



CEO Report

Agenda Item 8

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Date 8 June 2026

Paper for information

| | | |
|----|--|---|
| 1. | Purpose | 1 |
| 2. | Recommendation(s)..... | 1 |
| 3. | Scottish Government Update | 2 |
| 4. | Visitor Levy Update..... | 2 |
| 5. | Local Development and Land Use Plan..... | 3 |
| 6. | Sallochy and East Loch Lomond Update | 5 |
| 7. | Transport Update | 6 |
| 8. | West Highland Way Trust | 7 |

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

Following the outcome of the Scottish Parliament Elections, the Scottish Government Cabinet has been appointed and it should be noted that Gillian Martin MSP has been appointed as Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs and this is assumed to include responsibility for National Parks. Ms Martin visited the National Park last year with a focus on our nature restoration work and it is hoped that a further visit can be arranged in the coming months.

The new Scottish Government Director General for Net Zero, Andy Kerr visited the National Park on 18th May. This provided an excellent opportunity to showcase the work of the National Park Authority to a key senior official advising Scottish Ministers at the outset of a new Scottish Parliament term. Other Scottish Government delegations visiting the National Park include officials responsible for the Nature Restoration Fund, Nature Finance and the implementation of the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026. The latter visit discussed the next stages of implementing the National Park provisions of the Act and in particular the secondary legislation to strengthen byelaw enforcement powers for the National Park Authority.

4. Visitor Levy Update

- 4.1. 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.
- 4.2. The Scottish Government introduced the Visitor Levy (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill on 6 January 2026. This Bill sought to amend the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024 and allow local authorities to charge the levy as a fixed amount and make other changes to the operation of the levy. This amendment bill was welcomed by businesses as it simplifies

administrative burdens for businesses and has more transparency and clarity for those paying the levy. The Visitor Levy (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill passed on 24 March 2026.

- 4.3. As Members may recall, the Visitor Levy (Scotland) act determines that each Local Authority adopting the Visitor Levy must establish a Visitor Levy Advisory Forum to provide advice to each local authority relating to the operation of a Visitor Levy scheme.
- 4.4. Both Stirling Council and West Dunbartonshire Council have adopted the Visitor Levy scheme using the percentage rate model, and subsequently have each established a Visitor Levy Advisory Forum consisting of tourism businesses, communities and organisations related to the visitor economy. It will be for respective local authorities to establish its own decision-making process in relation to areas the Forum provides advice on.
- 4.5. Members will be interested to know that the National Park Authority has secured a place on both forums.
- 4.6. It is anticipated that Argyll & Bute Shadow Visitor Levy Forum will have a draft Visitor Levy proposal to share with elected Members of Argyll & Bute Council on 24 June 2026. If approved, this will then go out for consultation.
- 4.7. Perth & Kinross Council are presenting a draft Visitor Levy proposal to full Council on 17 June 2026.

5. Local Development and Land Use Plan

The new Local Development and Land Use Plan will cover the period 2028–2038 and will function as both a Local Development Plan and Land Use Framework, guiding how the National Park evolves towards the long-term vision for 2045 of becoming a thriving place that is nature positive and carbon negative. Building on the

National Park Partnership Plan 2024–2029, the Plan will set out where development should and should not occur, as well as considering land use change, balancing the needs of communities, visitors, businesses and the rural economy, climate adaptation, carbon reduction and nature restoration. It will establish a new spatial strategy to guide investment, development and land management across the National Park, including opportunities to strengthen ecological connectivity and expand the Nature Network through habitat restoration and green and blue infrastructure.

Members will recall [approving the Evidence Report for the new Plan in November 2025](#). This was subsequently submitted to the Scottish Government for a ‘Gate Check’ review to assess the sufficiency of the evidence base from which the Plan will be prepared. A Reporter was appointed in January 2026 and [outcome of the Gate Check assessment was received on the 21 May 2026](#). The Reporter has advised that the evidence base is sufficient to enable preparation of the new plan to proceed.

The Reporter’s decision is positive overall and recognises the extensive evidence gathering and engagement undertaken, including the absence of any unresolved disputes from Key Agencies or stakeholders. The decision particularly notes the strength of the housing evidence and supports the ambitious approach proposed through the indicative Local Housing Land Requirement to support sustainable communities, population retention and housing affordability across the National Park.

The Reporter also acknowledges the substantial progress made on Local Place Plans and the generally proportionate and collaborative approach taken throughout the Evidence Report process. A small number of advisory matters are identified for further consideration as the Plan progresses however these are not considered to affect the overall sufficiency of the Evidence Report.

