operational Plan

GW presented the paper and highlighted that the AOP has a slightly different structure for 25/26, reflecting our Corporate Plan 2025-30 which has been submitted to Scottish Government ministers for approval. The headings reflect the content of the draft corporate plan.

DS highlighted that the 'next steps' to be noted are;

- Following approval, the AOP will be communicated to staff, confirmed to the Scottish Government and as in previous years, updates to the Board will be provided quarterly on the progress of the AOP.

DS highlighted the operational activity captured in the AOP that have not been fully reflected in previous iterations, including: our planning function, our access work, some education work, equalities and some Comms work.

DS emphasised the read-through in the AOP with the Corporate Plan and National Park Partnership plan.

JK gave an overview of the proposed 25/26 budget.

Items and Actions

JK explained that the budget and AOP process has been combined as a single exercise. This began prior to receiving our budget allocation from Scottish Government which gave us the maximum amount of time for review. As with previous years we have taken the approach of over-programming. The proposed budget contains over-programming of 350K for capital and 207K revenue.

The proposed budget includes peatland numbers but not NRF, discussions are still ongoing. Staff costs; the number shown is still benefitting from reduced employer pension contributions. We are on year 2 of 3 and after this they will return to a higher level. This budget includes the higher employer NI levels and after a 5% efficiency target, which is the level Scottish Government expects from us currently.

Operating expenses are ahead of inflation. Project spend, excluding peatland and NRF - 2.7 million capital and 0.9 million revenue.

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- The potential of additional funding from Scottish Government towards an increase in NI contributions
- Timing of notification about Nature Restoration Fund awards
- Costing process for staff roles
- Plans for the outcome of the organisation skills audit
- Members expressed their pleasure with the approach and co-ordination the visibility of this plan gives.
- Local Place Plans
- The ongoing nature of the work involved with the redevelopment of the NPA's Website
- Restoring nature and biodiversity in the more urban areas of the National Park.
- The work being undertaken in 25/26 on the West Highland Way Trust
- The work being undertaken in 25/26 on waterways
- The drivers of the work being undertaken on information systems and technology

DS highlighted that there is an extra deliverable that has been missed on the paper and this is the following: RA08- Deliver Year 1 of woodland delivery plan including

Items and Actions

forestry casework, liaison with FLS, Scottish Forestry and other partners, with the shared aim of approval of 400 hectares of new woodland creation.

Members **approved** the annual operational plan 2025/2026 (appendix 1) and the Budget 2025/2026 (appendix 2) subject the wording re website and inclusion of deliverable R/A/08.

The Convener thanked all involved in the Budget and AOP process.

ACTION: Update wording of AOP Deliverable D/S/01 [AM]

ACTION: Discussion with RJ re: Urban biodiversity [SJ]

ACTION: Update AOP to include Deliverable R/A/08 [DS]

Item 6: Board Schedule 2026 and 2027

AF presented the paper on proposed Board schedules and highlighted there was a typo in the heading that should have read '2026 and 2027' and not previous years.

DECISION: Members **approved** the Board Schedules for 2026 and 2027.

Item 7: Equalities Outcomes 2025-2029

SS introduced the paper which sets out the progress made in mainstreaming equality across the National Park Authority and outlines our proposed equality outcomes for the next 4 years. This work closely aligns with our Partnership Plan and our Corporate Plan, all emphasising inclusion and access across the park.

NT highlighted aspects of the paper to members. Thanks were given to all those who contributed to the report. Including the Park for All group and multiple teams, staff, Youth Committee, groups and partners.

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- Tracking success and impact
- The benefits of annual reporting
- Data Collection with protected characteristics.
- Defining success
- Under-represented groups applying for roles at NPA
- Co-design approach

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- Thank you to 'Simply Emma'. Need to ensure that advice and support services stay high on our focus.
- The National Park Authority's approach to 'growing our own' internally to fill any positions both for current employees and volunteers.
- The use and application of the Travel grant
- Inclusive camping
- Access to the National Park
- Engagement
- Need to try and ensure future locally elected member elections are more diverse, appealing and inclusive.
- The increase of those reporting disability
- Working with landowners to remove barriers

DECISION: Members **agreed** to approve the Equalities Outcome Report in appendix 1 and agree to delegate any final editorial adjustments and additions of relevant appendices prior to the publishing of the report by 30th April 2025.

ACTION: Update to be provided on classification and recording of those with disabilities [NT]

Item 8: Sustainable Transport Update

ED introduced herself and her role, then presented the paper giving an update on the progress on the National Park Mobility Partnership Programme. Also touching on the Trossachs Explorer pilot, funding for the year ahead and giving an overview of priorities for next year.

