



# Place Investment Strategy Update

## Agenda Item 9

### National Park Authority Board Meeting

08 June 2026

Paper for information

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## 1. Purpose

1.1. The purpose of this Paper is to provide an update on delivery of the National Park Place Programme, A Place-based Approach to Visitor Infrastructure Investment. The Programme update considers priorities in the Annual Operating Plan for 2025-26 and for 2026-27 and is expanded to include agreed priorities for partner and third-sector sites.

1.2. This paper reports on activity aligned to the Place Programme Delivery Route Map, as presented on 10 June 2024 at the National Park Authority Board. This update presents:

- A summary of progress in 2025–26,
- An outline of priorities for 2026–27, including a planned refresh of the Route Map to reflect emerging opportunities,
- An update on delivery of the first year of the Place Programme Fund.

## 2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. Members are asked to:

- Note progress in 2025–26.
- Note the direction of budget and resources in 2026–27.
- Note the content of the update on the newly established Place Programme Fund.

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

- 3.1. The work detailed in this report progresses delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan 2024–2029 objective “Deliver a multi-year place programme”. This objective sits within the 2045 outcome “Improving Popular Places and Routes - by 2045 the National Park has high quality visitor infrastructure and facilities”, and as one of the three outcomes under the section “Creating a Low Carbon Place”.
- 3.2. The thematic priorities of the Place Programme are incorporated in the National Park Partnership Plan Policy for Improving Popular Places and Routes; “We will ensure that the National Park Authority and its partners take a co-ordinated, place-based approach to investing in higher quality visitor facilities across publicly owned sites to ensure a sustainable balance between local needs, environmental sensitivities, and visitor demand. There will be a particular focus on ensuring improvements that enable sustainable travel, improved accessibility, visitor safety and responsible tourism.”

### **4. Background**

- 4.1. This paper reports on activity aligned to the Place Programme Delivery Route Map, as presented to the National Park Board on 10 June 2024. The [Place Programme Delivery Route Map](#) aims to show a coordinated, joined-up strategic approach to investment by the Public Sector Partnership (National Park Visitor Management Group – NPVMG).
- 4.2. The Delivery Route Map focuses on delivering the National Park Partnership Plan objective “Deliver a multi-year place programme”. It is focused on public assets that really change visitor, community, and business experience. Sitting alongside this is the regular maintenance/minor works of partners and other community projects. The Route Map sets the direction of travel in delivering the National Park Partnership Plan 2024–2029. 2026-27 is the third year of Route Map Delivery and marks the mid-point.
- 4.3. It should be noted that the programme is part of delivering a Low Carbon Place. As such, many of the projects within the programme are fundamental to realising our Net Zero National Park vision by ensuring

key sites are facilitating alternative sustainable and active travel opportunities.

## **5. Place Programme Delivery Progress 2025-26**

5.1. The delivery of the Place Programme has two main strands:

- Strategic Development, which is largely informed by studies, feasibility work, action plans and masterplans to create a pipeline of delivery projects, and
- Delivery which takes project development through design and funding stages to delivery on the ground.

5.2. The Place Programme Delivery Route Map priorities for the National Park Authority 2025–2026 were as set out in Annual Operating Plan AOP Activity, “Creating a Low-Carbon Place, Improving Popular Places and Routes”. Place Programme Activity was planned to require an expected National Park Authority capital investment of £1.2 million on the following:

- Delivery at Tarbet Phase 2, Rowardennan, Falls of Falloch and Balloch Pierhead, and completion of Tarbet Phase 1.
- Development work across the National Park, including support to partners through the establishment of the Place Programme Fund, was also planned.

5.3. The actual capital investment by the National Park Authority in Place Programme Activity in 2025–26 was £0.5 million, 40% of planned spend. It should be noted that as in previous years programme progress reporting is indicative and therefore to the nearest £100,000 (£0.1million) and that the year-end accounts process is still underway.

5.3.1. The investment was primarily focused on:

- Progress towards delivery on site at Tarbet Phase 2, Rowardennan, Falls of Falloch and Balloch Pierhead (co-funded and co-delivered with West Dunbartonshire Council), and completion of outstanding elements at Tarbet Phase 1 (excepting EV installation), and
- Project development work supporting partners across the National Park, including the first year of the Place Programme Fund supporting projects in Callander and Tyndrum.

