

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY FINANCE & DELIVERY COMMITTEE

FOR DISCUSSION

**Title: SCOTTISH SCENIC ROUTES PROJECT:
CONSTRUCTION COMPLETION**

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Purpose

This paper summaries the completion of the three viewpoints that have allowed the development of the Snow Roads Scenic Route and outlines the ongoing work lead by the Cairngorms Business Partnership to further develop the route.

Recommendations

The Finance & Delivery Committee is requested to note:

- a) **The completion of the construction element of the Scottish Scenic Routes Project**
- b) **The ongoing development of Snow Roads as a visitor experience**

Background

1. Following study of work in Norway, Scottish Government recognised the economic benefit that developing scenic routes could bring to rural areas by both attracting new visitors and encouraging them to dwell longer. Projects also provide opportunities to develop the talent of young architects and landscape architects.
2. The Scottish Government initiated a three year Scenic Routes Project (2013-16) to pilot the development of up to eight outstanding view points along rural roads in Scotland.
3. The project was a partnership comprising; Scottish Government, Napier University, Transport Scotland, Visit Scotland, Scottish Canals, Scottish Natural Heritage, Sustrans, Loch Lomond and Trossachs NPA and Cairngorms NPA.

4. Sites for the pilot were put forward by partners and assessed according to agreed criteria. We were successful in securing three of the seven sites developed during the three year period.
5. Designs for each site were developed through a national competition open to newly qualified architects and landscape architects. While each site was different the aim of the competitions was to produce high quality, engaging and thought provoking designs that encourage visitors to stop and enjoy outstanding Scottish landscapes. The winning designs were chosen by a group of Scottish Government appointed judges including one CNPA Board Member.
6. It was a key part of the process that the winning designer was mentored through the process of taking the design from competition entry to final installation.
7. Funding for the competition and the development of chosen sites was provided by Scottish Government. CNPA staff managed the project locally including:
 - a) Reaching agreement with three private landowners
 - b) Reaching agreement with three local authorities; Moray, Aberdeenshire and Perth & Kinross
 - c) Refining a competition winning designs into affordable, practical installations
 - d) Developing skills and experience of competition winners
 - e) Obtaining planning consent
 - f) Communication with local communities and partners

Snow Roads Scenic Route

8. The three sites chosen in the Cairngorms had previously been identified as viewpoints requiring significant improvement:
 - a) Tomintoul – identified by the community in 2012 as a ‘gateway’ to the village in urgent need of improvement
 - b) Coragarff – developed in 2000 as a viewpoint with a sculpture but in need of upgrade
 - c) Glenshee – identified in 2011 by Glenshee and Strathardle Tourist Association
9. The Scottish Government accepted the proposal that the redevelopment of these three sites, combined with existing visitor experiences on the journey, could create a 90 mile ‘scenic route’ from Grantown-on-Spey to Blairgowrie. It could also encourage more visitors into the five communities along the route. The need to better promote

the eastern Cairngorms to tourists had been previously raised by a number of partners, some suggesting signing from Perth.

10. Following competitive tender Ian White Associates (Landscape Architects) were appointed by CNPA to both manage the installations and support the development of the newly qualified architects.

Project Delivery

11. The Scottish Government project covered a three year period from 2013-16 with the designs for the three sites coming from two competitions in 2014 and 2015.
12. Contractors were appointed by competitive tender with the principle building contractor being Hunter Construction (Aberdeenshire). The artistic installations were supplied by Chris Brammall Ltd.
13. The total cost of the project was:-

Phase 1 (Corgarff)	£97,000
Phase 2 (Tomintoul & Glenshee)	£180,300
Project Management	£55,300
	£332,600

14. The project management fees included IWAs joint role of project management and professional support for the newly qualified competition winners as well fees for additional technical advice required to develop a competition winning design into a practical installation.

Future Development

15. The Snow Roads Scenic Route is identified as a key project in Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan; *'the Snow Roads Scenic Route has the potential to be a major new attraction in the eastern Cairngorms.'*
16. Cairngorms Business Partnership has recently secured a two year grant from Scottish Enterprise Tourism Destination Development Fund to support a project of £314,000 to:
 - a) Develop Snow Roads as 'must do' scenic route
 - b) Create an authentic visitor experience
 - c) Develop better understanding of markets

- d) Provide businesses with the tools to bring this world class destination to life
17. CBP has developed a wide ranging Partnership Steering Group to meet three to four times a year to support the delivery of the project.
 18. There is potential to undertake more modest upgrades to existing stopping places that are excellent natural viewpoints along the route but this currently has no funding and as such is not a high priority.
 19. Scottish Government is still considering how to use the information and experience gained during the three year pilot project.
 20. Inspired by the success of North Coast 500 several organisations including Visit Aberdeen are looking at developing tourist routes but no firm proposals have been received.

