



CEO Report

Agenda Item 11

National Park Authority Board Meeting

9 March 2026

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1. Purpose

1.1. To provide updates on significant developments affecting the strategic context in which the National Park Authority operates as well as progress on the strategic areas of work not already reported elsewhere on the Board agenda.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. Board Members are asked to note the contents of this report for information.

3. Scottish Government Update

3.1. There are two significant developments to report in relation to the Scottish Government, and both are the subject of separate reports elsewhere on this agenda. The Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill was passed by the Scottish Parliament on January 29, 2026, and is expected to become an Act of the Scottish Parliament once it receives Royal Assent. The main changes introduced are summarised in the separate report.

3.2. As Board papers were being finalised, the Scottish Ministers issued a decision to **dismiss** the recalled appeal against the National Park Authority's refusal of planning permission in principle for the proposed Mixed-Use Tourism And Leisure Development at West Riverside And

Woodbank House, Balloch (known as Lomond Banks). The reasoning for this decision as set out in the decision letter is particularly welcome as it largely reflects and vindicates the interpretation of national planning policy which officers used as their rationale for recommending refusal to the Board. It should be noted that Ministers took a different decision from that recommended by the appointed Reporter who recommended that the appeal be upheld.

3.3. Officers are currently reviewing the documents issued by Scottish Ministers supporting this decision and a fuller late report will be circulated in advance of the Board meeting. It should be noted that there is still a right for any person aggrieved by the decision to apply to the Court of Session for the decision to be quashed within 6 weeks of the date of the decision letter (24th February 2026). Such an application must successfully argue that the decision is either outwith the powers of the Planning Act or has failed to meet a requirement of the Act.

4. Pre-Season Visitor Management Update

- 4.1. Work is progressing well in preparation for the season ahead and we are delighted that the budget settlements for ourselves and partners means that deployment levels of multi-agency staff are predicted to be largely in line with what worked successfully across last season.
- 4.2. The attached Joint Response Visitor Management Plan (appendix 1) continues the good partnership co-ordination of recent years and sets out the collective plan for the season ahead.
- 4.3. Similar to last year the NPA will be managing Sallochycampsite on behalf of FLS and we are working towards this becoming a permanent arrangement in due course while delivering efficiencies and benefits for both agencies and those enjoying the site.
- 4.4. We will also deliver visitor communication campaigns at key points across the season to influence behaviours and those are outlined in more detail within Appendix 1.
- 4.5. Looking more broadly at seasonal transport provision, we remain hopeful of a service in the Trossachs area and are exploring enhanced services in the west loch Lomond area. We are also delighted to see Stirling Council announcing two new pilot Monday to Friday services starting this spring which connect Callander – Thornhill – Port of Menteith – Aberfoyle – Kinlochard and Croftamie-Drymen-Balfron Station-Balfron-Fintry-Kippen. In addition to this it is very encouraging to hear that Ember buses have been sharing positive news about high patronage for their services connecting with the Park and have aspirations for new

services which will further improve the network, frequency and sustainable transport options.

5. Visitor Levy

- 5.1. Members are aware that the National Park Authority is continuing to closely engage with our four Local Authorities as progress is made in considering the discretionary powers set out in the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024 to introduce a visitor levy.
- 5.2. The Scottish Government introduced the Visitor Levy (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill on 6 January 2026. This Bill seeks to amend the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024 and allows local authorities to charge the levy as a fixed amount and makes other changes to the operation of the levy. This is to provide an alternative option to a percentage rate which the only approach currently provided for in the Act. Many voices in the tourism sector have argued for this as a much simpler way to administer the Levy.
- 5.3. In response to an invitation from the Scottish Parliament's Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee Officers have submitted a response to the Committee's "Call for Views" on the proposed Amendment Bill. As previously our comments have focussed on operational points and also to reflect feedback from the National Park Destination Group – a stakeholder group of National Park tourism businesses on the considerations of the proposed amendments. Key points were on the administrative benefits for businesses along with transparency and clarity for those paying the levy. It was also noted that consideration should be given to the impact a flat fee may have in areas where there is accommodation provision of both high-end and budget accommodation in areas such as the National Park Authority as that may be considered to disproportionately increase the cost of budget accommodation. Lastly, it was noted that through officer's engagement with local authorities it is being highlighted that the administrative fee for permits in Camping Permit Zones are an example where an express exemption should be applied in emerging schemes as these are administrative charges.
- 5.4. The Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee has drawn its conclusions and recommended to Parliament that the general principles of the Bill be agreed to. Parliament considered the recommendations and agreed to the general principles of the Visitor Levy (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill. Stage 1 concluded on 19 February 2026.
- 5.5. The Bill moves to Stage 2 and final amendments to this Bill will be invited from MSPs until 25 February 2026. Documents with the

amendments will be considered and debated at the meeting held on 3 March 2026.

- 5.6. As Members will recall West Dunbartonshire Council and Stirling Council have approved a percentage levy at 5% and 3% respectively. Work is ongoing by each of these local authorities to ensure a Visitor Levy Forum is established by June 2026 as set out in the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024. The function of a Forum is advisory. Its purpose is to provide advice to the local authority in a number of areas relating to the operation of a Visitor Levy scheme. It will be for the local authority to establish its own decision-making process in relation to areas the Forum has provided advice on.
- 5.7. It is intended that a Forum ensures that businesses, communities and organisations related to the visitor economy have a robust mechanism to conduct effective ongoing engagement with the local authority once a VL scheme has been introduced.
- 5.8. Both West Dunbartonshire and Stirling Councils are committed to initiating a Forum in each local authority area no later than June 2026. Both councils are progressing with developing a tourism strategy, and West Dunbartonshire Council is in the process of tendering for consultants to develop this for their local authority area. It is anticipated that the National Park Authority will take its place on each of these forums.
- 5.9. A Shadow Visitor Levy Forum for Argyll & Bute Council has been established with formal representation from the National Park Authority. The forum is currently evaluating the merits of adopting a percentage rate levy versus a percentage-based levy. Economic modelling is being developed to assess the impact of various permutations on the visitor economy. A decision to adopt the Visitor Levy is still paused.
- 5.10. Perth & Kinross Council continues to pause any decision on adopting the Visitor Levy until after the Amendment Bill has concluded.

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