



Draft minutes of meeting held on 9 March 2026

Agenda Item 3

National Park Authority Board Meeting
8 June 2026

Paper for approval

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Present
Heather Reid (Convener) (HR)
Martin Earl (Depute Convener) (ME)
Sarah Drummond (SD)
Ronnie Erskine (RE)
David Mackie (DM)
Christopher Spray (CS)
Rhona Brock (RB)
Davy Fettes (DF)
Richard Johnson (RJ)
Mark Irvine (MI)
Maurice Corry (MC)
Gerry McGarvey (GM)
Isla Jackson (IJ) (Board Shadow) joined meeting at Item 9

Apologies

Claire Chapman

Colin Lee

Hazel Sorrell

Shonny Paterson

In Attendance - National Park Authority Staff
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Gordon Watson (GW), Chief Executive Officer

Stuart Mearns (SM), Director of Place

Anna McLean (AM), Director of Engagement and Innovation

Simon Jones (SJ), Director of Environment and Visitor Services
--

Dougie Smith (DS), Corporate Performance Manager & Proper Officer

Annie Fitzpatrick (AF), Governance and Information Advisor (Note Taker)

Jane Kemp (JK), Head of Governance and Performance
--

Sam Stubbs (SS), Head of People and Assets
--

Kenny Auld (KA), Head of Visitor Services

Michael Ward (MW), Finance Manager

Helen Bowman (HB), Legal Advisor and Business Improvement

Dom Hall (DH), Future Nature Development Manager (joined meeting at Item 8)

Items and Actions

Item 1: Welcome and Apologies

The Convener opened the meeting by welcoming all attendees to Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Headquarters in Balloch.

HR reminded all Members to speak clearly into the microphones provided and not to speak over each other so that those following online are able to hear proceedings with clarity.

The Convener welcomed the members of the public observing the meeting online through a livestream on our website.

HR asked Members and National Park staff participating in this meeting to introduce themselves. A welcome was given to Mark Irvine, a newly appointed Board member.

Attendance noted with apologies from Claire Chapman, Colin Lee, Hazel Sorrell and Shonny Paterson.

HR also welcomed Diarmuid O'Neill, our interim Director from Scottish Government for Environment and Forestry, who will be hosting a closed session with the Board today after the official meeting.

Items and Actions

HR restated the Board's commitment to ethical standards in public life and highlighted Members' responsibilities under the Code of Conduct, emphasising section 3 on bullying and harassment and the Convener's role in upholding those responsibilities.

Item 2: Declarations of Interest

CS stated that he is a board member of Environmental Standards Scotland who are appointed as the scrutiny body for the progress of the Natural Environment Scotland Bill – Item 10. This appointment is declared on his Register of Interests.

HR noted under Item 9, that she is chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland Committee where the national park application was considered but she was not in attendance nor had any involvement with decision-making. Her appointment has been announced previously and her Register of Interests updated to reflect.

Item 3: Minutes of Meeting held on 8 December 2025

Minor (typo) amendments have been made to the minutes. The minutes were proposed by CS and seconded by RJ.

DECISION: The minutes of the Board Meeting held on 8 December 2025 were approved.

Item 4: Matters Arising from meeting held on 8 December 2025

The convener introduced the paper and passed to DS who provided an update on the ongoing actions.

Item 5: 2026/27 Budget and AOP

JK introduced the paper highlighting the following:

This is the third year we have taken an integrated approach to the AOP budget. Timelines this year have been condensed.

DS stated that a broad approach had been taken this year to aim for consistency.

He also highlighted points including establishing deliverables, coding against multiple parts of the plan and specific links to the Partnership Plan and Corporate Plan, a different approach taken in language and format for reporting.

This is a multi-audience document.

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- *Designing A Greener Way of Living* progress

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- Process improvement
- Local Place Plans and supporting local communities
- Collaboration with Cairngorms National Park
- Place Programme delivery
- Process Improvement and Digital Strategy Work
- Core work on the West Highland Way
- Trossachs Explorer and sustainable transport

MW presented the budget section of the paper.

MW highlighted that we have been able to continue to invest in capital projects; the three main ones being Tarbet, Falls of Falloch and Core Paths funding will continue into next year.

Across the projects, there is an element of over-programming for 26/27 which will allow us to deal with uncertainty. Revenue allocation is cash flat. We already know the pay award for next year but going into 27/28 we are expecting an increase in pension contributions.

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- Challenges we have when thinking of longer-term budgets
- Delivery of Peatland and NRF work
- Explanation of staff costs

DECISION: Members were asked to approve the AOP and proposed budget. All members content to approve.

Item 6: Risk Appetite Statement

RE thanked HB, DS and JK for all the work gone into this. RE highlighted the role that board members play and that they should be assured by the approach taken. Also useful was having comments from the Youth side.

