
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: CEO REPORT

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Purpose

- I. To highlight to Board Members the main strategic areas of work that are being directed by Management Team. These are areas where significant staff resources are being directed to deliver with partners the aspirations of the National Park Partnership Plan.

Conservation:

- a) **Cairngorms National Park Forest Strategy** – The Forestry Strategy consultation was launched on 12th February and runs until 23rd March. Anecdotal feedback so far has been very positive.
- b) **Cairngorms Capercaillie Framework** – We have reviewed and resubmitted the bid to HLF to fund 65% of the £4m Capercaillie Framework project. HLF have told us that competition for HLF funds is now ‘ferocious’; we expect to hear whether or not we have been successful in March. The project implements the Cairngorms Capercaillie Framework, a blueprint for a strategic approach to saving the capercaillie from going extinct in the UK through direct conservation action at a landscape scale. We hope it will provide a model for action to save ‘at risk’ species in National Parks around the world.
- c) **East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership** – We have advertised the ECMP officer post and have had 17 applications. We will be interviewing 5 candidates on 12th March. We are currently holding individual meetings with each of the six partner estates to confirm arrangements for wader and hare monitoring, muirburn plans and to explore opportunities for woodland creation/montane willow regeneration that fits alongside moorland management.
- d) **Tomintoul & Glenlivet Landscape Partnership** – The Partnership continues to progress well. We have recently undertaken a whole programme review to assess timing and budgets for all of the 20 projects. Managing such a diverse range of projects ranging in budget from £5k to £400k is complex and current successes are a credit to the excellent staff team and partners. We are currently recruiting additional Land Management officer staff time and will be interviewing on 1st March.
- e) **Peatland restoration** - Peatland restoration projects are ongoing. Stephen Corcoran is currently managing seven projects with a total value of £760,786 targeting restoration work over 582ha on Invercauld, Balmoral, Glenfeshie, Abernethy, Mar and Candacraig

Estates. This is a huge amount of work. We are optimistic that additional funds may be available through Peatland Action to allow us to recruit an additional project officer.

Visitor Experience:

- a) **Long Distance Routes** - Speyside Way extension: final planning application (Inshriach to Kingussie) has been slightly delayed but will be submitted this Spring. Funding has been secured from SRDP and SNH for the 'approved' section from Kincaig to Inshriach with construction scheduled for this summer. Positive discussions on funding for the final section are ongoing with a realistic possibility of completion by the end of this year. A review of promotion, interpretation, signage and the new start/end point at Newtonmore will be undertaken this year. On completion further work is still required on upgrading sections of the existing route between CNP boundary and Aviemore. Deeside Way: planning for the first section from Braemar to Invercauld Bridge has required more natural heritage input than first anticipated. A revised planning application will be submitted spring 2018.
- b) **Mountains and People Project** - The project is on schedule with some 15.2 km (37%) of the Cairngorms Mountain paths identified upgraded. The allocation of paths in Drumochter needs revised because of ongoing vehicle use: OATS, SNH and CNPA aim to agree priorities by March 2018. The project is at the 'half way point' and so the outputs and legacy will be discussed at June board meeting (see also volunteering).
- c) **Active Cairngorms** - The main area of activity is focussed on Active Aviemore with CNPA leading a partnership comprising SUSTRANS, HITRANS, NHS, Highland Council and Aviemore Community Council to develop costed proposals to redesign Aviemore to encourage greater active travel (walking and cycling). This work is linked to the new consultation on the Main Issues Report for the Local Development Plan. Local consultation is ongoing with outline proposals for improving access scheduled for summer 2018. (see Cairngorm and Glenmore)
- d) **Cairngorm and Glenmore** - Progress continues to be slow with delivery of the overall Strategy. Positively, Forestry Commission Scotland is now developing, in consultation with partners, a new visitor plan to deliver the Glenmore elements of the visitor experience. Unfortunately, an application to Leader to study non-car transport in the area did not progress but CNPA are now in discussion with a group from Ireland that are delivering a Leader supported looking at similar issues with the potential for learning from their work. Any transport study covering Cairngorm and Glenmore will link to Active Aviemore.
- e) **Volunteering** - CNPA continues to promote countryside volunteering opportunities across the National Park including a close working relationship with Mountains and People project where we are both encouraging residents and 'near' residents to get involved in path maintenance and repair, as well as a redeveloped path monitoring project. Eight volunteer rangers completed training in October and are now supporting four local ranger services. Further seven Volunteer Rangers started training at the end of

February. The project is at the 'half way point' and so the outputs and legacy we be discussed at June Board meeting.

