

## The National Park Partnership Plan, austerity and the Park Board

### Description

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# Making it happen

These are our priorities for action:

## Conservation Priority 2.1

# Landscape & Heritage

The National Park Authority, and its partners, will work to conserve and enhance the special landscape and cultural heritage qualities of the area by:



- › Ensuring that developments and recognise the need to protect and where possible, enhance the quality of wildness, tranquillity, dark skies and historic environment.
- › Supporting projects that enhance opportunities to enjoy landscapes particularly along major transport routes and around settlements. Including implementing a strategically planned designed upgrade to the A82 between Tarbet and Inverarnan, and continuing to review landslip management measures on the A83 at The Rest and Be Th
- › Prioritising spatially targeted landscape enhancements that also deliver improvements for nature such as woodland creation, re-structuring commercial forestry blocks, wetland restoration or tackling invasive non-native species.
- › Safeguarding and restoring tranquil loch-shores through initiatives in the Your Park camping management programme and Respect Your Park campaign.

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This photo has been used to illustrate what the Park thinks protecting landscape, wildness and tranquility is all about. What a disaster! And more of the same is promised! In my view any National Park worth anything would have insisted this section of A82 upgrade, replacing the old single road at the traffic lights should have been tunnelled through the hillside to come out behind pulpit rock. To add human insult

injury inflicted on the natural environment, there is no path alongside the road and no safe place for people who want to visit pulpit rock. to pull off and park.

The National Park Partnership Plan is supposed to be the most important document governing what happens in our National Park, setting out not just what our National Park Authorities do but also the commitments made by their partners, from public authorities to private landowners. It was considered at the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority Board Meeting today, a meeting I missed. Its one of the democratic deficits in our National Park that if you cannot attend in person, its very hard to find out if there was any debate worth of the name â?? though the Park, under its new convenor James Stuart, is trying to get minutes and papers for meetings out earlier.

As austerity has bitten further, its become harder and harder however for public authorities to plan for the future and instead the main function of management now appears to be to ensure the books balance whenever the next round of cuts is announced. Its not particularly surprising, therefore, to find the following judgement in the Strategic Environmental Assessment which accompanied the NPPP being considered by the LLTNPA Board today ([see here for all papers](#)):

*â??a key weakness of the new plan over the old plan is its lack of specific implementation detailâ?•.*

The LLTNPA and their Public Authority partners appear reluctant to commit to doing anything in the future. Five years plans have as a consequence become something of a farce. Large amounts of consultation and effort â?? for what?.

While since my posts on the DRAFT NPPP ([see here for example](#)), the LLTNPA has made some improvements to the plan (e.g there is a commitment to develop a woodland strategy and a target to increase the proportion of people getting to the National Park by other means than cars) if you look past the pretty photos and graphics, there is still no ambition. The proposed outcomes remain more or less unchanged and are mostly difficult to disagree with, even if the purple prose occasionally overreaches itself and becomes ridiculous (e.g the Park statement from the cutting above that says it will support projects that enhance opportunities to enjoy landscapes and then cites the works on the Rest and Be Thankful and proposed A82 upgrade as examples of this). Most of the outcomes however contain no clear commitments to action and are as a consequence vague aspirations rather than outcomes. It is almost impossible to work out from the Plan what the LLTNPA and their partners actually propose to do.

## **The LLTNPAâ??s indicators of success**

A good sense of this is given by the LLTNPAâ??s choice of key performance indicators:

<p><b>1 Area of new woodland</b></p> <p> 2000 hectares of woodland expansion by 2023</p>	<p><b>8 Reported public experience of the Park's settlements and landscapes</b></p> <p> Increase in proportion of people reporting a good quality experience</p>	<p>Indicators of success</p> <p>How will we measure success?</p>
<p><b>2 Area and condition of restored peatland</b></p> <p> 2000 hectares of restored peatland by 2023</p>	<p><b>9 Number of volunteers and volunteer hours</b></p> <p> Increase by 20% from the 2017/18 baseline by 2023</p>	
<p><b>3 Percentage of designated sites in favourable condition</b></p> <p> Increase from 2017 baseline of 76% of designated site features to 80% by 2023</p>	<p><b>10 Number of young people having an outdoor learning experience in the National Park</b></p> <p> At least 2500 young people per year over the Plan period</p>	
<p><b>4 Percentage of water bodies achieving at least good ecological condition.</b></p> <p> Increase from 2016 baseline of 44% to 59% by 2023</p>	<p><b>11 Number of new homes built and proportion of affordable homes</b></p> <p> 375 homes over the Plan period with a minimum of 25% being affordable</p>	
<p><b>5 Proportion of people travelling to and around the National Park by public or active transport</b></p> <p> Reduce proportion arriving by car from 2015/16 Visitor Survey baseline of 85%</p> <p>Reduce proportion exploring by car from 2015/16 Visitor Survey baseline of 62%</p> <p>Increase proportion exploring by foot, water and bike from the 2015/16 Visitor Survey</p>	<p><b>12 Number of projects delivering well-designed, sustainable places</b></p> <p> Delivery in 3 communities per year of the Plan</p> <p><b>13 Number of community-identified projects delivered</b></p> <p> Delivery of 3 projects per Community Action Plan by 2023</p>	
<p><b>6 Proportion of people taking part in active recreation</b></p> <p> Increase from 2015/16 Visitor Survey baselines of 24% for active sport and 54% for low-level walking</p>	<p><b>14 Reported public experience of the Park's settlements and landscapes</b></p> <p> Increase in proportion of people reporting a good quality experience</p>	
<p><b>7 Overall value of the visitor economy</b></p> <p> Increase from 2016 STEAM baseline of £340m by 2023</p>	<p><b>15 Number of new skills development opportunities from projects in the National Park</b></p> <p> Increase opportunities in the National Park over the Plan period</p>	

