



2026/27 Annual Operational Plan and Budget

Agenda Item 5

National Park Authority Board Meeting

09 March 2026

Paper for decision

1. Purpose	1
2. Recommendation(s)	1
3. Contribution to National Park Partnership Plan 2024-2029 and/or our Corporate Plan 2025-2030	1
4. Summary of Approach for 2026/27	2
5. Annual Operational Plan	2
6. Budget	5
7. Risks	7
8. Next steps	7
9. Appendices	7

1. Purpose

1.1. The purpose of this paper is to outline and seek approval of our Annual Operational Plan and budget for the 2026/27 financial year.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. It is recommended that Members approve:

- The proposed Annual Operational Plan for 2026/27 (Appendix 1)
- The proposed budget for 2025/26 (Appendix 3)

3. Contribution to National Park Partnership Plan 2024-2029 and/or our Corporate Plan 2025-2030

3.1. Our Annual Operational Plan is shaped by and reflects both the three strategic pillars of the National Park Partnership Plan 2024-29 and the priorities we have set out in our Corporate Plan 2025-30. This means that there is clearer alignment of our Annual Operational Plan deliverables and

our key strategic plans. Annual Operational Plan at Appendix 1 sets out how our activities for the year will contribute to the National Park Partnership Plan objectives for 2024-2029, as well as the Corporate Plan 2025-2030, and plays a key role in the operational delivery of those strategic plans. The budget supports the delivery of the Annual Operational Plan and therefore contributes to those same objectives.

4. Summary of Approach for 2026/27

- 4.1. Development of the 26/27 AOP and Budget took place between November 2025 and February 2026 with Operational Managers and Executive Leadership.
- 4.2. Final review process was undertaken in January and February 2026, following the announcement of the Scottish Government Budget for 2026/27 on 13 January and the subsequent allocation of grant-in-aid.
- 4.3. The proposed AOP for 2026/27 at Appendix 1 retains the same structure as the 2025/26 iteration for consistency in reporting against the National Park Plan Objectives throughout the lifespan of the latter document
- 4.4. The presentation of the AOP deliverables for 2026/27 has been reviewed and updated for consistency and clarity:
 - Coding now includes whether planned work this year involves delivery by the NPA, development by the NPA or where the NPA is influencing others' work.
 - To allow the required flexibility in reporting while retaining measurable deliverables alongside the revised wording, a list of anticipated operational activity examples has been produced (Appendix 2). This will be reviewed in-year and updates presented to Members alongside AOP update papers as necessary.
 - Links to specific objectives of the NPPP and Corporate Plan have been introduced for clarity and to enhance reporting against the NPPP.
 - Links to where the Board have strategic oversight relating to deliverables has been introduced for clarity.

5. Annual Operational Plan

- 5.1. The Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority Annual Operational Plan [AOP] sets out our proposed organisational priorities for delivery in the coming year.
- 5.2. It does not detail all core business of the organisation, although it does try to capture some of the 'business as usual' activity of the organisation, something which we introduced for the first time in 2025/26. The AOP sets out the deliverables we propose to undertake this year to drive change towards the Objectives and Outcomes of the National Park Partnership Plan 2024-29 and our Corporate Plan 2025-2030 and Appendix 2 outlines

anticipated operational activity to be undertaken in meeting the proposed deliverables.



5.3. In 2026/27 we will continue to build on our work from previous years, including delivering on programmes and strategies approved by the Board. The links to this strategic oversight have been more explicitly drawn out in the 2026/27 iteration of the AOP. This includes several multi-year projects and programmes, such as Future Nature, Mission Zero, and the Place Programme.

5.4. Our National Park Partnership Plan (2024-2029) which was approved by the NPA Board in 2023/24 describes the vision and outcomes for the whole National Park area and contributions required from many different organisations as delivery partners over a five-year period, to help achieve our shared vision for the National Park as a thriving place that is nature positive and carbon negative.

5.5. Our Corporate Plan 2025-2030 was approved by the NPA Board in 2024/25 and it gives our Staff, Board members, Scottish Ministers and those with an interest in the organisation, a clear view of the NPA's strategic direction for the next five years. The Corporate Plan considers the environment in which the Park Authority is operating and how we can work efficiently and collaboratively to offer value for money.

5.6. Guided by the National Park Partnership Plan and our Corporate Plan, the Annual Operational Plan for 2026/27 details the organisation's focus for the year, taking into account Scottish Government priorities and funding available through the organisation's annual Grant in Aid allocation.

5.7. The 2026/27 Annual Operational Plan is centred on the three Chapters of our National Park Partnership Plan, as well as our Corporate Plan for 2025-2030 and the three themes within it.

5.7.1. National Park Partnership Plan 2024-2029

- Chapter 1: Restoring Nature
- Chapter 2: Creating a Low-Carbon Place
- Chapter 3: Designing a Greener Way of Living

4.7.2. Corporate Plan 2025-2030

- Theme 1: Our Approach
- Theme 2: Our People
- Theme 3: Our Systems

5.8. The sections of the Annual Operational Plan 2026/27 are organised by the three chapters of the NPPP, a fourth section titled 'Delivering Our Corporate Plan', and a fifth section reflecting cross-cutting and enabling functions.