Lessons Learnt

21. Annex I contains a summary of lessons learnt provided for the Scottish Government.
22. Main improvement: it is clear that we underestimated the complexity of this project that was both financially and time constrained, and required detailed communication with a huge range of partners from Scottish Government to residents, from newly qualified architects to private landowners. With hindsight more staff time should have been allocated to support the work of what was in reality three individually challenging and complex projects.
23. Nevertheless, the development of a high quality project linking the eastern Cairngorms is now proving a success and CBP are receiving support from partners along the route. The project over the next two years has the potential to significantly support the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan aim of, *'increase the economic impact of visitors to eastern and southern Cairngorms from 21% to 25% of the total visitor economy.'*

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Annex I: Scottish Scenic Routes Project – Lessons learnt Cairngorms National Park

CNPA has been involved from the outset with the pilot and has put forward three sites for the design competition.

Site Choice and Route

1. Having community and land manager support is vital but time consuming – fortunately the sites in CNP had been identified as needing improvement prior to Scenic Routes Project.
2. Having a clear idea of a route makes it easier to develop support for the project – the three CNP sites are on a coherent route from Grantown-on-Spey to Blairgowrie. It also helped that this route linked communities and businesses that want greater promotion and more visitors.
3. Being able to link existing natural and cultural attractions along the route with new interventions makes it a more credible project and easier to develop support.

Partner and Stakeholder Support and Communications

4. It is vital to keep communities, tourism businesses, public sector partners and land managers informed and supportive of the process – external communications require a lot of work.
5. Internal project communications also require a lot of work with long chains of communication – Scottish Government, Project Working Group, client (CNPA), CNPA Board, technical consultant (IWA), competition winner, and land manager. We should consider ways to simplify this in future.
6. Private sector land managers require the liability and ongoing maintenance for any structures to be covered by a third party – in our case by CNPA.
7. The project required committed and sensitive leadership locally to take it forward.

Competition

8. The competitions have produced innovative and engaging designs that would not have been developed if we had simply upgraded the lay-bys.

9. The competitions brought a wealth of architecture experience to support the design process.
10. Clear design briefs still produced entries did not follow the brief; we need to look at ways of encouraging more high quality entries.
11. Winning designs required considerable technical input to take them through planning to tender and installation – some competition winners welcomed this process others were less engaged. The role of the competition winner still needs to be made clearer at the outset.
12. The competition winners had tremendous opportunities to develop their professional skills with nationally acclaimed projects.
13. Changes to winning designs needed to be agreed by Scottish Government, Project Working Group, Land manger and Client. Ways of streamlining this process should be considered.
14. There is a tension between national competitions and local decision making. We should consider how local involvement can be increased.

Technical Support

15. Specialist technical architectural support is required to mentor the competition winners, refine the winning designs and manage planning consent and installation.
16. Technical support was more expensive than a standard construction project because of the additional design and mentoring needs.

Budget and Resources

17. Scottish Government funds for the competition, technical support and implementation has produced innovative and engaging viewpoints that would not otherwise have been delivered.
18. Each site cost more to implement than anticipated. Remote working and novel designs meant that each lay-by cost in the region of £100,000 plus technical fees.

19. Additional funding support from partners has not been forthcoming at the installation phase, only now that the route is taking shape are we seeing support to promote it. We need to consider ways of obtaining partner support earlier in the process.
20. This process is resource intensive for the client in staff time - we committed some 45 days of staff time per year in each of the two competition years.

Timescales

21. The process is time consuming with the **minimum** time required for each element estimated as follows:-

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|---|------------|
| • Site selection and negotiation | 6-9 months |
| • Competition | 3 months |
| • Design development, planning and installation | 12 months |

22. This indicates that if 'starting from scratch' it would take two years to from initiation to the completion of the first installations.

Overall Evaluation

23. With three sites now completed we consider this an extremely worthwhile pilot. The installations provide a new way of promoting an outstanding route through the Cairngorms National Park, and a new way of linking existing attractions and tourism businesses. With CNP Tourism Destination Development work underway we are now seeing a range of partners coming together to realise the potential of the scenic route.