5.3.2. The programme underspend was as a result of delayed delivery of planned site works at Tarbet Phase 2, Falls of Falloch and Rowardennan in 2025-26. The risk highlighted at June 2025 Board, that this may happen for Tarbet and Rowardennan if design and planning time could not be recovered, materialised. Falls of Falloch was delayed further owing to a need to undertake a more detailed Transport Study on the A82 junction. These delays, in combination with the Scottish Government's enhanced essential criteria for the post-tender Accountable Officer Spend Control process, made significant site work spend prior to 31 March 2025 unachievable. Design and planning progress on other projects in-year continued at a good pace.

5.3.3. The table below shows sustained National Park Authority investment from previous years to the nearest £100,000 (£0.1 million), with a marked reduction in 2025-26 as a direct result of delayed site work.

*Table 1 - Investment to date*

<b>Years</b>	<b>Investment by NPA</b>	<b>Cumulative total</b>
2021–22	£0.1 million	£0.1 million
2022–23	£0.9 million	£1.0 million
2023–24	£1.6 million	£2.6 million
2024–25	£1.8 million	£4.4 million
2025–26	£0.5 million	£4.9 million

5.4. The Public Sector Partnership (National Park Visitor Management Group – NPVMG) delivery was anticipated to include the following activities:

5.4.1. Forestry and Land Scotland to continue to work in partnership with the National Park Authority to commence site works at Rowardennan.

5.4.2. West Dunbartonshire Council to continue to work in partnership with the National Park Authority at Balloch Pierhead, and to continue with improvement works at Balloch Castle.

5.4.3. Argyll & Bute Council to progress with their RTIF bid for Glen Loin car park when resources allow.

5.4.4. Stirling Council to continue to work with the National Park Authority in the East Loch Lomond area around transport and vehicle management, and in Callander to support the community led Green Adventure Gateway project as the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Design Grant application lead.

5.5. Delivery of the Place Programme in 2025–2026, Year 2 of the Route Map and the fifth year of programme delivery, is summarised in the following table and shows ten activity areas underway, with four partner led projects. Tarbet Phase 1 completion is not shown in these totals as Phase 1 was open to the public and therefore was shown as complete in 2024-25.

*Table 2 - Delivery in 2025-26: Summary of progress*

<b>2025/26</b>	<b>NPA led</b>	<b>Partner led</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Total Projects</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>
Strategic work (Complete)	1	0	<b>1</b>
Design stage	2	4	<b>6</b>
Site work (paused)	1	0	<b>1</b>
Site work (progressing)	2	0	<b>2</b>

5.5.1. The following table shows what was expected to be delivered or progressed, and what has and hasn't been achieved. Unless otherwise stated in the table then the lead partner is the National Park Authority. Tarbet Phase 1 completion is not shown in these totals as Phase 1 was open to the public and therefore was shown as complete in 2024-25.

*Table 3 - Delivery in 2025-26: Progress on planned activities.*

<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Stage</b>	<b>Lead</b>
Place Programme Fund	Strategic work (Complete)	NPA
Callander's Green Adventure Gateway: Station Road - Callander Community Development Trust (supported by NPA Place Programme Fund)	Design stage	Partner

Tyndrum Community Woodland Car Park – Strathfillan Community Development Trust (supported by NPA Place Programme Fund)	Design stage	Partner
Balloch Pierhead Phase 1, in partnership with West Dunbartonshire Council	Design stage	NPA
Benmore Botanic Garden, Benmore RGE supported by Argyll & Bute Council	Design stage	Partner
Glen Loin Car Park, Argyll & Bute Council	Design stage	Partner
Tarbet Phase 3 Landscape & Pier	Design stage	NPA
Rowardennan Phase 1 Delivery, with Forestry and Land Scotland	Site work (paused)	NPA
Falls of Falloch Delivery	Site work (progressing, slower than planned)	NPA
Tarbet Phase 2 Café & Toilets, including Changing Places Toilet	Site work (progressing, slower than planned)	NPA

5.5.2. In addition to the work set out above the National Park Authority has delivered:

- Tarbet Phase 1 landscape and civils works completion. However, the EV charger connection remains outstanding and is carried forward to 2026-27.
- Pontoon upgrades at Balloch Pierhead as identified in the Action Plan, this work complements the Balloch Pierhead Phase 1 work.
- Technical advice to Drymen Community Development Trust, looking at the feasibility of toilet provision in the village.

5.5.3. Forestry and Land Scotland continued to work in partnership with the National Park Authority to advance works at Rowardennan, this project is paused.

