



Annual Report to Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority: 2020-2021

1. Introduction

For the period April 2020 to March 2021, the National Park Authority provided a core grant of £15,000 to the Trust. In addition, it provided project-specific funds of £10,00 to support the delivery of the Trust's health walk programme, Walk in the Park. This report provides an overview and key highlights in what has been very positive year for the Trust, in terms of delivery, development and fundraising, despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Collectively, the Trust's activities have made an important contribution towards the delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan, particularly in relation to:

- **Conservation and Land Management**
 - Outcome 2: Landscape Qualities
 - Outcome 3: Climate Change
 - Outcome 4: Land Partnerships
- **Visitor Experience**
 - Outcome 8: Visitor Management
 - Outcome 9: Health & Learning
- **Rural Development**
 - Outcome 10: Placemaking
 - Outcome 13: Community Empowerment

In addition, the Trust contributed to the Park Authority's 'Active Park Healthy People' consultation, which identifies key roles for the Trust in relation to four of the six key themes: A Park for All; Active and Vibrant Places; Happy and Healthy People; and Connecting Places.

2. Board and staffing

Simon Jones stepped down from the Trust's Board in September. The Trust is extremely grateful to Simon for all his work as a Trust Director, and looks forward to continuing to work in close partnership with Simon and his team. At the end of September, the Trust appointed a Transformation Director. This role has had a particular focus on strategic and programme development, partnership building and fundraising. As evidenced in this report, this role has been very beneficial to the Trust and the National Park Authority.

3. Expansion and development of the Trust's community engagement role

During the year the Trust worked closely with the National Park Authority and the Community Partnership to review how the Authority provides support for, and engagement with, community groups. The Boards of the Community Partnership and the Countryside Trust negotiated a solution

that sees the closure of the Partnership as of 31st March 2021, and strengthening of the Countryside Trust to build on its existing work in and for communities supported by the Park Authority.

4. Funding

The Trust has been extremely successful in securing **£72,384** from public and charitable sources (Table 1). These funds are being used to augment and ensure the continuation of current programmes, and to enable the delivery of two new work programmes, being delivered in close partnership with the National Park Authority, and linked to visitor management and visitor travel behaviour.

The Trust is waiting to hear the outcome of a proposal from the National Park Authority to Scottish Government, which would fund the development phase of the biodiversity strand of the Wild Strathfillan programme (Appendix 1). This proposal was developed by the Trust with support from the National Park Authority, RSPB and Plantlife. This could lever in and additional £75,000 - £150,000 over one or two years respectively.

Further information on the projects that these funds are supporting is provided in Section 5.

Table 1: Summary of funding applications and outcomes November 2020-March 2021

Funder	Trust programme area & activities	Outcome/Request
Successful applications		
Community Climate Asset Fund	Active Travel: 2 e-bikes to augment stock available for demonstration & trials	£4,398 secured for 2 e-bikes.
Paths for All	Walk in the Park: funding for ongoing delivery of programme.	£15,000 secured towards Health Walk Co-ordinator fees & expenses, volunteer expenses, training
Better Places Green Recovery Fund	Community engagement/climate change: engagement with communities to enhance & develop their involvement in visitor management planning.	£10,670 secured to deliver short-term research project.
Smarter Choices Smarter Places	Active Travel: behaviour change campaign as part of wider sustainable transport pilot with NPA	£42,316 secured for a full-time Communications Adviser & delivery resources.
Pending		
Smarter Choices Smarter Places	Active Travel: to extend & develop existing work with local communities in support of cycling.	Expression of Interest submitted requesting up to £44,000 for full time Active Travel Officer & resources.

5. Programme development and delivery

The Trust has continued to deliver its main programmes of work during the challenges presented by the COVID-19 restrictions. In addition, it has taken a significant step forward in progressing the nascent Wild Strathfillan landscape partnership, and developed two new areas of work centred on visitors to the Park.

5.1 Walk in the Park

This programme continues to go from strength to strength as the National Park's flagship health walk scheme, supporting walkers and volunteers in six communities across the Park: Arrochar, Balloch, Drymen, Aberfoyle, Callander, and Killin. The Trust said 'goodbye' to Cathy Scott, our Health Walk Co-ordinator, who retired after giving such outstanding service and commitment to Walk in the Park over many years. Beverley Clarke was been appointed as the new Health Walk Co-ordinator. Beverley brings with her a wealth of relevant experience, including time as a Ranger with the NPA.

Despite the huge challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the team has found a range of creative and innovative ways to continue to reach out, support and motivate their walkers to stay active and socially connected.

