

National Park Place Programme Delivery Update

Agenda Item 6

National Park Authority Board Meeting

9 June 2025

Paper for information

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1. Purpose

1.1. The purpose of this Paper is 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 2024-25 and for 2025-26 and is expanded to include agreed priorities for partner and third-sector sites.

1.2. This paper reports on activity aligned to the Place Programme Delivery Route Map, as presented on 10 June 2024 at the National Park Board. This update presents:

- a) a summary of progress in 2024–25,
- b) an outline of priorities for 2025–26,
- c) an update on delivery at Tarbet Visitor Site, and

- d) the Balloch Pierhead Improvement Action Plan, developed with West Dunbartonshire Council.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. Members are asked to:

- a) Note progress in 2024–25.
- b) Note the direction of budget and resources in 2025–26.
- c) Note the content of the update on delivery at Tarbet Visitor Site.

2.2. Note and consider the identified improvement projects, Balloch Pierhead Improvement Action Plan, Appendix 1.

3. Contribution to National Park Partnership Plan

3.1. 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”*, and as one of the three outcomes under the section *“Creating a Low Carbon Place”*.

3.2. 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. This paper reports on activity aligned to the Place Programme Delivery Route Map, as presented to the National Park Board on 10 June 2024. The Place Programme 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).

4.2. The Delivery Route Map focuses on delivering the National Park Partnership Plan objective *“Deliver a multi-year place programme”*. It is focused 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.

4.3. 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 focused on:

- a) following the National Park Partnership Plan policy and mapping that is focused on priority areas and primary and secondary hubs,
- b) putting the Policy for Improving Popular Places and Routes via the Place Programme into action, and
- c) delivering accelerated projects on East and West Loch Lomond which are already well developed and have funding packages well progressed.

4.4. 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. Delivery is subject to funding availability, and we will continuously review the Route Map against progress made as well as new opportunities that may arise.

4.5. It should be noted that the projects are part of delivering a Low Carbon Place. 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.

5. Place Programme Delivery Progress 2024–25

5.1. The delivery of the Place Programme has two main strands: (a) Strategic Development, which is largely informed by studies, feasibility work and masterplans to create a pipeline of delivery projects, and (b) Delivery which takes project development through design and funding stages to delivery on the ground.

5.2. The Place Programme Delivery Route Map priorities for 2024–2025 were to be focused in West Loch Lomond, East Loch Lomond, Balloch, Tyndrum and Benmore, requiring an anticipated partner investment of £1.87 million, with £1.6 million of this being National Park Authority led projects.

5.3. The actual capital investment by the National Park Authority in Place Programme Activity in 2024–25 was £1.8 million. This was primarily

focused on (a) delivery at Tarbet Loch Lomond Phase 1, Conic Hill, Sustainable Travel Hub at Ben Venue, and (b) project development work at Rowardennan, Falls of Falloch and the co-funding and co-delivery of the Balloch Pierhead Improvement Action Plan with West Dunbartonshire Council. Investment at Tarbet in 2023–24 and 2024–25 was supported by a £750,000 grant from VisitScotland’s Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF).

5.4. The spend forecast was exceeded by 6%, however the progress of some lower value but time critical survey and design work was delayed. The Scottish Government Spending Review and resultant controls halted progress on commencing design work that had been programmed at Tarbet Phase 2, and slowed progress on Rowardennan Phase 1. For Rowardennan the submission of the planning application was recoverable in year, but later than planned. Tarbet 2 design was not recoverable in-year. There is a risk this will have an impact on delivery of site work in 2025–26 if this time cannot be recovered.

5.5. The table below shows sustained and steadily increasing investment from previous years to the nearest £100,000 (£0.1 million).

Years	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	£1.8 million	£4.4 million

5.6. In 2024–25 the National Park Authority committed to the priorities focused on finishing projects that were continuing from financial year 2023–2024 and developing those at design stage further on the route to delivery on the ground. The highest priority projects were as set out in the 2024–25 Annual Operating Plan AOP Activity, “*Creating a Low-Carbon Place, Improving Popular Places and Routes*”:

- a) Complete the upgrades to the path on Conic Hill, concluding all works on the ground and fully reopening.
- b) Complete Phase 1 of the works at Tarbet and complete the design of Phase 2.

- c) Continue the masterplanning work to be undertaken at Rowardennan and explore works to be undertaken at Balmaha as part of the Place Programme.
- d) Establish a partnership to oversee preparation of a masterplan for the Balloch Pierhead area, which will also consider wider linkages and co-ordinated actions.
- e) 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.