- f) **Education and Inclusion** - The John Muir Award continues to be popular with 3,581 Awards delivered in and around the National Park so far this year. John Muir Trust celebrated 21 years of John Muir Award in February with the partnership with CNPA recognised as supporting the long term delivery of the Award. The three year Backbone project encouraging 'minority groups' to enjoy the Scottish countryside and both National Parks comes to a conclusion on 30th June this year with a celebration in Balloch. Backbone is now looking at opportunities to support volunteering with 'minority groups' in 2018 and beyond.
- g) **Information and Interpretation** - Work continues to upgrade Ballater and Tomintoul VIC's which are both now due to open in summer 2018. CNPA is also agreeing a partnership with non-Visit Scotland centres to mutual benefit. A new partnership will be needed in Braemar in 2019 when the Visit Scotland centre closes. Discussions have also started for a potential partner in Laggan. Visitor leaflets for 2018 are being updated for distribution in Spring 2018.
- h) **Snow Roads Scenic Route** - Cairngorms Business Partnership project is now working with communities and interest groups to develop interpretation and visitor information along the route with outputs scheduled for this spring. Aberdeenshire Council are coordinating the design of brown tourist signs along the route (four local authorities), funded by CNPA, for installation spring 2018. The Snow Roads Scenic Route featured in BBC Countryfile in late November and BBC Radio Scotland Outdoors programme in December.

Rural Development:

- a) **Local Development Plan 2020** - The consultation on the Local Development Plan Main Issues (MIR) Report started on 17 November 2017 and ran until 2 March 2018. The team held 17 drop-in, workshop or other awareness raising events across the National Park, with more than 300 people attending those events. The social media promotion of the MIR has reached thousands of accounts and increased engagement. With more than 100 formal responses to the MIR at the start of the final week of consultation, it is expected that there will be significantly more formal responses than to the previous MIR consultation five years ago.
- b) **Planning casework** – The period at the end of 2017 and early 2018 saw a number of planning applications called for housing, renewable energy and telecoms developments. The level of planning enforcement casework remains high with continued investigation of new or upgraded tracks on open moorland where works may have been undertaken without consent. The planning service gained positive feedback from a number of stakeholders to its report on enforcement activity that was taken to Planning Committee in December.
- c) **Digital Communications** - The Scottish Government's Reaching "100 project" that plans to deliver high speed broadband to 100% of Scottish properties will cover the entire National Park, including those areas where bodies have developed bespoke

solutions. CNPA will be assisting with communication to communities about delivery as part of wider community updates. There will be a Planning Committee update paper on telecoms upgrades in March 2018.

- d) **Tourism Action Plan** – The Cairngorms Tourism Partnership met on 7 March. The group discussed the recommendations of the Verifiers for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas to ensure that sufficient work was in hand to address them. The Group also discussed the plan for the year ahead, the proposed Tourism Infrastructure Fund and collaborative work on business engagement with Park..
- e) **Housing Delivery** - Development on the ground of housing, including affordable housing, at sites at Beachan Court (Grantown-on-Spey) and at Boat of Garten is progressing well. Work has been progressing with Highland Small Communities Housing Trust and Voluntary Action Badenoch Strathspey to review arrangements for community-led housing delivery and Dulnain Bridge community are actively looking at potential sites for detailed investigation.
- f) **A9 Dualling project** – The CNPA Planning Committee have considered the formal stage 3 proposals of preferred options, Environmental Statements and extent of compulsory purchase orders for three sections of the A9 dualling programme from Killiekrankie to Glen Garry, Glen Garry to Dalwhinnie and Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore. Formal consultation on two further sections within the National Park is expected in 2018 (Crubenmore to Kincaig and Dalraddy to Slochd).
- f) **Economic Strategy** – A programme for review of the Economic Strategy is being developed to include review of available economic data on performance, business engagement. Scheduled for consideration by Board in December 2018.
- g) **Community-led development** – The Community Support Manager is providing advice and support to a range of community organisations to add value to the work of Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey and Marr Area Partnership. Ballater is close to completing a review of its Community Action Plan (CAP) and Kingussie is started to review its CAP in Feb 2018.
- h) **Badenoch Great Place project** - The Badenoch Great Place Project was approved by Heritage Lottery Fund's Great Places Scheme in late December 2017. Formal "Permission to start" is awaited from HLF. The Project Board has met once (Dave Fallows is the Board contact) and the Project Officer has been advertised – to be employed by Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey.
- i) **Cairngorms Archive Trust:** CNPA has been assisting a group of interested individuals in forming a new charitable organisation to act as custodian of a collection of book, magazines, maps, postcards, photos, scientific records and papers, etc. The Archive will develop over time into an important cultural heritage and educational resource and will initially be stored in Inverness in association with the Highland Archive Service. The Group's aspiration is to display elements within the National Park in due course.