Highlights

- Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the Walk in the Park team devised and delivered a range of mechanisms to engage with our walkers and volunteers in each of the programme's six locations. Activities centred on: zoom calls, zoom walks, zoom strength and balance sessions, 'bubble' walks in smaller groups; kindness calls for those with no internet access. In addition, the team has adapted to deliver online training for volunteer walk leaders. Whilst numbers have not been at the levels expected under 'normal' circumstances, contact and attendance levels have remained high (Table 1).

Table 1: Walk in the Park activities and attendance 2020-2021

Activity	Activity Description	Activity Period	Attendance
Zoom calls	Weekly zoom meetings for walkers and walk leaders for all six walking groups, hosted by Project Coordinators. This activity took place on scheduled walk days and times.	April 2020 - August 2020 January 2021 - ongoing Please note there were no Zoom Call stats between September - December 2020, as groups had restarted.	1,472 points of contact made during this period. Average weekly attendance: 8

		Weekly Zoom calls were reintroduced in January 2021.	
Kindness Calls	Monthly phone calls to those walkers/walk leaders who are especially isolated, and do not have internet or email access.	April 2020 - ongoing	On average 40 per month.
Zoom Walks	A weekly live zoom walk led by the Health Walk Coordinator for each of the six walking groups. This at home activity provides the opportunity for walkers to increase their confidence and build their stamina in preparation to restart walking with the project.	June 2020 - ongoing	354 points of contact made up until the end of February 2021. Average weekly attendance 11.
Zoom Strength & Balance	A weekly live Strength & Balance session led trained volunteers.	May 2020 - ongoing	493 points of contact made up until the end of February 2021. Average weekly participants 12.
Walk in the Park Restart	Two method restart approach: Informal Buddy & Bubble Walking: Callander, Aberfoyle & Killin. Official restart of the Balloch, Drymen, and Arrochar Groups.	August 2020 - December 2020 In line with Scottish Government's guidance our group health walks were suspended in January 2021.	1,473 points of contact made up until the end of February 2021. Average Weekly Number of Returning Walkers: Balloch 30 Arrochar 6 Drymen 10 Buddy & Bubble Walk Participants: Callander 10 Killin 10 Aberfoyle 12
Training	Online Volunteer Walk Leader Training for walkers from each of the programme's six communities.	March 2021	7 new Volunteer Walk Leaders training.

- Under the banner of 'In Step with Nature' the team created new elements to help motivate and support walkers, including a weekly 'noticing nature' challenge and a step-based challenge. The 'noticing nature' challenge is grounded in cutting edge research which highlights the importance of connection with the natural world in supporting health, wellbeing and pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours:
<https://www.derby.ac.uk/research/centres-groups/nature-connectedness-research-group/>
- In partnership with the Paths for All 'Park Power' team, a new strength and balance resource has been secured for Callander Meadows. A series of posts with associated interpretation panel, will enable people to do gentle exercises to support wellbeing and walking confidence.
- The promotion and visibility of the programme continues to grow, and it has been featured on a number of high-profile platforms and events:
 - Paths for All 'Voices of the Walk' podcast, featuring two of our volunteers -
<https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/podcasts>
 - Impact Funding Partners blog for international volunteer day -
<https://www.impactfundingpartners.com/news/blog-together-we-can-international-volunteers-day>.
 - EUROPARC federation webinar 16th February 'Healthy Parks, Healthy People' - presentation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFWelPabJY&feature=youtu.be>

5.2 Active travel

Our Active Travel Officer was furloughed during the first COVID-19 lockdown, returning to work in August 2020. As for Walk in the Park, activities have had to be adapted to address circumstances, but good progress continues to be made.

Highlights

- Securing 2 new e-bikes to double the capacity of our trial scheme – loaning out ebikes to people in local communities, in particular Aberfoyle and Callander.
- Working with communities in Aberfoyle and Callander to secure 'Cycle Friendly Community' status, as the first phase in a plan to secure a 'Cycle Friendly Community' corridor along the length of the NCN7 as it passes through the National Park.
- Ongoing support for led rides. The Callander Cycle Meander group continues to grow, with the group's number up by 40% to 28.
- The promotion and visibility of the programme continues to grow. We have had 11 articles published in a range of publications with a circulation of 558,500. Publications include the Times, Scottish Field, Park Life, Ben Ledi View and most recently the Voice. Our social media following has increased from 181 likes to 273 on Facebook (50%) in the last year, and from 1234 to 1318 on Twitter (7%) Instagram 130 (100%).
- Commissioning of a short film to promote the value of cycling for local people and the environment.
- The Trust has participated in a range of active travel specific webinars and a number of consultations, including that for the National Park Authority's draft 'Active Park, Healthy People' strategy.

