

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: **Entry Point Signage for the Cairngorms National Park**

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Purpose

To inform the Board of the progress made on entry point marker project since September 2005 when the Board approved expenditure for Phase 1 that concerns the 21 non trunk road sites.

Recommendations

That the Board note progress made on the project to date.

Executive Summary

This paper summaries the development work that has been undertaken on the Point of Entry marker Project since September 2005 including appointment of consultants to manage the project, to manufacture and install the markers and to negotiate land agreements. A breakdown of project expenditure is provided along with progress reports for each area of work.

ENTRY POINT SIGNAGE FOR THE CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK – For Information

Background

1. The development of entry point markers for the Cairngorms National Park was identified as one of the Authority's earliest priorities. The work was initially developed through consultation with the Gateways Working Group that operated between November 2003 and May 2004.
2. Since July 2004 the project has been the subject of five Board papers that have either provided information on progress or requested authority to proceed with the next stage of the project.
3. In the spring of 2005 permanent markers were installed at the five railway stations and interim metal signs erected at 10 of the busiest road entrances to the Park.
4. In September 2005 the Board approved the expenditure by CNPA of £328,000 over the two financial years 2005/06 and 2006/07 to implement Phase 1 of the project to install 21 permanent markers at the non trunk road sites. Partnership funding amounting to some 37% was sourced from local authorities, enterprise companies, European Rural Development Fund and a charitable trust.

Policy Context

5. The rationale for developing high quality entry point markers was formalised in the Scoping Study of July 2004. Project aims included: creating a strong and positive sense of arrival for people entering the Park, creating a feeling of welcome, of being in a special place and one that is cared for by residents, visitors and communities. Since that time the work on the National Park Plan has been developed and the project fits well with the Priority for Action on Developing Awareness and Understanding of the Park.
6. This approach is further endorsed by a report to Ministers prepared by Eric Milligan, former Provost of Edinburgh, entitled 'Review of First Impressions of Scotland.' The report considered arrival experiences at national level and states that first impressions are crucial, recommending that, 'Scottish Ministers and gateway operators should develop a 20-year vision for Scotland's points of entry to realise the ambition to be among the world's best. The plans should ensure that development is for the long term and not confined to coping with the demands of the next 2-3 years, and should encourage the use of inspiring high quality design.'

Progress on Appointment of Consultants and Contractors

7. Since September 2005 the following consultants/contractors have been appointed to progress the project:
 - a) Ian White Associates, Landscape Designers (Stirling) – to produce detailed designs for the 21 sites; to tender and manage both sign manufacture and installation contracts.
 - b) Fyfe Glenrock (Oldmeldrum) – to source material and manufacture granite markers.
 - c) Hunter Construction (Aberdeen)– to install granite markers and associated landscaping.
 - d) Smiths Gore, Land agents (Fochabers) to negotiate land management agreements for the marker sites
 - e) Aaron Lawton Associates (Pitlochry) – to design Park wide information and interpretation features for lay-bys/car parks at three key entry points at Dinnet, Laggan and Drumochter.

8. It is of note that most appointments have been made to companies based in the north of Scotland.

Progress on Marker Design and Manufacture

9. At both Board meetings in September, concerns were expressed by members about the size and legibility of the Gaelic wording on markers. Following these comments we asked the designer to look at the potential to enlarge the Gaelic. The resulting revision increased Gaelic lettering to the maximum size allowed by the current three panel design while retaining the overall function. However, the revision did increase the overall height of the marker. An additional mock-up sign was made and the design tested. The revised design retains the functionality of the original but ensures that the Gaelic is more clearly recognisable by motorists.

10. The increase in height of the marker meant that the engineering analysis for installation had to be recalculated and advertising consents resubmitted.

11. Despite the increase in the size of Gaelic wording, the revised design is being strongly criticised by some individuals who wish to see the Gaelic have equal parity with English.

12. Fyfe Glenrock sourced granite from within the National Park and the company is currently finishing production of the 21 markers. The supply of granite contained a number of large, 'natural looking' boulders. This created the opportunity for the designer to look again at the single slab design and change to the use of large irregular boulders for all markers that contain the bird from the brand image alone. Boulders will be installed at 15 sites on the less frequented roads, the Speyside Way and on National Cycle Route 7. Photographs of the two designs are contained in Annex 1.

Progress on Land Management Agreements

13. The site of the marker and the immediate surrounds need to be safeguarded to ensure that they are maintained free of clutter, tree planting, etc. so that the marker is clearly visible and the first impression is positive. The most effective way to maintain the integrity of the sites is by entering into 20 year management agreements with owners following procedures laid down in Section 15 of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000.
14. Smiths Gore is currently negotiating agreements on our behalf with all land managers. In recognition of the goodwill shown by land managers we are making a modest single payment covering a 10-year period based on the size of the marker installed, as well as reasonable legal cost up to £350.
15. Despite the work undertaken with land managers over the past two years we are now experiencing some delays in entering formal, legal agreements. However, to date the majority are scheduled to be agreed at least in principle with entry authorised by June. Only one land manager is expressing lack of support for the project but discussions are ongoing.