- 5.5.4. West Dunbartonshire Council continued to work in partnership on the project at Balloch Pierhead and continued to advance future improvement works at Balloch Castle.
  - 5.5.5. Argyll and Bute Council work at Glen Loin progressed slower than planned from design to delivery because of insufficient staff resources. They will develop this project further when resources allow. Support was given to the Benmore Botanic Garden led project on the development of funding.
  - 5.5.6. Stirling Council supported the Callander Development Trust design work for Callander's Green Adventure Gateway at Station Road that was funded by the National Park Authority, and they continued to engage on the development stage of improvements to East Loch Lomond facilities, transport and vehicle management.
- 5.6. Steamship Sir Walter Scott Trust secured a funding offer for a standalone Changing Places facility at Loch Katrine from The Changing Places Scotland Fund. Inspiring Scotland administer the fund on behalf of the Scottish Government.
- 5.7. In summary, when activity is compared with that planned in the National Park Authority AOP 2025-26 and the in the Place Programme Report to Board of June 2025, then one of the six activities the Authority set out to deliver is paused and therefore delayed, that is 'East Loch Lomond – Rowardennan, with Forestry and Land Scotland.' Glen Loin also remains at design stage because of insufficient staff resource at Argyll and Bute Council in 2025-26. All other activities are being progressed by the partnership as planned and the securing of funding by the Steamship Sir Walter Scott Trust for what would be the fourth Changing Places Facility within the National Park is to be recognised and commended (Changing Places Summary: in operation at Aberfoyle - Stirling Council and at Tyndrum – Tyndrum Infrastructure Group, and planned at Tarbet – NPA, and Loch Katrine – SWST).

## **6. Place Programme Delivery Priorities for 2026-27**

- 6.1. The investment by the National Park Authority in Place Programme activity in 2026-27 is planned to continue at £1.0 million with all funding secured. This activity will again be primarily focused on delivering accelerated visitor recreation site projects on East and West Loch Lomond (AOP action C/A/06x). The table below shows sustained investment over a six-year period, with this year as Year 3 of the Route Map.

*Table 4 - Investment to date and planned.*

<b>Years</b>	<b>Investment by NPA</b>	<b>Cumulative total</b>
2021-22	£0.1 million	£0.1 million
2022-23	£0.9 million	£1.0 million
2023-24	£1.6 million	£2.6 million
2024-25	£1.8 million	£4.4 million
2025-26	£0.5 million	£4.9 million
2026-27 (planned)	£1.0 million	£5.9 million

6.2. Place Programme for 2026-27 is in a more positive delivery position, with works active on sites, later contracts ready to go and a future pipeline in progress. Draft capital budget profiling shows high levels of confidence in both early and steady spend levels.

6.3. The priority projects with the National Park Authority as lead include those noted in the AOP 2026-27 “Appendix 2 AOP Operational Activity Examples” and are in line with NPPP priorities. Planned project activity is summarised in the table below.

*Table 5 - Planned activity 2026-27*

<b>Annual Operating Plan Deliverable</b>	<b>Anticipated Operational Activity</b>
<b>C/A/06x Place Programme Delivery:</b> Deliver the multi-year Place Programme, including accelerated visitor recreation site projects on East and West Loch Lomond.	Delivering work at Falls of Falloch, Balloch Pierhead, Tarbet and East Loch Lomond.
<b>C/A/07y Place Programme Development:</b> Establish a coordinated pipeline of transformational projects for future delivery through the Place Programme.	Engagement and support to communities and other public bodies.

6.4. National Park Authority led delivery work planned at Falls of Falloch is now underway on site and making good progress. Also, at Tarbet the

work on the new café building has started on site, and the Changing Places Toilet work is on track to follow in year. EV connection work is scheduled for summer 2026, with charger installation to follow.

- 6.5. Potential partner support is anticipated to include support to the public sector partners and also to community led projects noted below:
  - Callander's Green Adventure Gateway (Callander Development Trust)
  - Arrochar facilities and path connection to Tarbet (Arrochar and Tarbet Community Development Trust)
  - Year 2 Place Programme Fund
- 6.6. The Public Sector Partnership (National Park Visitor Management Group – NPVMG) delivery is anticipated to include the following activities:
  - 6.6.1. West Dunbartonshire Council will continue to work in partnership with the National Park Authority at Balloch Pierhead. In addition, they are continuing with improvement works within Balloch Castle
  - 6.6.2. Argyll and Bute Council are planning to work towards Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund RTIF design grant funding to support design work at Duck Bay. The engagement they would undertake on this site would reflect the requirements for a major planning application given the size of the site. The Council is also supporting Benmore Botanic Garden with funding bids, with the aim to facilitate delivery on site, subject to funding. Glen Loin car park and facilities in Arrochar will be developed further when resources allow.
  - 6.6.3. Stirling Council will continue to engage on the development stage of improvements to East Loch Lomond facilities, transport and vehicle management. They are also working on improvements to infrastructure to support cycle use and modal shift at the primary hubs of Aberfoyle, Callander and Drymen. Potential support to partners is anticipated to include Callander's Green Adventure Gateway (Callander Community Development Trust).
  - 6.6.4. Perth and Kinross Council have no planned activity to note for this period.
  - 6.6.5. Forestry and Land Scotland will continue to work with the National Park Authority to advance work at Rowardennan. In Cowal at Pucks Glen area, they will be continuing to work with stakeholders and potential partners to develop a longer-term plan for the site.