5.3 Wild Strathfillan

A great deal of time has been invested by the Transformation Director in bringing together different plans, partners and stakeholders to shape a more holistic and integrated concept and approach for Wild Strathfillan. Working closely with the Strathfillan Community Development Trust, and the National Park Authority's Planning and Communities Team, has enabled the challenges and needs of the local community to be better understood and integrated. Four distinct themes have now been identified:

- (i) ***Building a nature recovery network***: At the cornerstone of the nature recovery network are the upland designated sites of: Ben Lui SSSI/SAC, Ben More – Stob Binnain SSSI, Glen Falloch Pinewood SSSI and Coille Coire Chuilc SSSI/SAC, all of which have unfavourable condition features and contribute to the threatened Breadalbanes Mountains Important Plant Area. The River Fillan at the heart of the Strath is also an SAC. Direct practical action to protect, restore and connect these vulnerable habitats is needed now, to secure nature-based solutions and long-term environmental sustainability.
- (ii) ***Enabling exploration and connection with the landscape***: enhancing and developing access to, and interpretation of the area's rich natural and cultural heritage, for a wide range of audiences, using a blended set of resources to maximise reach and engagement;
- (iii) ***Encouraging skills development and job creation***: enabling the local community to enhance and develop their skills using the area's rich natural and cultural assets; and
- (iv) ***Supporting health, wellbeing and sustainable living***: transforming people's experience and connection with the landscape, supporting health and wellbeing, and changing attitudes and behaviours in support of more sustainable living, so important in a post Covid-19 recovery.

There is a great deal of enthusiasm and positivity from a range of possible project partners and stakeholders around the development of this programme. As identified in Section 3, a request for funding to support the development phase of the nature recovery theme is currently being considered by Scottish Government. In addition, an initial approach will be made to the NHLF in the near future, with a view to submitting an Expression of Interest to their main grants programme later in 2021.

5.4 Research into community engagement in visitor management planning

Working in close partnership with the National Park Authority's Visitor Management Team and Development Planning and Communities Team, the Trust secured funding from NatureScot's Better Places Green Recovery Fund. This has been used to deliver a short-term research project which will help to:

- (i) understand visitor impacts in communities which are not currently included in the Park Authority's visitor monitoring framework; and
- (ii) to improve communications between communities and the Park Authority in relation to visitor pressures.

It is anticipated that the outcomes of this project will help to facilitate holistic visitor management planning across the Park.

5.5 Behaviour Change Campaign as part of Park-wide sustainable transport programme

Working in close partnership with the National Park Authority's Communications Team and Access and Recreation Team, the Trust secured funding from Smarter Choices Smarter Places. This will enable the extension and development of the Trust's work on active and sustainable travel, through engaging with visitors to the National Park, and encouraging access via sustainable transport modes, in particular sustainable transport. This work is part of a wider sustainable transport programme within the National Park, and will deliver a behaviour change campaign during 2021, with a particular focus on visitors accessing 'hot spot' locations around East Loch Lomond and The Trossachs.

Susan Warren
Transformation Director
March 2021

Wild Strathfillan – a landscape scale approach to addressing climate change, biodiversity and community sustainability

1. Introduction

Strathfillan is an area of dramatic natural beauty in the north west of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. Distinctly Highland in character, it is the gateway to northern Scotland, and is home to the communities of Crianlarich and Tyndrum. This remote, rural area, is traversed in part by the West Highland Way, but is less well known or visited than other areas of the National Park. With the only remaining iconic Caledonian pinewoods left in the National Park, some of the richest montane flora in the UK, and peatland and riparian habitats, it is a unique and precious landscape. It is a vital strategic link in a much wider nature recovery network across the Central Scotland landscape, linking the Atlantic rainforest to the south and west, the forested hills of the Trossachs to the east, and the pinewoods to the north. It has huge potential in addressing the twin climate and nature emergencies and in supporting the health, wellbeing and sustainability of local communities.

2. Threats and challenges

However, this special landscape and its communities are facing a number of interrelated issues:

- from mountain top to river valley, a unique and important suite of biodiversity is threatened and in decline due to: climate change, atmospheric pollution, herbivore pressures and a lack of connectivity between isolated, fragile habitats;
- access to, and interpretation of, the natural and cultural heritage is limited, both for locals and visitors;
- local business is struggling to develop the infrastructure necessary to welcome and encourage visitors; and
- opportunities are lacking for young people to develop skills related to tourism, land management and nature conservation.