JK stated that one of the aims was to have useable and practical documents that can be applied day to day as well. Thanks to DS and HB.

HB stated that this should be a practical guidance for people to use and this has shaped the thought process in pulling this together. Looked at a range of

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approaches and being a diverse organisation, it wasn't possible to have one category, one appetite. There will be scenario-based training on this.

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- Excellent, clear and thorough piece of work.
- Learning which informed our Risk work
- Climate Change risk
- Where do our public communications fall as this has a big impact on our public image.
- This is an enabling document that will evolve. From a proactive and reactive point of view, it's a very good document.
- Plans for roll-out and application across the organisation.
- Fully endorse involving young people in consultation.

RE stated that there is now an established framework. Categories will be defined and some may be changed but we will ensure that the main areas of risk are captured.

DECISION: Members were asked to approve the updated Risk Appetite Matrix. Whilst also noting the framework will be updated and will be presented for approval at Audit and Risk Committee. All members content to approve.

Item 7: Standards Commission for Scotland Hearing NPA/LLT/4184 Written Decision

DS presented this paper.

HR noted that this has been a lengthy process and the process and outcome underlines our committee to upholding standards in public life in Scotland and good governance from this Board.

DECISION: All members content to approve.

Item 8: Future Nature Update

HR introduced DH to the meeting and handed to CS who introduced the paper.

Thanks to SJ and DH. There are a series of papers on Nature conservation coming up and people should consider 'how can we help?'

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SJ spoke about the enormity of the subject and the challenges faced. This is a multi-year commitment for everyone in professional and personal lives. Handed to DH.

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- Community Empowerment
- Volunteer engagement
- Partnership working progression.
- Advocacy
- Stakeholders and partners
- Exploring Green Finance
- When proactively gathering evidence eg. Non-native species, are we sharing our findings with bodies like the Scottish Government.
- Confidence in perception of the role we are playing and work undertaken.
- Unmanaged land
- Nature Restoration Fund work
- Peatland restoration work

HR thanked all involved in Future Nature work.

DECISION: Members agreed to note the content of the report.

HR welcomed IJ to the meeting.

Item 9: Landscape Connections

CS introduced the paper and congratulated the team on the work put in.

With partners RSPB and the Countryside Trust, this involves everyone across the Park. Connectivity, Quality and Scale.

SJ stated that with programmes of this scale it's vital to engage with partners and build momentum. Funding resources are required to tackle the nature crisis.

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DH commented that it's helpful to be able to plan on a 10-year basis. Closely working with communities over a long period and engaging with visitors. Nature led project.

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- Has natural flood management been taken into consideration. ACTION: SJ and DH to consider this as a topic for Strategy Day
- Programme Board being established. How is the governance going to be reflected at this Board for the project.
- Are there any particular follow-on prospects in terms of leveraging this and encouraging more people to get involved.
- How is the information on this going to get to communities.

ACTION: SJ and DH to consider this as a topic for Strategy Day

DECISION: Members agreed to note the content of the report.

Item 10: Natural Environment Bill Update

GW presented the paper and highlighted the following:

The bill was passed on 29th January, setting out enabling powers and statutory targets for nature amongst others.

Final amendments are being made to the National Park Act.

It heightens enforcement powers in relation to byelaws in the ability to issue fixed penalty notices.

Unsustainable deer population impact – the bill sets out circumstances in how that may be taken forward.

Provisions in the Act and byelaws around wildfire and banning recreational fires during the season.

DECISION: Members noted the contents of the report.

Item 11: CEO Report (inc. Pre-season Visitor Management Update)

GW took members through the paper and highlighted the following:

2 main items are: the pre-season update and budget.
Salloch Campsite

Items and Actions

Progress on Visitor Levy proposal.

Bill in parliament allowing a fixed rate rather than a percentage rate for Visitor Levy.

Briefing note went out to members re a diesel spill affecting the Dochart and Killin community.

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- Typo in section 5.9 ACTION – to Adjust
- Pleased to see the work done between NPA and Stirling Council re bus services and visitor transport.
- Sharing learnings with and from other sectors with regards to sustainable transport infrastructure and joining links.
- Would be great to have real-time in-situ programme providing information on things like weather risks, preferred routes, nature.
- Collaboration with Police Scotland re: Duck Bay involving jet skis, visitors, litter etc.
- Visitor Management

HR thanks DF for his contribution around the Killin diesel spillage and the work in partnership with the NPA in communication and awareness raising of this.

ACTION – AF to adjust section 5.9 typo

DECISION: Members noted the contents of the report.

GW handed over to SM to give an update on the Lomond Banks report which was issued as a late paper to members prior to this meeting.

SM highlighted paragraph 3.3 and the reason for ministers dismissing the appeal and the decision notice. There are 6 weeks to challenge the ministers' decision and this deadline is 6th April.

DECISION: Members noted the content of the report.

