



# Future Nature – Update Paper

## Agenda Item 8

### National Park Authority Board Meeting

Date 9 March 2026

Paper for information

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#### **1. Purpose**

1.1. The purpose of this paper is to update the Board on the annual progress of the Future Nature Route Map: an ambitious, multi-year, strategic partnership programme for restoring nature in the National Park.

1.2. This paper and associated appendix follows the last annual update to Board in March 2025.

#### **2. Recommendation(s)**

2.1. Board are asked to note progress to date.

#### **3. Contribution to National Park Partnership Plan and/or Our 5-year Plan**

3.1. The Future Nature programme forms a key element of the strategic background, delivery plans and monitoring framework for the Restore Nature pillar of the National Park Partnership Plan.

#### **4. Background**

- 4.1. The Future Nature [Route Map](#) was published and launched on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023 and is therefore coming towards the end of its third full year of delivery.
- 4.2. The vision of Future Nature is *‘a resilient nature-rich National Park, where abundant wildlife and a healthy natural environment provide a wealth of benefits through an extensive, well-connected living network.’*
- 4.3. The key objectives of the Route Map are to (i) *‘reverse the decline in nature in Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park by 2030 latest’* and (ii) *‘ensure the widespread restoration of nature across the National Park by 2040.’*
- 4.4. This paper highlights the headlines over the last year in developing and delivering the objectives laid out in the Route Map. Appendix 1 is a report compiled from across the Future Nature partnership containing further details of all related work.

#### **5. Progress to date - Delivery Plans and Governance**

- 5.1. The Route Map identifies a range of initial actions which have been developed into more detailed, rolling five-year delivery plans focused on either the main habitat types (such as woodlands, peatlands, wetlands) or key pressures to biodiversity in the National Park, such as Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) or herbivores (wild deer and livestock).
- 5.2. These delivery plans are designed to drive nature restoration action on the ground identifying the ‘when, where and who’ and support the Future Nature partners with budget planning, funding bids, project development and robust monitoring and reporting.
- 5.3. This year alongside targeted restoration work on the ground, we have also completed a Trees and Woodlands Delivery Plan, a Herbivore Delivery Plan and worked with consultants to produce a Rhododendron Strategy to identify priority areas and actions, adding to our existing Riparian Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) and Peatland ACTION Delivery Plans. Work is currently underway through a competitive tender consultancy contract to also develop a strategic approach to our Water Delivery programme.
- 5.4. The Future Nature partnership led by the National Park Authority consists of 32 signatories ranging from agencies such as Scottish

Forestry, Forest and Land Scotland and NatureScot, through to organisations like RSPB, The Woodland Trust and Strathfillan Community Development Trust. The partnership working group continues to meet regularly with well attended and valuable operational meetings held every two months, supporting delivery and development on a whole range of partnership and landscape scale projects.

## 6. Progress to date – Delivery Highlights

- 6.1. In line with the Future Nature Route Map, we continue to monitor and record progress of the programme through an established Annual Reporting structure. This includes overall RAG status ratings for each delivery area as well as narrative updates from the National Park Authority and other delivery partners.
- 6.2. The RAG scoring system is explained in table 1 below. To quantify progress in each area of the route map we have developed a RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating system. This is based on two factors:
- Progress on planned deliverables in the last 12 months
  - Overall progress towards 2030/2040 targets

For each theme in the route map, we have assigned a score between 1 and 4 for each of the above using the definitions below. These two scores are then multiplied together to give an overall rating indicating the level of overall progress made.

Table 1.

|          |            |   |
|----------|------------|---|
| 12 to 16 | Green      | Projects would only score green by getting good or excellent both this year and in overall impact                             |
| 6 to 9   | High Amber | This is a good score – it means there is both good progress in year and some level of significant longer-term shift in impact |
| 3 to 4   | Low Amber  | This likely means good progress in year - but little evidence of longer-term shift in impact                                  |
| 1 to 2   | Red        | Indicates a lack of in year and longer-term impact  |

6.3. Below is the summary table showing the rating of each Future Nature programme area over the past year.

| Green   | High Amber   | Low Amber   | Red |
|---|--|---|-----|
| Programme level delivery<br>Herbivores<br>Peatland ACTION<br>Landscape scale projects (inc Wild Strathfillan, The Great Trossachs Forest, Loch Lomond Rainforest) | Programme level partnership development<br>Programme level strategy development<br>Riparian INNS<br>Rhododendron<br>Woodland expansion<br>River and wetland restoration<br>New funding models<br>Nature based visitor experiences<br>Education and outreach<br>Volunteering for nature<br>Nature Positive Development<br>Regional Land Use Partnership | Existing nature – Species (priority spp)<br>Agricultural and forestry systems<br>Green jobs and skills<br>Community empowerment |     |

6.4. We have seen some real positive progress for nature restoration outputs this year, chiefly associated with an increase in funding support and partner engagement. The Herbivores workstream moved from high-amber to green status, largely as a result of new initiatives including the Deer Management Incentive scheme. ‘Programme delivery’ moved from low amber to green through excellent progress on funding (including the Nature Restoration Fund, and The National Lottery Heritage Fund Development Phase bid), as well Future Nature being embedded further into our Place Programme and Estates work.