The key priority has been to establish the mobility partnership. Within this a new leadership group, chaired by GW, has been formed which is made up of the National Park Authority, 4 local authorities, 3 regional transport partners and national bodies (Transport Scotland, Forestry and Land Scotland, Visit Scotland) meeting quarterly.

Priorities for the year ahead will depend on funding, the key output is to continue to drive forward the mobility partnership, to develop a mobility route map (reporting back to the board in September with a draft), deliver a further multi-model transport

Items and Actions

and bus connectivity study in East Loch Lomond and continue to explore options for the 2025 pilot.

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- Funding challenges
- Working in collaboration with destination groups, visitor management and comms to align end to end with the bus journeys.
- Usage patterns of the Trossachs Explorer service – single use passengers vs return users
- Possibility of establishing further bus pilots
- Working with existing bus providers in the National Park area
- The potential of purchasing a bus and the practicalities of running a service when not a transport authority
- The C60 bus service
- The wider issue of sustainable transport and the need for joined-up thinking between public and private sector organisations, alongside communities.
- Need to explore alternative funding schemes.

DECISION: Members **agreed** to note the contents of the report.

ACTION: Discussion with ISP re: work with existing bus operators [ED]

ACTION – GM and ME (in roles as Board Members) to organise follow up discussions following the outcome of current funding applications.

Discussions to include KA, ED and ISP; GM to also look at potential to include appropriate Stirling Council Officers. [GM/ME]

Item 9: Future Nature Update

CS introduced the paper. SJ thanked the team and all involved. DH continued by highlighting parts of the paper.

- We are keen to express in-year progress and a long-term view progress

Items and Actions

- Good progress in peatland and woodland targets where we are working with partners closely.
- Progress in landscape scale partnerships; Great Trossachs Forest, Wild Strathfillan and the Lomond Rainforest project.
- Still working on core-work, ecological advice going into the planning system.

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- The reduction of non-native species.
- The impact of beaver translocation
- Engagement and behaviour change
- The balance between wildlife and more structural change
- Community empowerment
- Cultural programmes
- Funding for deer management

DECISION: Members **noted** the Future Nature Update.

Item 10: Annual Health and Safety Update

SS introduced the paper which outlines the progress of the past year and setting for the year ahead. We placed a particular focus this year on assessing whether our health and safety arrangements were truly effective and embedded across the organisation.

MR presented the paper.

- Our Health and Safety plan at the start of the year focused on 3 main priorities: policy development and documentation, the compliance check programme and health and safety arrangements.
- Our particular focus for the past 2 years has been to increase our reporting of health and safety incidents. This has increased 30% on those received last year and 50% from 2 years ago.
- We continue to closely monitor the effect on both our staff and the public and have taken 25 different improvement actions as we strive to minimise risk across the park.

Items and Actions

- We are developing an app called Park Safe and this will replace our current MS Word based Health & Safety reporting form. We are in the final stage of testing.
- The health and safety committee welcomed 4 new members.
- Our commitment to employee wellbeing has seen us increase the scope and availability of our wellness programme.
- Also looking at improving accessibility of documentation.

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- 'Our overall systemic organisational approach to health and safety' as a key risk
- Importance of Wellbeing
- Use of App – clarity that it is a MicroSoft 'Power App'
- Why increased reporting is of benefit to the organisation
- Incidents at the Slipway

DECISION: Members **noted** the contents of the Health and Safety Report.

ACTION – MC to receive update on types of Health and Safety incidents at the Slipway [SS]

Item 11: Convener's Report

HR thanked the chairs of committees for meeting in January to help plan for the year ahead. Strategy and Action dates have been set.

HR thanked those who attended and conducted the recent training on Consumer Duty.

HR outlined the work ongoing with the Scottish Government on the Natural Environment Bill and its potential impact on National Parks.

Cabinet Secretary has suggested a meeting with her, HR and the Convener of Cairngorms and CEOs to understand the process better as it goes through parliament. If this happens before June Board, HR will update Board.

Welcomed JM to apprentice role and thanked RE for his support.

HR reminded Members that she will be in touch regarding appraisals over the coming months.

Items and Actions

HR reminded Members that she is willing to attend/support activity across the National Park area and if to get in touch directly if they would like her to do so.

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- The prospect of a meeting between Members and their counterparts at Cairngorms National Park

ACTION: HR to work with Convener of Cairngorms to explore options for Members from both National Parks to engage in the process of the Natural Environment Bill to understand its impact on National Parks in Scotland [HR]

Item 12: CEO Report (*including Pre-Season Visitor Management Update*)

GW presented the paper and highlighted the following:

- Natural Environment Bill
- National Park Scotland Act and updating/clarification of aims
- Pre-season look at joint response plan of the National Park and our partners and work of the visitor management steering group.
- Submission to Transport Scotland re the Rest and be Thankful.
- Update on the Visitor Levy and early consultation.
- Cononish Goldmine Update.

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- Money owed to the NPA in relation to the goldmine at Cononish
- The 'Sandford Principle' and confirmation of its retention and application in the proposed Natural Environment Bill
- Visitor management groups
- Visitor levy consultations
- Impacts of the Natural Environment bill on the development of the Local Development Plan
- RTIF Funding
- Consultation process for the Natural Environment Bill
- HR thanks SM and his team for the Cononish updates.

Items and Actions

DECISION: Members **noted** the contents of the CEO Report.

Item 13: 2024/25 Annual Operational Plan Progress Report

DS presented the report.

Highlighted areas were;

- Final update on this will be at the June board alongside the first update of 2025/2026 AOP
- Restructure of AOP for the Corporate Plan and progression will be seen
- NRF at risk and not cancelled – this will be updated on the final report.

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- Resilient Farm Network proposals
- Concerning that 4 out of the 8 deliverables that are behind schedule, relate to mission zero or climate change.
- Timeline for LDP Evidence Report
- Any impact of being 'behind schedule' on the new registration system for loch users – confirmation deadlines are internal

DECISION: Members **noted** the contents of the AOP Report.

Item 14: Finance Update

JK presented the report and gave an update on resourcing – we are still looking for a Finance Manager and this has been readvertised.

Highlighted the following:

- Management accounts up till the end of February and running a rolling forecast. We should deliver a balanced budget of both capital and revenue.
- Ringfenced budget- peatland was under budget by 100K and this has now increased to around 180K.
- Annual Report and Accounts. Auditors did interim process and main audit planned for 9th June.
- The long-term capital commission and revenue forecast submitted to Scottish Government.

Items and Actions

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- Peatland budget
- Thank you to JK for all the work

DECISION: Members **noted** the contents of the Finance Update Report.

Item 15: Committee and Group Highlights

SD gave an update on Futures Group and highlighted dates for the coming year:

- 22nd April 2025 – Artificial Intelligence
- 21st October 2025 – What are the risks to us as a NPA from a rapidly changing climate
- 24th March 2026 – Visitor Levy or Economic strategy or health & Social care

CC gave an update on Planning and Access. Online planning session at the end of January going through the LDP. LRB in February and end of February planning meeting.

RE gave an update on Audit and Risk. Meeting last week and agreed to undertake a review of the committee's effectiveness. Individual meetings with members will take place soon. RE updated that the Internal audit tender exercise had recently concluded and that Azets will be taking over the role from 1 April 2025. RE thanked staff for the recent deep dive undertaken at committee.

CS gave an update on the Countryside Trust. Board meeting recently and spent time taking about budget proposals and future funding options. Also rechecking KPI's and ensuring training on GDPR up to date. HR asked CS to pass on thanks from the Board for all involvement.

DF gave an update on the Local Access Forum. Focus has been on a recruitment drive led by Sue Hilder. 4 new members been appointed. Had recent training days including a site visit. The 20th anniversary of access legislation coming into force is coming up and the forum are talking about how they can raise their profile and how they are independent and people can come for advice.

AM gave an update on the Youth Committee. The members are working through the areas they want to work with us on this year. There were 3 themes:

- Influencing Policy and Decision making (developing the net zero National Park work, being more involved in the LDP)

Items and Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding the priorities of other young people (Looking to carry out a Young Person survey which will help us understand the views, opinions and priorities in a more general sense and this will be used then to help NP with strategic work) - Making NP priorities more engaging for other young people <p>They recently had an update from ED on the sustainable transport work. The YC will also be taking on their own social media channels and using Instagram to share the work they are doing. A member will be hopefully joining us at the Board in June.</p> <p>ACTION –Youth Committee representative(s) to be invited to Futures Group session on AI. [AM]</p> <p>ACTION – Youth Committee to be asked if a member could keep the Board informed on any survey results and give an update. [AM]</p>
Item 16: Any Other Business
NONE
Item 17: Date of Next Meeting
Monday 9 June 2025

Signed _____

Heather Reid, Convener