Stakeholder Engagement:

- a) CEO & Convener attended NPUK Executive meeting in York. CEO also attended the CEO meeting in Lake District.
- b) The Convener, Vice-Convener and CEO met with CBP Chair and CEO.
- c) The CEO attended an SG workshop on the future of land use in Scotland.
- d) The Convener, CEO & staff attended meeting with the Duke of Rothesay at Birkhall.
- e) The CEO has also met with a number of stakeholders including NPPP Delivery Group, Killiekrankie Action Group, Moray CPP, Land Commission, BSW Timber Group, and Entrepreneurial Scotland.
- f) The Board had its latest evening in Tomintoul with the local community and around 40 people attended the evening including the Leader of Moray Council.

Communications:

- a) **Cairngorms Nature Campaign** – work is underway to develop a programme of events for the Cairngorms Nature Big Weekend 11 - 13 May 2018 which will be launched before Easter. As part of this programme a Rural Skills Day will take place on Friday 11 May led by FCS and the winners of the School Arts Competition will be announced at Cairngorm Mountain. The [Cairngorms Young Presenter competition](#) winner Aiden Curlew was announced in December and will visit the Park with his family in March. The competition reached 242,736 through our social media activity resulting in 6824 engagements which represents a 2.8% engagement rate. This does not include RSPB or other partner activity.
- b) **Active Cairngorms** – a campaign to promote responsible access and dog walking during the lambing season is underway and plans for Wee Walks Week to take place 15-22 September 2018 are being developed. The Active Aviemore consultation was delivered alongside the LDPMIR consultation meeting held in Aviemore with 28 people attending.
- c) **Make It Yours Campaign** – A more detailed learning experience alongside the one hour presentations for tourism businesses is being developed. This ½ day session will be trialled with an outdoor activity provider in early April. Businesses using the tear-off map pads were invited to take part in an online survey and the results were extremely positive and will inform how we take this forward. A review of the branded merchandise sales at Aviemore will take place in the spring.
- d) **Corporate Communications** – public consultation for the LDP Main Issues Report closed on 2 March with over 5675 web views. The Gaelic Language Plan has been finalised and submitted to Bord na Gaidhlig for approval and a Gaelic Language student has been appointed for a 3 month research project starting in June. The Forest Strategy consultation was launched 12 February and closes on 23 March. An infographic promoting the work of Cairngorms National Park Rangers has been produced and one promoting the work of the Cairngorms LEADER programme was sent to MSPs ahead of a debate at Holyrood. Our social media activity increased to reach 13,135 followers on Facebook (7% engagement rate) and 7,413 followers on twitter (4% engagement rate) and 190,000 website visitors in 2017.
- e) **Europarc Conference 2018** – a programme and key note speakers have been confirmed and workshop topics and study tours are being finalised with a website and booking system ready to go live by the end of March. The conference is expected to attract 300+ delegates.

Organisational Development:

- a) **Office Extension Project** – The building is now largely complete from an external perspective with the windows in situ and most of the larch cladding has been affixed to the walls. The concrete slab for the floor will be poured early March and then the internal finishes will begin. Completion is still anticipated to be July 2018, with building fit out to follow. Likely staff occupation therefore toward end of August. A staff project team has been established to identify and cost improvements/redecoration to the existing office space so that it compares favourably to the new extension.
- b) **Staffing update** – The Landscape Officer, Graham Saunders joined us in January, together with Viv Roach, the new Admin Support Officer. We are currently recruiting the East Cairngorms Moorland Project Officer, which is a new post to support the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership (ECMP). We are also recruiting a Land Management Officer to job share with the existing officer, supporting the Tomintoul & Glenlivet Landscape Partnership (TGLP) project. The LEADER Programme Manager, Sam Wiaczek, has notified us of his resignation. Action is underway now to recruit to cover both the finalisation of the Cairngorms LEADER programme and also the ongoing development of the charitable activities of the Cairngorms Local Action Group Trust.
- c) **Youth Employment** – Further to our recently launched Youth Employment Strategy, we have in the last few months supported the following activities:
 - i. We have successfully recruited an Intern to deliver a 3 month project that will involve research into available resources that promote Gaelic as an Asset in terms of heritage, tourism, visitor interpretation and experiences within the Cairngorms National Park. The intern will join us on a 3 month contract, commencing in June.
 - ii. We have entered into partnership with UHI to support a Foundation Apprentice. Foundation Apprenticeships are a Skills Development Scotland (SDS) initiative, providing new, work-based learning opportunities for S5 and S6 learners. It enables them to complete elements of a Modern Apprenticeship while still at school. The young person will be placed with the CNPA one day/week (Friday), commencing in August.
- d) **Organisational Development Strategy 2** – Work on ODS2 has resulted in a number of exciting developments, including the launch of the internal staff intranet in February, as well as a focus on improvement initiatives, which is being supported by the Scottish Government’s Improvement Service. Our vision in this regard is to be the “Best small public body in Scotland”.
- e) **Best Companies Survey** – This survey was carried out in October 2017 and there was a 90% response rate. CNPA has been listed at number 84 out of the top 100 organisations to work for in the “not for profit” sector (2018). Overall, the results continue to present a very positive assessment of staff satisfaction with their role and employment with the Authority. Our results are well above the benchmark average for public administration organisation and we appear to be the third highest ranked Scottish organisation participating in this survey. However, we will not rest on our laurels. The list itself is not the reason we did the survey – the results provide a very detailed and insightful snapshot of the health of the organisation, and inform actions for the following 18 months. The 2018 survey results have now been analysed in detail, and highlight and shadow areas, together with an action plan, have been

- identified, and are now being fully consulted with staff. The action plan will further inform the evolving Organisational Development process.
- f) **Shared Services** - Work is underway to ensure a smooth handover to CNPA providing the shared HR and Payroll services for the Scottish Land Commission. Commencement date is 1st April 2018
- g) **UKNP** - National Parks agreed to move forward with the establishment of a national charity vehicle to support the activities of National Parks Partnerships in seeking financial and other support for the work of National Parks in the UK. The Cairngorms NPA will continue as a member of the working group developing this vehicle on behalf of all NPAs.
- h) **LEADER** - Cairngorms LEADER remains the third highest commitment of all Scottish LEADER Programmes. It is likely that the Local Action Group meeting on 28 February will exhaust the allocation of both community and enterprise development funding. A small amount of farm diversification allocation and funds for cooperation projects falling in multiple LAG areas will remain. Cairngorms also Chairs the Accountable Bodies' Working Group, reviewing the adequacy of Service Level Agreement provisions between Scottish Government and Accountable Bodies in the delivery of LEADER across Scotland. Work is also underway on a number of fronts to highlight the benefits of Community Led Local Development, as currently financed through LEADER, to develop the case for continued financial support for these activities after the UK's exit from the EU.

Future dates for diary

- **Cairngorms Nature Big Weekend 11 – 13 May**
- **Europarc Conference 18 – 21 September**

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March 2018

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Board Member Update

Judith Webb - Along with other CNPA representatives I attended the Nature of Scotland Awards – a good and useful networking event, plus great to see one of the CNPA assisted projects, Ruthven Farm, win an award.

On November 30th I attended, along with David Hetherington, the Mountain Woodland Project closing conference in Edinburgh which ties in well with development of our woodland strategy and some Cairngorms Nature work.

In December 2017, I attended as Board representative, the Cairngorms Nature Steering Group meeting and field visit in Tomintoul, and have since been liaising with some partners, and Andy Ford, regarding Big Weekend events.

More recently I attended the Reindeer research group meeting with Andy Ford at UHI.