5.8.1. Delivering Our Corporate Plan

- In addition to actions to deliver outcomes within each of the three chapters of the National Park Partnership, our Annual Operational Plan includes a fourth section to reflect the activity being undertaken this year to deliver the organisation's Corporate Plan 2025-2030.

5.8.2. This section of the AOP plays a key role in ensuring that the Corporate Plan is the useful and used document which it is intended to be and sets out the annual actions we as an organisation are taking to meet the aspirations of Our Corporate Plan and improving our capability to deliver on our NPPP ambitions.

- Ensuring that the AOP, Corporate Plan and NPPP are appropriately aligned is important for both our operational delivery and the meeting of our strategic aims.

5.8.3. Our 2026/27 AOP aims to progress the objectives of the Corporate Plan through the actions set out in Section 4 of the Annual Operational Plan Table of Deliverables [see Appendix 1].

5.8.4. **Cross-cutting and Enabling Functions**

5.8.5. The final section of our Annual Operational Plan reflects areas of core business delivery for the year which cut-across and enable the outcomes and objectives of the NPPP and Corporate Plan.

- This section also aims to ensure that the AOP continues to reflect the operational work being resourced and undertaken across the organisation throughout the year.
- Our 2026/27 AOP aims to progress the cross-cutting and enabling actions set out in Section 5 of the Annual Operational Plan Table of Deliverables [see Appendix 1].
- These pieces of further core business will not be subject to 'RAG' ratings in the AOP Progress Updates to the Board on a quarterly basis, but there will be a short narrative update on each.

6. Budget

6.1. Draft allocations for 26/27 Core Grant in Aid are £10,408k revenue and £1,800k capital.

6.2. Revenue allocations were in line with indications from Scottish Government that revenue budget would be 'cash flat'. This means we have not received an uplift for pay-award and inflation, so in real terms this represents a reduction in revenue budget.

6.3. Despite signalling an increasingly challenging overall financial picture across capital our draft Grant in Aid allocation for 2026/27 is higher than some of the scenarios we were asked to model.

6.4. There is a separate process for Peatland and NRF funding and indications are that we will receive funding in line with 25/26 but are subject to finalisation.

6.5. All amounts are still subject to Parliamentary approval.

6.6. As with previous year's draft budgets, we take an approach of over-programming to mitigate against the risk of underspend. The current version projects a capital overspend of £306k and a revenue overspend of £285k which is in line with previous years.

- 6.7. **Staff costs** are projected to increase from the 2025/26 Q2 review position of £7,822k to £8,187k. Approx £274k of this increase is due to the pay award. 2026/27 represents the second year of the pay award that we agreed in 2025/26. We've added a limited number of roles to increase delivery capacity and to support improvements to deliver against our Public Sector Reform priorities. We will be continuing our focus on delivering against Scottish Government's Public Sector Reform priorities
- 6.8. **Operating expenses** are projected to increase from the 2025/26 Q2 review position of £2,867k to £2,875k. Due to continued investment in Information Technology we expect to see efficiency savings across our ICT spend. We have also been able to bring forward some essential administration and property related costs from anticipated spend in 2026/27, this has allowed us to offset inflation increases.
- 6.9. **Project bids**, excluding indicative Peatland and NRF, allocations are £1,961k capital and £788k revenue. Spend by National Park Partnership Plan theme and Corporate Plan includes:
- 6.9.1. **Restoring nature** – total capital spend of £89k and revenue spend of £258k. Key projects include the National Lottery Project and delivering against our Future Nature strategy. Early indications are our Peatland funding will total £611k capital and £291k revenue.
- 6.9.2. **Creating a low-carbon place** – total capital spend of £1,582k and revenue spend of £117k. Key projects include delivering against our Place Programme route map, investment in the Core Paths Network and investment in our mobility partnership and developing a sustainable travel programme.
- 6.9.3. **Designing a greener way of living** – total capital spend of £10k and revenue spend of £95k. Key projects are focused on delivering the next stages of our Local Development Plan and continuing to support communities to produce their Local Place Plans.
- 6.9.4. **Corporate plan** – total capital spend of £280k and total revenue spend of £307k. Key projects include works on the Camping Byelaws, our Piers and pontoons, replacing our website and continued investment in our IT systems to deliver cloud-based solutions.

7. Risks

7.1. Financial: Given our annualised budget cycle, risk of over or underspend always requires careful management. To help mitigate this risk we have included overprogramming. Our ongoing internal budget monitoring and management accounts processes also manage this risk, including quarterly reports to the Board and 6-weekly Project Board meetings. Budget risk is also tracked in our Risk Registers, which are reported quarterly to the Audit and Risk Committee. Additionally, in 2026/27 we aim to establish a Medium-term Financial Plan to help mitigate the risks associated with annual budgeting.

7.2. Reputational/Operational: Additional resourcing challenges have the potential to impact on our ability as an organisation to successfully complete all deliverables in the AOP for 2026/27, which in turn may impact on our ability to deliver the outcomes and objectives of the NPPP and Corporate Plan.

8. Next steps

8.1. Annual Operational Plan and Budget 2026/27, as approved, to be communicated to staff and Scottish Government Sponsor Team.

8.2. AOP and Finance updates, outlining progress against the Annual Operational Plan and Budget 2026/27 to be presented to the Board quarterly.

9. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft Annual Operational Plan 2026/27

Appendix 2 – Anticipated Operational Activity Examples

Appendix 3 – Draft Budget 2026/27

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