3. Unlocking potential through Wild Strathfillan

A comprehensive, co-ordinated, and ambitious programme of activity, grounded in the landscape's rich natural and cultural heritage, is vital to unlocking a suite of multiple, interrelated benefits for biodiversity and people. The key pillars of the programme are:

- Building a nature recovery network:*** At the cornerstone of the nature recovery network are the upland designated sites of: Ben Lui SSSI/SAC, Ben More – Stob Binnain SSSI, Glen Falloch Pinewood SSSI and Coille Coire Chuilc SSSI/SAC, all of which have unfavourable condition features and contribute to the threatened Breadalbanes Mountains Important Plant Area. The River Fillan at the heart of the Strath is also an SAC. Direct practical action to protect, restore and connect these vulnerable habitats is needed now, to secure nature-based solutions and long-term environmental sustainability.

- ii. **Enabling exploration and connection with the landscape:** enhancing and developing access to, and interpretation of the area's rich natural and cultural heritage, for a wide range of audiences, using a blended set of resources to maximise reach and engagement;
- iii. **Encouraging skills development and job creation:** enabling the local community to enhance and develop their skills using the area's rich natural and cultural assets; and
- iv. **Supporting health, wellbeing and sustainable living:** transforming people's experience and connection with the landscape, supporting health and wellbeing, and changing attitudes and behaviours in support of more sustainable living, so important in a post Covid-19 recovery.

4. Building a Nature Recovery Network: Priority actions 2021-2022

Delivering the biodiversity pillar of Wild Strathfillan requires co-ordinated action at the landscape scale, working in partnership to harness the interest and enthusiasm of public sector, charitable and community organisations, and local land managers. This will make a direct contribution to the priorities as outlined in the Biodiversity Challenge Fund (3), securing transformation change for biodiversity, increasing natural capital, providing skills and training for communities in land-based practices, and contributing to the green recovery through linking together biodiversity, communities and the local economy.

The proposed development year aims to build the foundations for an expression of interest and subsequent partnership-based application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in 2022.

5. Outputs 2020-22

The first key step is to develop a holistic, nature recovery plan across the landscape, which will include:

- habitat restoration and regeneration opportunity mapping to tackle unfavourable site condition, create ecological connectivity, and enhance ecosystem function;
- natural capital accounting to understand the value and potential of the landscape in terms of ecosystem goods and services;
- developing a costed nature recovery plan, identifying short, medium and longer-term priority areas and targets for practical action;
- establishing a monitoring framework (including citizen science) to identify a project baseline and to monitor and evaluate progress over time against key biodiversity indicators;
- working with land managers to understand their role(s) in the landscape, and to garner their support for, and engagement in, landscape scale restoration;
- working with Strathfillan Community Development Trust and local community to identify opportunities to develop their woodlands, provide skills training in land management, and involve the community in other land-based projects;
- working with Scotgold to identify how to link with and extend nature restoration work planned in the Greater Cononish Glen Management Plan;
- working with the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest, the proposed Lomond Woods project and other initiatives to identify opportunities to deliver a wider nature recovery network;
- scoping and delivery of small-scale practical works in relation to one or more of the following: river bank restoration; peatland restoration; INNS eradication; fencing; planting;
- Interaction with the pilot Regional Land Use Partnership, to explore using Strathfillan as an early adopter area within the National Park.

A nascent project advisory group is in place, which will oversee this work. This includes representatives from: National Park Authority, Loch Lomond and The Trossachs Countryside Trust, NatureScot, RSPB, Plantlife, SRUC, Scottish Forestry, Strathfillan Community Development Trust. The group will seek to expand its membership during the first year to reflect the wider interests across the landscape.

6. Resources & Support

To deliver this first phase will require £75k to support:

- A dedicated Nature & Land Use Advisor role to manage and deliver phase 1 of the nature recovery network programme - £35k
- Capital works funding to enable practical action on the ground (e.g. tree planting, livestock fencing, riverbank restoration, wader scrapes, INNS control) - £15k
- Consultancy work to map and undertake Natural Capital accounting work - £10k
- Support for volunteer co-ordination and skills training – practical conservation work, plant ID training - £5k
- Land manager and local community stakeholder liaison and events - £5k
- Management overheads - £5k

7. Partner Contributions

The Loch Lomond & Countryside Trust will employ the Nature & Land Use Advisor, who will be hosted in-kind by the National Park Authority and assisted by SRUC Kirkton.

The National Park Authority will make a £10k capital contribution for practical works in the first year.

All advisory partners will contribute staff time towards supporting and enabling the delivery and development of the project, in readiness for a future bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund.