



Loch Lomond and the Trossachs Landscape Connections

Agenda Item 9

National Park Authority Board Meeting

9 March 2026

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1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper and attached appendix is to update the Board on the new **Loch Lomond and the Trossachs Landscape Connections Initiative** - a large-scale nature restoration focused programme, led by the National Park Authority, the Development Phase of which has recently secured funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The Board are asked to note progress to date and planned next steps for the programme.

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

- 3.1 Landscape Connections provides a mechanism to scale up and deliver a variety of the outcomes within the National Park Partnership Plan from across all three pillars of the plan including Restoring Nature, Creating a Low-Carbon Place and Designing a Greener Way of Living.

4. Background

- 4.1 Landscape Connections is a new £150million strategic fund from The National Lottery Heritage Fund aiming to support nature restoration projects in National Parks and National Landscapes (previously known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) around the UK.
- 4.2 National Park Authority staff identified this fund more than a year ago as an excellent strategic fit for the landscape-scale nature restoration projects identified and developed through our Future Nature Route Map.
- 4.3 Working with a wide range of Future Nature partners a draft bid was developed and following Exec team approval this was submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in August 2025. The other partners in the bid are RSPB Scotland and Loch Lomond and The Trossachs Countryside Trust.
- 4.4 In December 2025 we were delighted to have been informed by the National Lottery Heritage Fund that we were successful in securing an initial £670,000 for an 18-month long Development Phase which should unlock a further £9.2million for the subsequent Delivery Phase (subject to successful implementation of the Development Phase and a successful Delivery Phase submission).
- 4.5 In February 2026, this was publicly announced receiving good media coverage and allowing us to begin the planning and implementation of the Development Phase
- 4.6 The Development Phase will officially begin in May 2026 and has the purpose of refining and fully preparing the following Delivery Phase. The Development Phase will complete and submit the Delivery Phase application in October 2027 and if successful the eight-year Delivery Phase would then start around April 2028.

5. Programme outline

- 5.1. The Landscape Connections initiative focuses on a core mission of restoring a rich mix of globally threatened native woodland including temperate rainforest, ancient Caledonian pinewoods and upland woodland, in total covering an area more than twice the size of Glasgow.
- 5.2. The programme will connect the three landscape projects identified in the Future Nature Route Map and the National Park Partnership Plan – The Great Trossachs Forest, Wild Strathfillan and Lomond Rainforest.
- 5.3. Delivery of this core mission in a new ‘woodland restoration zone’ will be achieved through wider systemic programmes across the landscape projects

which in turn provide multiple benefits to people in and around the National Park. These wider programmes include:

- Support for rural economies through green job creation, practical training and skills, and improved local venison markets
- ‘Community-led conversation’ at scale – communities shaping projects from the outset and involved in all stages of planning and delivery.

5.4. Appendix 1 is the Initiative ‘brochure’ which was submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund and gives a good overview of all the eleven programmes which make up the overall initiative. These programmes are:

- Rhododendron-Free Future
- Loch Lomond Venison
- Grazing for Future Nature
- Restoring our Woodland Mosaic
- Growing our Future
- Nature’s Future Workforce
- Funding Future Nature
- Embedded Communities
- Engaging and Inspiring Action for Nature
- Nature Routes
- Learn and Share

6. Programme Structure – Governance, Roles and Responsibilities

6.1. The scale and breadth of Landscape Connections requires clear governance, roles and responsibilities to be put in place early between the three main partners. Additionally, there will be ongoing working relationships with multiple other delivery bodies involved in on the ground projects which will need clear processes and procedures.

6.2. The National Park Authority will be the overall lead and secretariat for the project. All financial claims and reporting to the main funder will be through the Park Authority who will also hold overall responsibility for the initiative.

6.3. Throughout the development of the application, National Park Authority officers have worked hand in hand with RSPB Scotland and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs Countryside Trust. A Memorandum of Understanding has been agreed with these organisations for the initiative, to be followed by individual funding agreements with RSPB who lead delivery on the jobs and skills programme and the Countryside Trust who will lead on community engagement and specialist plant nursery programme. Together we are

committed to the collective development and delivery of this initiative and have formed a Programme Board and Steering Group which have already been functioning through the application phase.

- 6.4. A Programme Board was established from senior representatives of the Partner organisations during the bid-writing phase, and this will continue to have oversight of the Initiative during the duration of the Development Phase. Beneath this Board sits a Steering Group comprising of lead officers from the Partners and which oversees the different workstreams.