- 6.7. This year is the third year and the mid-point of the Route Map and so we will undertake a concise review, to ensure that the Route Map reflects the impacts of both challenges and new opportunities that have arisen since publication. This is in line with the June 2024 Board Paper that noted we will continuously review the Delivery Route Map against progress made and new opportunities that may arise.

## **7. Place Programme Fund**

- 7.1. The Place Programme Fund was set up by the National Park Authority in June 2025 as a targeted capital funding stream to support the development and delivery of priority visitor infrastructure projects shown in the Place Programme Delivery Route Map.
- 7.2. The Fund will help strengthen the programme by supporting sites to come through from third sector organisations in our communities therefore opening up wider opportunities for investment and improvement than the Public Sector Partnership (National Park Visitor Management Group – NPVMG) can deliver alone. The fund reinforces our messaging that Place Programme delivery is not ultimately about National Park Authority owned sites, it's about a wide range of sites contributing to delivering high quality facilities in our popular places. It also reflects an efficient use of limited budgets and resources by seeking to increase collaboration.
- 7.3. The Fund has established a clear, auditable process for supporting project development within Route Map priority areas. The Fund contributes directly to Annual Operating Plan deliverables by supporting the development of a pipeline of investable projects, strengthening delivery capacity through partnerships, and enabling progression of interventions within Place Programme priority locations.
- 7.4. In its first year of operation, the Fund supported two design projects within Route Map priority areas: Tyndrum Community Woodland Car Park, Dalrigh (Strathfillan Community Development Trust) and Callander's Green Adventure Gateway: Station Road Car Park (Callander Community Development Trust), with a combined award value of £55,000. These awards have enabled partners to move from concept to more developed design stages and strengthened their readiness for future delivery.
- 7.5. Match funding was not an essential requirement for these initial awards, the intention being that enabling support to projects at design stage will help unlock future further capital funding from a wider range of sources including Visit Scotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Funding and, when operational, Visitor Levy funds.

- 7.6. In 2026-27 the second year of the Fund will continue to support design work while placing increased emphasis on strengthening project readiness for delivery on the ground and maximising opportunities to leverage match funding at an early stage, ensuring that projects supported through the Fund can progress quickly towards delivery and contribute to the achievement of Place Programme outcomes, including improved visitor management, enhanced infrastructure provision, and wider environmental, economic, and community benefits across the National Park.

## **8. Risks and Issues**

- 8.1. The main risks to delivery of both the programme and the projects within, for the Park Authority and delivery partners, have not changed since previous years and these remain: budget settlement, external funding availability, staff capacity, availability of consultants, availability of contractors, availability of materials, landowner agreements where required, permissions where required, continued resourcing of joint partner working, and managing external expectations with prioritisation of works. We will continue to use existing mitigation and control measures to manage these wherever possible.
- 8.2. Continued resourcing and capacity of joint partner working across organisations is a key risk for projects on land not controlled by the National Park Authority. Were capacity and resource to reduce in-year, then this could stall the development of projects and result in delays to progress of the programme.
- 8.3. Place Programme delivery was particularly challenging in 2025-26, owing to the complexity of sites, including ownership patterns, and complexity of governance and funding mechanisms. This contributed to slower delivery on the ground as noted in Section 5, though with good progress being made to support the pipeline of activity on a range of sites and locations. This will require continued management, but this is within the context of a much stronger basis for this year's delivery on the ground.

## **9. Next steps**

- 9.1. The National Park Authority priority projects within the Place Programme will be reported to Board through the Annual Operating Plan Updates. Where applicable, updates will also be provided in the End of Season Review 2026.
- 9.2. An indicative summary update of all partner activity against the Route Map Priorities will be provided annually within the 2027 Board

programme. Formal monitoring will be through the National Park Partnership Plan.

- 9.3. The mid-point review of the Route Map will report through Annual Operating Plan Updates, with a summary of proposed changes, if applicable, provided within the 2027 Board Programme.

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