

31 January 2020

Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority
Carrochan
20 Carrochan Road
Balloch
G83 8EG

Dear Sirs

Response to consultation on Outdoor Recreation Delivery Plan

This is the response from Ramblers Scotland to the consultation on the Outdoor Recreation Delivery Plan. We are the representative body for walkers in Scotland, recognised by **sportscotland** as a governing body of sport. We help everyone, across Scotland, enjoy walking and protect the places we love to walk. We are a membership organisation with 54 local walking groups in Scotland, running 3,500 group walks a year which are led and organised by 1,200 volunteers.

1. Do you agree with the direction of the plan?

Ramblers Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Outdoor Recreation Delivery Plan. We have been involved in some stakeholder consultation prior to the publication of this document and so we support much of its intention. We are pleased to be listed as delivery partners for various parts of the plan as we believe it is important that the national representative recreation bodies are engaged, along with community and landowning interests, given that the vast majority of people enjoying outdoor recreation in the park will not also be residents.

As a general comment, however, it is difficult to see exactly what our role will be in helping to deliver this plan without any related action plan, and what actions we have committed to. Without targeted, measurable actions with delivery dates and owners which are focussed on the national park's activities, our contribution will be limited to carrying out our own organisational activities with a hope that some benefit will accrue to those enjoying the national park – and this hope may not be realised. We have no way of knowing how this might affect the park's own success measures regarding delivery of this plan.

There doesn't seem to be any detail here as to how outdoor recreation is supported by the facilities which visitors need, such as toilets, car parks, campsites, litter bins, shops and cafes. The presence of these facilities often steers where people go within the park, as they are often linked to path networks, lochsides or popular hills. There is an ongoing issue of facilities in the park being open only during the summer months even though walking and many other activities are popular throughout the year. Indeed, there is plenty to see in the park all year round, as evidenced by the popularity of wildlife programmes showing the natural environment in each season. Yet there is nothing here about how to attract people into the park in the quieter months and ensure they are supported by the right infrastructure. We feel it is strange to have an outdoor recreation plan which barely mentions such visitor management infrastructure beyond a mention in the Coasts and Waters section relating to changing facilities for those enjoying water-based sports.

We are surprised to see no mention of the role of the ranger service in supporting outdoor recreation and responsible access, given that the park has a large number of both volunteer and paid rangers.

Finally, it would have been good to link this document with the previous Outdoor Recreation Plan to show how far the actions included in that plan had been successfully delivered and therefore, if there were undelivered initiatives, set out any lessons learnt which could inform this plan.

Policy context

2. Is the policy context clear?

Yes, it is clear and helpful to see the links to other national strategies. However, we are not sure why activities such as fishing and boating are not included within the plan and there is no reference to climbing. In addition, we question why camping is excluded. We acknowledge that there are some differences in that fishing is not covered by access rights and that camping within the park is covered in the camping development framework, but the visitor planning and management measures will be relevant for all outdoor activities.

3. Is there anything you would change?

It would be helpful to have all the main outdoor recreation activities included in this plan.

Overview

4. Is the strategic overview map clear?

Yes

5. Is there anything you feel would improve this element of the plan?

It would be helpful, if possible, to get an indication of the numbers of people who are accessing the park and travelling around the park from each direction, perhaps by providing thicker arrows where the most traffic is concentrated. This, along with an indication of opportunities for arriving at or travelling around the park by public transport, would assist with planning where there is a need for targeted visitor management, and also where there are opportunities to encourage more people to visit – or indeed to encourage more people to use public transport.

A park for all

6. Do you agree with the vision for A Park for All?

We support this vision.

8. Do you agree with the key focus areas and delivery principles outlined under A Park for All?

1) We welcome the commitment to promote and protect access rights. The national park has been robust in standing up for access rights, notably by taking part in the Drumlean case, and we have been pleased to add our public support for this action.

2) We don't disagree that an access panel would be useful, but hope that this will be linked to the existing Local Outdoor Access Forum as there is clearly a lot of crossover in their remits.

3) We applaud the success of The Mountains and The People project over the last few years and hope that the park will be able to access funding to continue with path work. While lower level paths and accessibility for all are important principles, there is also a need for ongoing investment in maintaining upland paths and without an action plan to guide the setting of budgets it is not clear how far this can be delivered.

4) We are pleased that our Mapping Scotland's Paths project is mentioned as helping to deliver this action and are committed to developing the project during period to August 2021 when it is currently funded.

In terms of the first delivery principle, that land management operations should offer an opportunity to remove barriers to the outdoors, we note that parts of the national park are heavily blanketed in commercial forestry. Windblown timber can be a serious obstruction to access, especially when fire breaks have been blocked by trees, given that these corridors are often

used as routes through the forestry and onto the hillsides beyond. It would therefore be helpful if land managers were asked to remove any obstruction, or at least to use information and signage to help people navigate through forestry when they are not using a promoted route. This could be referenced in the first priority initiative on responsible access and removing barriers.

We are disappointed that there is no mention of the role the park might play in supporting outdoor education opportunities which would attract more young people into the park.

10. Do you think the right delivery partners have been identified for A Park for All?

We are pleased to be listed as delivery partners, but as noted previously we are unsure as to what our role will be beyond business as usual, which is unlikely to have an impact on the delivery of this plan.