5.7. Partner body commitments in the June 2024 Board Report included: continued joint working with Forestry and Land Scotland to complete works at Ben Venue Sustainable Travel Hub; joint working with West Dunbartonshire Council on Balloch Pierhead; and Tyndrum Infrastructure Group (TIG) working with Stirling Council to secure funds to construct a Changing Places Toilet at Tyndrum.

5.8. The delivery of the Place Programme in 2024–2025 is set out in the table below. The table shows what was expected to be delivered or progressed, 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 2025	Projects/activities committed to in 2024–25
	Note this is Year 1 of The Delivery Route Map (this would have been year 4 of the original 5-year plan)
Strategic work completed	Place Programme Delivery Route Map. Balloch Pierhead Improvement Action Plan. National Park Design Guide (internal and for briefing of consultants). Callander Green Adventure Gateway: a vision for Station Road and The Meadows (Callander Community Development Trust)
Design Work	Rowardennan Masterplan planning application and RTIF funding application submitted for Phase 1 works focussed on inclusion and

	<p>active travel through better visitor facilities, including toilets.</p> <p>Falls of Falloch planning application submitted (proposed works to improve the site's safe operation).</p>
Site work completed	<p>Conic Hill, all primary path work completed (snagging programmed for late May).</p> <p>Tarbet phase 1 project was completed and opened in December 2024 (covering works to internal circulation, parking, paths and landscaping) Outstanding landscape works are programmed for Spring 2025.</p> <p>Trossachs Connectivity – sustainable Travel Hub at Ben Venue car park working with FLS, carried forward from 2023–24.</p> <p>Tyndrum Changing Places Toilet, (Tyndrum Infrastructure Group working with Stirling Council).</p>
Area where progress has been slower than planned owing to mid-year spending controls.	<p>Tarbet, Loch Lomond – completion of the design of Phase 2 (café / toilet improvements).</p>
Area where progress has been slower than planned owing to lack of partnership resource	<p>Explore the works to be undertaken at Balmaha as part of the Place Programme.</p> <p>Glen Loin car park design (Argyll and Bute Council)</p>

5.8.1. Stirling Council supported access to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for Tyndrum Infrastructure Group to enable them to deliver the Changing Places Toilet housed within the Green Welly Stop. As noted in the report of June 2024, 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. It has increased 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.

5.8.2. In addition to the partnership project at Balloch Pierhead, West Dunbartonshire Council are continuing with improvement works within Balloch Castle, survey work and preparatory work was carried out in 24/25.

5.9. In summary, when activity is compared with that planned in the National Park Authority AOP 2024-25 and the in the Place Programme Report to Board of June 2024, then one of the seven activities we set out to deliver has not been delivered, that is 'Tarbet -complete the design of phase 2'. All other activities are being progressed by the partnership as planned, with additional strategic work at Callander, design work at Falls of Falloch and site work in Tyndrum.

6. Priorities for 2025-26

6.1. The investment by the National Park Authority in Place Programme activity in 2025-26 is planned to continue at £1.2 million, and is focused on delivery at Tarbet Phase 2, Rowardennan, Falls of Falloch and Balloch Pierhead, completion of Tarbet Phase 1, and development work across the National Park, including support to partners. For Rowardennan an RTIF grant offer is in place, subject to conditions on timing of planning permission and the timing of works. Agreement will also need to be reached with Forestry and Land Scotland regarding future management responsibilities for the site. This presents lower investment than previous years, however this is because the Conic Hill three-year project is now complete. Further repair work on the West Highland Way on the eastern side of Conic Hill will now be reported through our Annual Operating Plan only.

6.2. The table below shows sustained investment over a 5-year period.

Years	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	£1.8 million	£4.4 million

2025–26 (planned)	£1.2 million	£5.6 million
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6.2.1. The priority projects with the National Park Authority as the lead partner are as set out in the Annual Operating Plan 2025-26 and in line with NPPP priorities. *“C/A/07 Design, progress and deliver high quality visitor recreation sites and facilities as Part of the Place Programme across publicly managed sites at West Loch Lomond (Tarbet Phase 2), Falls of Falloch, East Loch Lomond (Rowardennan) and Balloch Pierhead.”* They are summarised in the table below.