‘River and wetland restoration’ moved from low amber to high amber as a result of good progress with the production of a Water Delivery Plan. ‘Jobs and skills’ is newly reported this year. The overall picture shows a growing programme each year but continuing uncertainty on medium to long-term funding, particular with regard to agricultural schemes.

6.5. Key highlights this year include:

**£1.2 Million of Nature Restoration Fund (NRF)** awarded to the National Park Authority by Scottish Government, delivering 24 projects so far ranging from new community deer larders to large scale removal of INNS.

Working with RSPB and Loch Lomond & The Trossachs Countryside Trust a successful Development Phase bid was submitted to National Lottery Heritage Fund for the **Loch Lomond and The Trossachs Landscape Connections** with **£670,000 of development funding** secured for 18 months with a potential further **£9million** of delivery funding over the following eight years.

**604 hectares of degraded peat bog restored and on the road to recovery**, by our Peatland ACTION team with another 302 hectares to be delivered by end of March 2026. *This is expected to see a total of 906 hectares restored surpassing our annual target of 840 hectares.*

**A brand-new Deer Management Incentive Scheme launched** across all the National Park aiming to encourage higher female and juvenile deer culls through a financial incentive for land managers. There are currently 26 land holdings enrolled in the scheme, covering 20.5% of land in the National Park.

**Over 700 locations in the National Park that are known to have riparian INNS were monitored by River and Fisheries Trusts, the National Park Authority Nature & Land Use team, Estates team and Ranger Service in 2025.** 168 (24%) sites were recorded as being eradicated with a further 306 (44%) showing a decrease.

**Approaching 4500 hours of Practical Conversation Volunteering**, of which almost 3000 hours delivered multiple projects for nature restoration, such as planting more than 38,000 seeds, saplings and trees.

**Over 10,400 hours of public engagement and visitor impact management** was delivered by the National Park Ranger Service.

- 6.6. Good progress has been made on the three key landscape scale projects identified in the Future Nature strategy:

In **The Great Trossachs Forest** 19 decision-makers across 16 key stakeholder organisations attended The Great Trossachs Forest event in September celebrating 10-years as a National Nature Reserve.

Delivery in **Wild Strathfillan** continues into the last year of the current Nature Restoration Funding. Projects included fencing the Crom Alt gorge at Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) Kirkton Farm to provide arctic alpine plants protection from grazing herbivores and establishment of a new specialist plant nursery at the RSPB Loch Lomond Reserve. This nursery will be used to grow threatened, rare, and absent native species of flora to support nature restoration projects.

In the **Loch Lomond Rainforest**, supported by a £90,000 funding award from the Nature Restoration Fund, we have carried out extensive site surveys to develop management plans on the first proposed phase of rainforest restoration. The final report with proposed management plans for each site will be completed by March 2026 and will feed into the development phase of the new Landscape Connections project in the coming year.

## 7. Risks

- 7.1. The fundamental risks remain very similar to those experienced through the previous three years of Future Nature to date. Operationally we continue a positive trajectory of liaison and scaling up of our own internal resourcing and delivery. However there remains considerable uncertainty regarding the availability of longer-term funding such as the Nature Restoration Fund in order to maintain momentum and expand delivery. The successful application for National Lottery Heritage Fund development phase will considerably help with this but match funding is also a requirement of Landscape Connections and working with the delivery partners we will need to secure additional income, such as more external grants and exploring possibilities such as ethical green finance.
- 7.2. Last year's report highlighted the ongoing risk of wider policy and strategic uncertainty over areas, such as Biodiversity Enhancement through the planning system, alongside agri-environment support mechanisms. This picture remains very similar and there remains uncertainty about what the changes will be and, specifically for the National Park, how well they will be aligned to delivering a National

Park which is an exemplar in addressing the climate and biodiversity crisis.

- 7.3. With the imminent arrival of the new Natural Environment Act there is scope for optimism that nature restoration will sit alongside climate change on a stronger statutory footing in Scotland and that this will lead to concerted action resulting in benefits to nature and people. However, this does depend on meaningful and successful implementation of the new act over many years by all involved in and responsible for nature restoration delivery at a national level.
- 7.4. We continue to work closely with other organisations, individuals and agencies and remain very reliant on others as the main deciding influence and the practical agents of delivery. The resourcing pressures facing all partners including public, private, NGOs and local community agencies pose a considerable challenge our collective capacity to deliver a shared vision.

## 8. Next steps

- 8.1. By the end of March, we will review all the ongoing delivery plans and set objectives and plans for the coming year.
- 8.2. Key priorities for the year to come include developing our thinking on a Nature Network for the National Park as part of the new Local Development Plan, the crucial first year of development for the Landscape Connections Initiative and rebooting the delayed Resilient Farming Network project.
- 8.3. Alongside this will be the ongoing programme of nature related project delivery and the core business of ecological and landscape related advisory work that support and expand our statutory functions.

## 9. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Future Nature Annual Report 2025-26

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