Active and vibrant places

12. Do you agree with the vision for Active and Vibrant Places?

Yes

14. Do you agree with the key focus areas and delivery principles outlined under Active and Vibrant Places?

We support the development of Aberfoyle and the Trossachs as a destination but would suggest that this must go hand-in-hand with development of sustainable transport routes to the area, or it's likely that increased motor traffic will lead to heavy congestion in an area without the roads and parking infrastructure to cope.

We welcome consideration of an active and sustainable travel forum and wonder if this could become one element of those forums which already exist, ie the Local Outdoor Access Forum and proposed Access Panel. Otherwise we are concerned that there may be a missed opportunity to bring together a range of people working on different aspects of the same issue who can all learn from each other. Also, there is a worry that the same volunteers may be approached for involvement in each forum and this could lead to volunteer-fatigue.

In terms of co-designing projects with local communities, we would ask that national representative bodies are also included, given that they can reflect the views of the communities of interest that visit the park.

16. Do you think the right delivery partners have been identified for Active and Vibrant Places?

Yes

Happy and Healthy People

18. Do you agree with the vision for Happy and Healthy People?

Yes

20. Do you agree with the key focus areas and delivery principles outlined under Happy and Healthy People?

Generally yes. As a membership organisation and charity which promotes walking we are clearly very supportive of actions which will lead to greater levels of physical activity. However, most of the initiatives in this section are related to interventionist activities, such as health walks and the Daily Mile. We would therefore like to highlight that the Ramblers has a number of groups based around the park (in Bearsden & Milngavie, Strathkelvin, Lochaber & Lorn, Helensburgh & West Dunbartonshire and Stirling & Falkirk), and, along with many of our other groups from Glasgow and elsewhere in Scotland, they regularly visit the national park. There are likely to be a number of other non-Ramblers groups who operate under the same model. These are all volunteer led, grassroots groups which run regular led walks programmes. It is recognised that the social aspect of walking in a group has great value to both mental and physical health. It would be good to have this volunteer-led activity recognised in this section for

the contribution such groups make to improving health, with encouragement given where possible to move people on from shorter health walks.

22. Do you think the right delivery partners have been identified for Happy and Healthy People?

Yes.

Connecting Places

24. Do you agree with the vision for Connecting Places?

Yes, the climate emergency is an urgent factor in ensuring that the national park plays a leading role in changing behaviour and culture within the national park, for both visitors and residents.

26. Do you agree with the key focus areas and delivery principles outlined under Connecting Places?

Yes, but we believe these could go further. For example, there are clearly areas within the park where the provision of park and ride facilities would reduce the reliance on private car use, such as along East Loch Lomond to Rowardennan. Likewise, working with bus companies to provide bike carriage would enable far more people to explore the park by bike, which generally is difficult - for example in the east given the lack of train routes beyond Bridge of Allan. With regard to cycle friendly bus services in Callander and Balloch, priority initiative 14) simply says that there is the "potential to be greatly improved", which doesn't commit the park authority to actual action.

We acknowledge that the West Highland train line is a key transport corridor, but the current timetables are unfit for purpose if being used to get into the park on a day trip due to the long gaps between trains. In order to persuade people to use public transport, this needs to be regular and at a reasonable cost.

We are pleased to see that the National Cycle Network will continue to develop but suggest that separated cycling or walking routes along main roads are prioritised, given the high speed and heavy traffic on these roads. These routes could be parallel to the road or make use of existing forestry tracks which are using the same corridor.

28. Do you think the right delivery partners have been identified for Connecting Places?

Yes.

Exploring further

30. Do you agree with the vision for Exploring Further?

Yes

32. Do you agree with the key focus areas and delivery principles outlined under Exploring Further?

Generally yes. We would suggest that any itineraries which are developed start from the principle that the user could arrive and move around the park by public transport, for example by starting at Balloch train station and linking to buses or trains to take the visitor further afield within the park. Similarly, we believe there would be merit in including itineraries for two-day trips which include an overnight stay at a settlement where there is a variety of accommodation options, such as a youth hostel or campsite as well as more expensive options, as this would help people to have a longer adventure within the park.

34. Do you think the right delivery partners have been identified for Exploring Further?

Yes

Coasts and Waters

36. Do you agree with the vision for Coasts and Waters?

Yes.

38. Do you agree with the key focus areas and delivery principles outlined under Coasts and Waters?

Yes

40. Do you think the right delivery partners have been identified for Coasts and Waters?

Yes

How we will measure success

42. Do you have any comments on the indicators for success, or suggestions on how we can measure our success?

We have nothing to add here, except that it might be useful to also measure the number of bus passengers along with train passengers.

If the intention is to base measurement of these indicators on the regular national park visitor survey, it would be useful to provide the dates for this survey which relate to the delivery period of this plan.

46. Do you provide your consent for us to process your personal information? *

- I consent to the National Park Authority processing my personal information in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018; specifically its storage and use by members of staff working on the Active Park, Healthy People: Outdoor Recreation Delivery Plan, who may contact me regarding my response or to update me on the progress of the strategy.

We hope the comments above are useful and would be happy to discuss them further.

Yours sincerely

Helen Todd
Campaigns & policy manager

Convener: **Ronnie Forbes**
President: **Ben Dolphin**
Director: **Brendan Paddy**

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