Annual Operating Plan 2025-26	Projects/activities committed to 2025-26
<i>C/A/07 Design, progress and deliver high quality visitor recreation sites and facilities as Part of the Place Programme across publicly managed sites</i>	Note this is Year 2 of The Delivery Route Map (this would have been year 5 of original 5-year plan)
Design	Balloch Pierhead Tarbet Phase 3
Progress	Balloch Pierhead – early actions
Delivery	West Loch Lomond (Tarbet Phase 2) Falls of Falloch East Loch Lomond (Rowardennan)

6.2.2. In addition, there is also a priority to develop and coordinate a pipeline of work: *“C/A/08 Develop and coordinate a pipeline of transformational projects for future delivery through Place Programme partnership working to facilitate higher quality assets across publicly managed sites in the National Park.”* Potential project support here is anticipated to include:

- a) Callander’s Green Gateway (Callander Development Trust)

b) Arrochar facilities and path connection to Tarbet (Arrochar and Tarbet Community Development Trust)

c) A Place Programme Fund (further details at 6.4)

6.3. Through the Public Sector Partnership (National Park Visitor Management Group – NPVMG) additional delivery is anticipated to include the following activities:

- a) Stirling Council will be continuing to work with the National Park Authority in the East Loch Lomond area around transport and vehicle management. In addition, Callander's Community led Green Adventure Gateway project is progressing towards an RTIF Design Grant funding application, with Stirling Council as the RTIF lead.
- b) West Dunbartonshire Council will continue to work in partnership with the National Park Authority at Balloch Pierhead. In addition, they are continuing with improvement works within Balloch Castle and works will be carried out in 2025-26 following the survey work and preparatory work that was carried out in 2024-25.
- c) Argyll & Bute Council are unable to progress with their RTIF bid for Glen Loin car park and facilities in Arrochar, because of insufficient staff resources. They will develop this project further when resources allow.

The Place Programme Fund

6.4. The Place Programme Fund is a targeted capital funding stream that will support the development and delivery of priority visitor infrastructure projects identified in the *Place Programme Delivery Route Map*. The fund will follow the model established by the Future Nature *Natural Resources Fund*. It directly contributes to AOP deliverables by helping to develop a pipeline of transformational projects that can be delivered through Place Programme partnerships, improving the quality of visitor sites across the National Park.

6.4.1. With an initial budget of £60,000 for 2025-26, the fund is intended to help partners such as Development Trusts, public bodies, and third-sector organisations, to progress early-stage project development and strengthen delivery capacity. Funding will be restricted to priority projects located in the Route Map priority areas; Balloch, Callander, Strathard & The Trossachs, East Loch Lomond and West Loch Lomond, as well as the Secondary Hubs outwith these areas. The application process will be short and efficient, and only eligible projects meeting the criteria will be invited to submit a full funding application.

- 6.4.2. The fund will open on the website in Spring 2025, with awards issued between June and November. As a highly targeted fund, information and links to the National Park Authority webpage will be shared via direct communication with key partners and groups.

7. Tarbet Visitor Site

- 7.1. Following investment including £750,000 from the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, the visitor site at Tarbet Loch Lomond has had a significant upgrade, transforming it into a sustainable low-carbon destination with expanded facilities for visitors and the community.
- 7.2. As previously reported in the [Visitor Management Season Review 2024](#); The delay during the construction phase of the project in 2024 created some challenges on the site, with reduced parking capacity during the busy summer months. Officers worked closely with site operators and the local community to manage these challenges as well as possible.
- 7.3. The project is now in the Defects Rectification phase, and we continue to work with the contractor to ensure all snagging and outstanding elements of work are completed as quickly as possible. This includes the grass-reinforced seasonal overflow parking and accessible picnic area and the utility network upgrades to allow the EV chargers to be installed.
- 7.4. The site is also being monitored closely by staff and site operators to understand how visitors interact with the new site layout and facilities. The improved vehicle circulation has been working well to reduce conflicts between different types of users. However there have also been some issues arising from irresponsible use of the site, such as scorched picnic tabletops from disposable BBQs being placed directly on them, and vehicles parking in coach bays and on pedestrian areas at peak times.
- 7.5. Adjustments and appropriate action will be taken where necessary to resolve issues with the use of the site so far; for example, additional 'coach parking only' signage was installed in time for the Easter weekend and additional protective hot plates for the picnic tables will be installed prior to the school summer holidays. Monitoring will continue once the site is fully open to see how this addresses these issues.
- 7.6. As noted earlier work is now progressing with Tarbet Phase 2 (the cafe and toilet block improvements), following a delay in 2024–25 with assembling the Phase 2 design team, as a result of the in-year Scottish Government spending controls.

8. Balloch Pierhead Improvement Action Plan

8.1. As noted earlier in this report, the Balloch Pierhead project has been developed and jointly funded with West Dunbartonshire Council. Following a competitive tender, *Page\Park* architects were appointed by the Council as consultants to undertake the Balloch Pierhead Improvement Action Plan. The purpose of the Improvement Action Plan is to illustrate what success looks like for the Pierhead, prioritise actions, support funding proposals, and in time be used to form a planning guidance reference for any future development proposals. The Improvement Action Plan, with key sections attached as an appendix to this paper, will be considered alongside the community's Local Place Plan (in development) by the National Park Authority in preparation of the new Local Development Plan. The National Park Authority is the majority landowner, having recently secured the car park land previously owned by Scottish Enterprise. Landownership is outlined in the attached extracts from the consultant's Report.