Progress on Installation

16. The installation process for the larger markers uses a concrete foundation with stainless steel pegs and resin bonding. The use of resin bonding is a tried and tested technique. However, in order to perfect the process with the markers Hunter Construction is currently refining their technique on two mock-up granite slabs prior to field installation. These test slabs will be loaded in excess of the maximum wind loading encountered on site to ensure that the resin has been correctly applied.
17. Installation is scheduled to start in June and the programme will be determined partly by progress on the management agreements. Once a detailed schedule is available land managers, community councils and Board members will be notified.
18. Since January the start of installation has slipped by some six weeks due to delays in marker production, appointment of installation contractors and finalisation of management agreements. This time delay is not critical at this stage and the installation contract allows for the completion of Phase 1 by the autumn. The focus to date has been on controlling the quality of the project and the cost - two areas where slippage would have had a significant impact.

Progress on Individual Sites

19. **Dinnet** is the most popular eastern road entrance to the Park with some 4400 vehicles per day using the A93 (the third busiest road entry into the Park after the A9). The proximity of the boundary to the village means that there is considerable scope for encouraging visitors to stop and obtain information about the Park and the area around Dinnet. However, agreeing a location for the boundary marker has proved problematic because of the existence of the Highland Boundary stone close to the Park boundary.
20. In April we presented three complementary proposals to a meeting of stakeholders:
 - a) To install the Cairngorms marker 500m east of the village on the south side of the road (i.e. on the left as you enter the Park).
 - b) To upgrade the village hall car park and install Park wide information and interpretation.
 - c) To move the Highland Boundary stone into the car park and provide interpretation that can tell the story of why it is there.
21. Participants were generally supportive of the first two proposals but unanimous in their desire to retain the Highland Boundary Stone in its current location.
22. Following the meeting draft proposals were prepared recommending the location of the Cairngorms marker and the upgrade of the car park but rejecting the relocation of the Highland Boundary stone. These have been circulated for wider comment and to date no further submissions have been received.
23. Assuming the consultation does not reveal any further contrary views we will move to seek land manager permission, advertising and planning consents for the works in early June. If successful in normal timescales it is anticipated that the works can be completed by autumn 2006.
24. The exact location of the marker at **Glen Shee** has presented challenges because of the need to distance it from the carriageway for road safety while not cutting excessively into the hillside. Agreement has now been reached and advertising consent is anticipated in time for June.
25. Agreement has been reached with Highland Council over the upgrade of the lay-by at **Huntly's Cave north of Grantown- on- Spey**. The Council have agreed fund the road surfacing element of the upgrade and manage this proportion of the contract.

External Funding

Progress to date has satisfied the requirements of all the external funding partners. The Project received an Article 4 Monitoring Check from the European Regional Development Fund Programme Executive in early May. The monitoring is to ensure that the project is being managed appropriately and that the Objective 2 funding is

being used for the purposes granted. The monitoring check was thorough and examined the whole project from initial justification, consultation, Board approval, contract appointment through to the approval of individual invoices. Although we have yet to receive written confirmation the verbal feedback was a positive endorsement of the project procedures to date.

Project Budget

27. The initial budget presented in September 2005 is summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Expenditure forecast, September 2005

	Initial budget (£)
CNPA contribution 2005/06	120,000
CNPA contribution 2006/07	208,000
Funding Partner contributions	194,000
Total: Phase 1	522,000

28. Project expenditure in the financial year 2005/06 was in line with the forecast.
29. As can be expected, the costs of individual contracts have shown both increases and decreases when compared to the original estimates. Nevertheless, with all the main contracts now let our **current forecast for completion of Phase 1 is £528,000**. To date additional costs have been incurred due to the redesign of markers and the resubmission of advertising consents. Given the size and timescale of the project the cost increase against budget of 1% is considered reasonable.

Progress on Phase 2 (Trunk road sites)

30. The development of the four trunk road sites (A9 Drumochter, A86 Laggan, A9 Slochd and A95 Mains of Dalvey) is scheduled to commence in the spring of 2007. We are currently working with the Scottish Executive (Trunk Roads) to developed detailed proposal for the upgrade of lay-bys at Drumochter, Laggan and Mains of Dalvey. The change of contractor from Bear Scotland to Scotland Transerv this year in North West area has slowed progress in discussions and we are unable to present detailed, costed proposals now.
31. However, the work on Phase 1 will allow us to refine the marker production and installation costs for Phase 2 and we intend to come to the Board this autumn with detailed proposals and costs.

Signage to the National Park

32. The Scottish Executive has approved the use of the National Park brand image for use on tourist (brown) signs to the Park.

33. Angus Council have installed signs on the A94 and in Kirrimuir to the Cairngorms National Park with the name of the relevant Angus Glen(s) positioned below the Park (see Annex 2).
34. Visitscotland, with Highland, Moray and Aberdeenshire Councils, is currently looking at the feasibility of redesigning the Highland Tourist Route which runs from Aberdeen to Inverness via Tomintoul. We are in discussion with the group about signing to the Cairngorms National Park as part of this upgrade.
35. There are proposals in the National Park Plan to undertake further signage to the Park. Funds are in place to do a scoping study later this calendar year.

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2 June 2006

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Annex 1 - Point of Entry Markers



3 metre marker



Boulder