National Park Charity Reflects on Another Successful Year

Tuesday 20 June, 2023

Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs, the independent conservation and heritage charity for the National Park area, has enjoyed another successful year, with more than £90,000 raised. Several deserving projects throughout the National Park have benefited from grant awards as a result of funds raised through the charity's pioneering Friends of OUR Park project, which involves many local businesses. The voluntary visitor donation element of Friends of OUR Park continues to be an important source of funds to support access, conservation and heritage projects. The most successful fundraising technique used by businesses has been the use of opt-out visitor donation opportunities linked to accommodation and food bills.

The charity managed to re-introduce all their core activities including the popular Make a Difference Days, Young Friends outdoor programme and progressed two major Visitor Management Projects. They also printed and distributed two editions of the popular and informative Voice magazine.

Thanks to a grant provided by West Dunbartonshire Council's Year of Young People Legacy Fund, the Friends co-ordinated activity days in the National Park during 2022 for young people in the local area who enjoyed participating in many different outdoor activities, such as watersports, climbing and learning bushcraft and other skills as well as learning about nature and the environment.

At the Friends' well-attended AGM at Ross Priory in Gartocharn recently, there were several changes to the Friends' Board, with Chairman James Fraser and Trustees Dr Joyce Deans, Bill Dalrymple and Paul Saunders all retiring from the Board. Together they have provided a total of 45 years' loyal service to the Friends. John Urquhart, has moved from the position of Vice Chairman to Chairman and there are also two new Trustees who have joined the Board, namely Dr Roddy Yarr, Executive Lead Sustainability at the University of Strathclyde and Mr Stewart Gibb who is also on the Board of Helensburgh & District Access Trust.

In his review of the year at the Friends AGM the Chairman highlighted:

- The continued campaigning and lobbying by the Friends on matters affecting the National Park, such as the proposed A82 upgrade;
- Visitor management issues continued to be to the fore during the year and due to the proximity of the National Park to major population centres and the gradual return of UK and overseas visitors there continued to be large flows of visitors with some major visitor management challenges at some of the busier hotspots around Loch Lomond and in the Trossachs areas. The Friends participated in a series of community led Luss Summit meetings and they took direct action by stepping in for a second year to coordinate practical visitor management initiatives in the West Loch Lomond, head of Loch Long and Trossachs areas
- The Friends took an active part in meetings of the Destination National Park Group and various visitor management and place infrastructure consultation groups coordinated by the National Park. They also contributed pro-actively to a number of consultations on specific policy and byelaws reviews and commented on a number of planning applications.
- They continued to monitor planning applications and made comments on a limited number of proposals taking account of the aims of the National Park and the Friends' watchdog remit.
- With support from the Hannah Stirling Loch Lomond Trust and the Friends of OUR Park visitor giving scheme further work was undertaken clearing shrubs and small trees to maintain open views of Loch Lomond and Ben Lomond between Luss and Tarbet on stretches of the busy A82 and the adjacent cycle and footpath for the enjoyment of visitors.
- The Chairman extended his sincere thanks to all Trustees past and present for their sterling and selfless work over many years. He also thanked the Friends' business supporters and sponsors, the loyal members, and various partners, including the National Park Authority, for all their support, commitment, and encouragement during the 12 years he has been Chairman of the Friends.

Towards the end of the meeting, two interesting and informative talks were delivered, firstly by John Urquhart who provided an update on the campaign for a major re-think of the plans for the A82 upgrade

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on Loch Lomondside which is being considered by a Parliamentary Petitions Committee, followed by Gordon Watson, the National Park Authority Chief Executive on current and future priorities of the National Park.

Presentations were made to James Fraser, Joyce Deans, Bill Dalrymple and Paul Saunders by the Friends Honorary President, Sir Malcolm Colquhoun to acknowledge their hard work and dedication to the Friends.

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