Item 12: Convener's Report

Five Board Members are due to be finishing a second term on the board at the end of October, so a lot of time has been spent on the public appointment process.

January and start of February has been spent interviewing and five nominations have gone to the cabinet secretary last month. Approval and checks are almost complete and we will share as soon as possible. Thanks to the deputy director Donald Henderson, Neelam Bashi from the Ethics Commissioner's Office and

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Morag Shepherd, our independent panel member on helping with the interview process. Also, thanks to Jane Cook and her team for helping us manage that process and DS for all the work he did around the skills matrix and job description.

A few appraisals have been completed. More dates going out between now and June.

We held an invasive non-native species summit here in Balloch in partnership with Nature Scot and Scottish Wildlife Trust and the Scottish Forum on Green Finance in December. Great event and some follow up with a delivery plan being sent to the cabinet secretary with a letter highlighting the importance of this.

As always, Members are encouraged to let HR know if they would like her to attend any activities or events in the National Park.

Item 13: AOP Progress Report

DS introduced the paper and highlighted the following:

We have taken a slightly different approach this year in response to feedback from the paper in June.

A table has been constructed to show where the continued deliverables sit within next year's plan.

This is the penultimate report and the final progress report will be given in June. There are two deliverables behind schedule with reasons connected to staffing capacity, absence and additional spend control processes.

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- The Place Programme Delivery
- The new website is due for launch later in the year; are we testing our tasks and services with partners.

DECISION: Members noted the content of the report.

Item 14: Financial Report

MW introduced the paper.

Statutory accounts produced no further questions from internal audit after 2 weeks of being onsite.

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- Nature Restoration funding

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- Assurance that we are on track for a balanced outcome for our revenue budget for the end of year.

DECISION: Members noted the content of the report.

Item 15: Annual Health & Safety Update

SS introduced the paper, highlighting 4 key points:

- Overall systems are improving, policy review and compliance checks are underway, however the implementation across teams still need strengthening.
- Incident levels are stable and reporting is definitely improving.
- Our ParkSafe reporting app is working well and reducing time spent reporting an incident. Priorities for the coming year include driving safely.
- Deep dive into unacceptable behaviour.

Discussion and questions from Members followed. The discussion focused on:

- Public Reporting of incidents
- Overall Health and Safety arrangements.
- Increasing health and well-being for staff is good to see and support around women's health.
- Tick bites

DECISION: Members noted the content of the report.

Item 16: Committee and Group Highlights

Planning and Access Committee – RJ – PAC met several times to discuss a large variety of planning applications and appeals which have included access onto public roads, private water supplies and windfarms outside of our area. Regular briefings on the local development and land use plan which have been extremely useful and updates from major planning applications such as Lomond Banks and Cononish Goldmine. Support and advice have been greatly received from the legal and planning teams. Also received excellent briefing documents from planning officers so thank you to them for those.

Audit and Risk Committee – RE – ARC have considered an update from External Audit who were setting out their timelines for the year. Azerts, our new internal auditors, had a few different reports with a follow-up report on actions. Financial Sustainability-assured on the process going forward. There were specific audits on Management Information and Stakeholder Management. Draft internal audit plan for

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the year ahead presented. Deep dive on unacceptable behaviour which was well received.

Futures Group – SD – The last Futures Group is in 2 weeks on 24th March and will be focused on Housing. We previously did a session on Housing a few years ago, but this one will specifically look at the interventions and levers that are available to us as a National Park and exploring ideas around this. Speakers include Donna Milton, David Moodie and Fiona Campbell. A good mix of people that will bring a balanced perspective.

Countryside Trust – CS – The new CEO is settling in and we are looking to try and get a meeting with our respective Boards sometime. A lot of focus recently on Landscape Connections bid and Countryside Trust will be leading some areas on Community Development. HR welcomed Alistair from the NPA Board.

Local Access Forum – DF – Going well and looking at any skills gaps for recruitment process. Looking at site visits as part of training programme. Had a couple of requests from NPA to go look at issues with paths. Thanks as always to the Access team for support.

Youth Committee – IJ – No pre-board meeting this month as the first in-person meeting is taking place on Saturday. We will be planning for the year ahead. Also have a bit of filming going on for the Nature Connections Campaign.

MC thanked IJ and all who presented today.

Item 17: Any Other Business

DS reminded members that the pre-election period begins on 26th March. DS will circulate guidance for public bodies and it has a couple of references to Board Members. DS summarised a couple of points:

13.4 You cannot work with a political party in an official capacity as a Board member

13.7 The code of conduct still applies

13.8 If you are campaigning in this part of the election, you must make it clear that it is not in your capacity as a NPA Board member

Also applies to us as an organisation and staff. Communication will follow.

ACTION: DS to circulate pre-election guidance to Members

Items and Actions
Item 18: Date of next meeting
Monday 8 June 2026

Signed _____

Heather Reid, Convener

DRAFT