In parallel, work has commenced on the early stages of preparing the new spatial development and land use strategy. This work is informed by the strategic direction established through the National Park Partnership Plan 2024–2029, Local Place Plans prepared by communities, the evidence base and implications identified through the Evidence Report process, and the remaining supply of undeveloped sites within the current Local Development Plan. Together, these provide a strong foundation for developing future strategies, site proposals and any necessary local policy approaches.

A non-statutory “Call for Land, Sites and Ideas” engagement phase was undertaken between 29 January and 23 April 2026 to invite suggestions for land, sites, ideas and potential land use changes to be considered through the new Plan. This was open to everyone, with targeted engagement undertaken with developers, land and planning agents, land managers, businesses and communities through direct mailouts, online engagement and in-person sessions. Responses have now been logged and acknowledged, and site assessment work is underway and will continue over the summer months. A schedule of submitted sites and proposals is expected to be published in late July/early August once data processing is complete, with fuller updates to be provided to Board Members in September and October 2026.

6. Salloch and East Loch Lomond Update

The National Park Authority’s operation of the Forestry and Land Scotland owned Salloch campsite has continued into its second season this year with the season starting well, building on the success of 2025. The continuation of low cost camping provided at the site is key to the successful operation of the Camping Management Byelaws in the East Loch Lomond corridor which are currently under review and discussed elsewhere on this agenda. Once again, we have appointed a Seasonal

Ranger Team Leader looking after our 3 campsites and managing the teams on our sites in an efficient operating model which continues to be well received by visitors. A longer term arrangement for the National Park Authority to occupy the site is currently being discussed with FLS which would allow us to better plan staffing and site investment over the coming years.

Despite the mixed weather during Spring months, visitor numbers at Balmaha Visitor Centre, Conic Hill and along the West Highland Way have been extremely high with contractors finding it a challenge to complete the important path work on the southern Conic Hill approach due the sheer volume of enthusiastic walkers passing through.

Improved surfacing and car parking arrangements at Milarrochy were completed in spring ready for the start of the main visitor season. Clearer marking of spaces should help alleviate some of the parking pressures and frustrations we have witnessed at this popular site. Work continues with Stirling Council and Forestry and Land Scotland to agree longer term strategic interventions in the East Lomond Lomond corridor, particularly improved car park management which can enable transport options to better deliver for visitors, communities and businesses in a more sustainable way.

7. Transport Update

The continued partner buy-in to support better transport outcomes in the National Park has reached a key stage with the presentation of the Mobility Route Map presented elsewhere on the agenda. Partner engagement to ensure support in substance has included positive CEO level meetings while recognising that absolute commitment has to be caveated in terms of capacity and resources year to year.

Some current activity to note includes a feasibility study on the viability of an East Loch Lomond park-and-ride scheme, focusing on land availability, capital costs, and operating options. Due to the complexity, further assessment is required with Stirling Council to determine appropriate next steps and once those are clearer, we will be engaging with stakeholders across East Loch Lomond to share an update.

A further positive development is Stirling Council's recent decision to operate the Trossachs Explorer bus service as a two-year pilot from summer 2026. This is an important step for sustainable transport in the National Park and builds on the success of the pilots of the last two seasons. We will continue working with Stirling Council and partners to ensure the planning and promotion of bus services continues to deliver the wider National Park Partnership Plan vision to benefit communities, visitors, and the environment.

The potential for a similar pilot in West Loch Lomond is now being explored, building on lessons from the Trossachs Explorer. However, delivering this into operation in 2026 has not been possible as further development work with a different funding and partners (particularly SPT) has been necessary with a view to operating a pilot in 2027.

8. West Highland Way Trust

Members will be aware of the ongoing work to establish and develop the West Highland Way Trust. As a reminder the charitable trust came into being in October 2024 and is currently being supported by specialist consultants and by the National Park Authority. The Asset Transfer and Data Share agreements were signed by both the Trust and by the National Park Authority in April 2026, meaning that the Trust is now fully operational. A project plan to transfer over all remaining assets from the National Park Authority to the Trust is in development.

Recruitment for 2 key roles with the West Highland Way Trust, a full time Director and part time Fundraising and Membership Manger, is underway and this campaign is supported by the National Park Authority. The National Park Authority will continue to support the West Highland Way Trust while the assets transfer and recruitment is concluded.

Executive Sponsor / Author: *Gordon Watson*