- 2000 hectares of woodland expansion sounds good until you look at the area of the National Park, 1,865 square kilometres or 186,500 hectares. That's an increase of just of 1%, almost all of it already accounted for by work already planned in the Great Trossachs Forest National Nature Reserve.
- The target to increase the percent of protected nature sites in favourable condition from 76% to 80% is woeful – here we have a National Park that appears to think its acceptable for protected natura sites to remain in unfavourable condition indefinitely. This is simply not good enough but tackling this would mean tackling landowners and that is something this National Park won't do.
- The commitment to 25% of all new Homes being affordable, means the LLTNPA wants 95 new affordable homes over the next five years. Affordable is not the same as social housing. This target will do almost nothing to help younger people move back into the Park – the LLTNPA is concerned about the ageing population – or enable people working in the tourist industry to obtain somewhere secure to live.
- The target to increase the proportion of the public reporting a good quality experience is vague and meaningless. Elsewhere the Park talks about the importance of SMART targets and then doesn't include them in its plan.
- The number of young people the LLTNPA wish to have an outdoor learning experience in the National Park, 2500, is truly pathetic (think 1.5m people living Clyde Conurbation, that's about 1% of school age children. When I was on the Board of SNH in the discussions leading up to the creation of the National Park the aspiration was for EVERY school age child in the Glasgow conurbation to have an outdoor learning experience in the National Park.

And so on –

## **An alternative vision**

I believe its time to call for end to this type of meaningless plan and to start developing alternatives. Below are some ideas which could be the starting point for an alternative vision to inspire people and give hope for the future:

- **Wildlife.** Re-introduce beavers (if they don't make their own way from Tayside as appears increasingly likely) and develop ways to enable the public enjoy their presence (video links etc). When Michael Gove, no less, this week announced the re-introduction of beavers into the Forest of Dean, why cannot Scotland's National Parks do the same? After this, look at Lynx.
- **Wildlife.** End persecution of native species, such as foxes and crows, so the National Park starts to live up to its name and the wildlife that exists is not limited to what landowners tolerate. Enforce cross compliance between provision of public subsidies for land use and species protection.
- **Conservation.** Shift forest practice in the Argyll Forest Park from being primarily industrial, with the disastrous consequences that has – e.g all the larch are dying from pythoptera ramorum – to being conservation based. Get rid of the monolithic sitka plantations and replace with mixed woodland which would enhance the landscape, help wildlife and provide more local jobs.
- **Landscape enhancement.** Develop a plan to address existing blots on the landscape, including burial of existing powerlines and removing tracks to hydro schemes. New roads and road improvements should be tunnelled (as happens commonly in Europe).

- Wild Land and re-wilding. Stop developments in Wild Land Areas (Cononish gold mine) and re-wild the area south of Ben Lui and Ben Oss, the largest area of core wild land in the National Park, by burial and removal of hydro electric infrastructure.
- Land Ownership. Identify all landowners in the National Park and analyse where the benefits of landownership are currently going (eg much income from many hydro schemes which the public pays for ends up in the city) and from this develop plans how land-based income streams could be re-invested in the land.
- Land-ownership and community right to buy. Where benefits of landownership are not being reinvested in the National Park and local communities, encourage local community buy outs/assets transfers.
- Sustainable economic development. Develop proposals for alternative forms of land-use which are compatible with the statutory objectives of the National Park (e.g the type of Forest initiatives promoted by Reforesting Scotland and which are conspicuously absent from the National Park.) Stop developments, like Flamingo Land, which are not.
- Outdoor recreation. Support/facilitate the creation of permanent jobs which support the right of people to enjoy the National Park (e.g in path construction and maintenance, pier maintenance etc).
- Outdoor recreation and visitor management. Focus on provision of facilities and services (including far better public transport) rather than on behaviour management. Allow the camping byelaws to lapse at the end of the three years with the focus of camping management zones becoming the provision of infrastructure rather than trying to control people
- Culture and history. Promote the history and culture of the area as well as viewpoints. For example, new cultural and history centres could be created at places like Balloch and Tyndrum, while far more attention could be given to raising awareness of the many historic sites in the National Park.
- Re-open outdoor centres to enable the children and young people of the west of Scotland to experience something of the National Park while still at school.

Lot's more is possible!

And in response to the argument that there is no money to do this, create it! When Edinburgh is now seriously trying to promote a tourism tax to fund infrastructure there, why are our National Parks so far behind? According to the National Park Plan Loch Lomond and the Trossachs is now a world class tourism destination! So get those tourists to contribute something! The Park has in effect taxed campers - most of whom are from the the poorest sections of society - £3 for the right to put up a tent in a grotty area, so why not those staying in other accommodation? The National Park should also be supporting the creation of a rural investment bank that could provide money for community buyouts and help finance new forms of economic development.

The LLTNPA's Boards approval of a 5 Year Partnership Plan should not prevent ideas such as these from happening. The Plan is so vague that most of the suggestions here could go ahead, if there was the will. With our current governmental structures imploding under neo-liberal ideology and austerity there is an opportunity for change and people need to start developing alternatives.

## Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

## Tags

1. LLTNPA
2. planning

## Date Created

December 12, 2017

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