7. Budget and Staffing

- 7.1. The Development Phase has an overall value of just under £1.3million to be delivered in an 18-month period spanning 2026/7 and 2027/8. This budget comprises of three elements – (i) the National Lottery Heritage Fund contribution, (ii) non-cash (in-kind) contributions from all the partners and delivery bodies and (iii) match funding to be secured by the National Park Authority.
- 7.2. With £676,137 secured from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and £381,604 of non-cash contributions (such as existing staff and volunteer time, hosting and support costs) coming from partners and delivery bodies, the remaining £240,000 will need to be secured as match funding by the National Park Authority.
- 7.3. A proportion of this match funding is presented in the draft National Park Authority Budget for 2026/27 presented elsewhere on this agenda. Efforts are underway to help secure an additional £100,000 through a Nature Restoration Fund bid to contribute towards the match funding requirement and so reduce the impact on our core grant in aid funding.
- 7.4. There will be three new posts employed for 18 months by the National Park Authority to progress the Development Phase. Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund these will be a new Programme Manager (1 Full Time Equivalent), a Programme Coordinator post (0.5 FTE) to support the programme and a Green Routes Project Officer (1 FTE) leading on the work to develop sustainable plans for people to access and experience the nature restoration areas.
- 7.5. Additionally, there will be four further funded posts hosted by the other partners employed for 18 months. The Countryside Trust will host a Plant Nursery Manager (1 FTE), a Communities Development Officer (1 FTE) and a Communities Advisor (1 FTE) (the latter employed by Community Land Scotland). At RSPB there will be a new Nature's Future Workforce Project Officer (0.5 FTE).

- 7.6. This new team will provide the necessary capacity to drive forward this exciting new initiative. They will be embedded in the wider work of the three organisations, working with existing staff and teams to ensure close alignment and coordination between this initiative and all the wider work it relates to across the National Park Partnership Plan.

8. Risks

- 8.1. A new risk register was established as part of the application phase and will be reviewed and developed to become an operations document ahead of the Development Phase start date in May. Key current risks are highlighted below:
- 8.2. **Match funding:** The National Lottery Heritage fund requires match funding and as described in section 7 the National Park Authority is committed to deliver £240,000 of match funding over the next two financial years as part of the development phase.
- 8.3. Over the Development Phase the partner bodies will need to put together a match funding plan for the following Delivery Phase. Whilst the final budget will be reviewed throughout the Development Phase, the overall Delivery Project value is estimated at just under £15million with £9million coming from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and £2.4 million from non-cash contributions. This would require cash match funding of just over £3million. Whilst a considerable sum, this is a joint commitment from all three partners and needs to be secured over an eight-year period - an annual target of £375,000. We believe that given the scale of delivery, the scope to attract other grants such as match funding from the Nature Restoration Fund, Forestry Grant Schemes, possible corporate and trust funding as well as contributions through our Grant in Aid makes this match funding requirement very achievable. Planning for this match funding will be a key element of the Development Phase and an ongoing risk to closely monitor.
- 8.4. **Partnership working:** the successful delivery of Landscape Connections will not be possible without committed partners. In the first instance this includes RSPB and the Countryside Trust. As described earlier these partners have been integral to the development so far, we have an agreed MoU and will have funding agreements specifying their role and commitments to the project ahead of the Development Phase starting. This partnership is very firmly established through over a year of developing the application as well as strong working relationships before that. Nonetheless it will be necessary to monitor any ongoing risk of changes in circumstances and capacity in those key partners.
- 8.5. More widely, over the Development Phase we will need to build a series of clear delivery agreements with other delivery organisations and land

managers. A tracker document will be used during the Development Phase to allow us to live-track those partnership commitments and land management agreements as the project develops and ensure they are in place in advance of the Delivery Phase.

- 8.6. **Recruitment and retainment of dedicated project team.** It is always a challenge in project-based work such as this that the initial Development Phase only offers firm commitment for an initial eighteen-month period. This poses a risk in attracting, recruiting and retaining the team throughout the Development Phase, in the interim period between phases (see below) and in some cases through to the completion of the Delivery Phase.
- 8.7. It is a particular challenge in staff retention that there will be a minimum period of six months between completing the Development Phase and being able to secure and start the Delivery Phase. Planning is underway now to assess which of the new roles are short-term development ones and which are longer term and how we plan to fill the funding gap to be able to retain key posts through into delivery.
- 8.8. **New monitoring and reporting requirements creating corporate process and capacity risks.** This is a large-scale project and National Lottery Heritage projects come with a new set of financial and reporting requirements which are not part of the National Park Authorities standard systems and of which there is limited recent experience within the team. Colleagues across the National Park Authority teams, including those in Corporate Governance, Legal and Finance have been involved from the earliest stages of developing this project. Staff have thoroughly reviewed the requirements, terms and conditions of the Lottery funding and reporting and compared them to our own procurement and financial reporting systems and we are live to the risks of setting up and maintaining new corporate processes.

9. Next steps

- 9.1. The bid team have recently submitted the permission to start paperwork to the National Lottery Heritage Fund and expect to conclude that soon. We hope to have permission to start well ahead of the planned start date of May 2026.
- 9.2. Recruitment for the two Park Authority hosted posts is already underway with a timeline for sifting candidates and carrying out interviews in place, with the aim of having the Programme Manager and Programme Coordinator in post in time for the project start date.
- 9.3. The key focus between now and May include (i) the finalisation of funding agreements with RSPB and the Countryside Trust for their lead areas, (ii) the

set-up of new monitoring and reporting structures, and (iii) pre-planning for each programme area in readiness to start in May.

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