8.2. To be able to fully consider a high-level design proposal to improve the Pierhead, the appointment included *Page\Park* undertaking a rigorous engagement process with the key stakeholders, pier users and the local community. The engagement process ensured that all groups were represented and that a broad range of views, concerns, and aspirations for the site were actively considered. The multi layered engagement process included numerous events to ensure the process was inclusive and accessible to all. *Page\Park*'s approach operated at two levels:

- Engagement with site users and stakeholders for Pierhead views, and
- Engagement with community groups and the wider public for wider Balloch views.

8.3. The engagement events held throughout November included a key stakeholder roundtable meeting, a public engagement event at the Pierhead, walking workshops on site with Balloch and Haldane Community Council and Maid of the Loch, and an online survey which received over 200 constructive and proactive responses. There was a follow-up roundtable meeting in February for the key stakeholders to review the developing proposals.

8.4. Following the engagement process the responses were compiled and *Page/Park* developed a concept layout forming the Improvement Action Plan focussed around 4 key themes;

- Enhanced Attractiveness,
- Functionality and Organisation,

- Access & Movement, and
- Biodiversity and Sustainable Design.

8.5. The table below outlines some of the key existing site challenges identified during the engagement process and the early actions proposed within the Improvement Action Plan, presented within the *Short, Medium and Long Term Projects* matrix (see Appendix 1 – Extracts from Balloch Pierhead Improvement Action Plan).

Theme	Existing Site Challenges	Proposed Early Design Actions
Enhanced Attractiveness	Weak connectivity to Balloch	A stronger sense of arrival and destination will be established including access via the Riverside Path, offering a direct, safe, and accessible route for all active travel modes.
	Limited civic space	Public and civic space on site will be increased to improve the visitor experience and create a more welcoming, safe environment. Sheltered seating and canopy
Functionality and Organisation	Disorganised storage and visual clutter	A new Operations Hub is proposed to consolidate all storage requirements, reducing clutter across the site.
	Insufficient preparation space for boat launching	The boat waiting area is expanded, alongside the introduction of a dedicated preparation zone to support launching activity.
Access and Movement	Traffic congestion and queues in summer months	The boat waiting area is expanded. The public car park is relocated. Internal vehicle movement is restricted.

	Limited wheelchair accessibility	Reduced occurrence of level changes to pathways/routes. A transfer hoist for water access is proposed.
Biodiversity and Sustainable Design	Tree and vegetation management	All landscaping will use native species to support and enhance biodiversity, create nature networks, and enrich the visitor experience within the National Park. Civic spaces will include rain gardens

9. Risks

- 9.1. It will be clear to Members that the level of ambition for this work remains high, which is entirely appropriate to drive delivery of the NPPP Vision. The main risks to delivery of both programme and the projects within, for the Park Authority and delivery partners have not changed since previous years and these remain: budget settlement, external funding availability, staff capacity, availability of consultants, availability of contractors, availability of materials, landowner agreements where required, permissions where required, continued resourcing of joint partner working, and managing external expectations with prioritisation of works. We will continue to utilise existing mitigation and control measures to manage these wherever possible.
- 9.2. The delays to project development work for Tarbet Phase 2 and also at Rowardennan in the previous year has reduced the time available for the delivery of these projects this year and there is an increasing risk that this time will not be recoverable, which may result in these projects not being fully completed in-year.
- 9.3. With three projects (Falls of Falloch, Rowardennan and Tarbet Phase 2) projected to be delivered by contractors on sites over the late autumn and into winter of 2025-2026 there is a risk that adverse winter weather conditions could delay works which may result in projects not being complete in-year.
- 9.4. Continued resourcing and capacity of joint partner working across organisations is a key risk for projects on land not controlled by the NPA. Were capacity and resource to reduce in-year, then this could stall the

development of projects and result in delays to progress of the programme.

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. Where applicable updates will also be provided in the End of Season Review 2025.
- 10.2. An indicative summary update of all partner activity against the Route Map Priorities will be provided annually within the 2026 Board programme. Formal monitoring will be through the National Park Partnership Plan.
- 10.3. The Balloch Pierhead Improvement Action Plan will be published on the National Park Authority website and updates will be provided to partner organisations and stakeholders.

11. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Extract from Balloch Pierhead Improvement Action Plan (Sections 1 and 5)

Full Balloch Pierhead Improvement Action Plan available to view on our website [here](#).

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