

# CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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## FOR INFORMATION

**Title:** Corporate Plan Report: Theme 3

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Development  
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### **Purpose**

To inform the Board of our work to date to achieve the third strategic theme of the Corporate Plan for 2005-08, and our plans for future activity.

### **Recommendations**

- That the Board note the progress and plans for achieving the third theme of the Corporate Plan for 2005-08.

### **Executive Summary**

The third theme of the Corporate Plan for 2005-08 states:

“To support and stimulate economic and social development within the Park that sustains and is sustained by its special natural and cultural qualities”

The CNPA’s work to date on this theme has concentrated on developing our strategic approach to the broad range of policy areas that fall within the scope of the theme. This has involved extensive work with partners and has helped shape the thinking that has gone into the Park Plan. At the same time a balance has been struck in that we have delivered a number of tangible activities and projects that are generating positive benefits on the ground now.

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## CORPORATE PLAN REPORT: THEME 3 – FOR INFORMATION

### Background

1. This is the third report on the third theme of the CNPA's Corporate Plan for 2005-08. The Board considered the previous reports in May and November 2005.
2. The third theme is:

“To support and stimulate economic and social development within the Park that sustains and is sustained by its special natural and cultural qualities”
3. It is important to remember the explicit reference to the special qualities of the Park. This should always be to the forefront of our thinking so that the Park Authority is able to focus in on economic and social development issues that are directly linked to the special qualities and does not get drawn into more general economic and social development activity. To further focus effort, economic and social activity that also contributes to the achievement of the other Corporate Plan themes is prioritised.
4. Delivery of the third Corporate Plan theme is primarily the responsibility of the CNPA's Economic and Social Development (ESD) and Planning and Development Control (PDC) Groups, although other groups also make important contributions. For example, work on path provision, on co-ordination of ranger services, food marketing etc, also provides important economic and social benefits. This report, however, focuses only upon the work of the ESD and PDC Groups and has been structured around key policy areas.

### Housing

5. The Heriot Watt housing system analysis study is now complete, as is the information on household and population projections, prepared by Manchester University. This information was considered by the Board on the 19 May and a *preferred* strategic direction for the CNPA in facilitating greater provision of affordable housing within the Park was agreed.
6. The next step is to consider the views of the Board in the context of the Park Plan consultation. Thus a workshop has been arranged on 14 June for the Board and the Cairngorms Housing Group to review the draft Park Plan priority for action on 'Making Housing Affordable and Sustainable'. This currently reflects the Cairngorms Housing Action Plan that was previously prepared by the Housing Group. It is intended that appropriate revisions will be identified and agreed with partners, with a final review of the action plan being conducted once the public consultation on the Park Plan is complete.
7. There are also several specific initiatives upon which the Housing Policy Officer, Fiona Munro, is working closely with partners, as follows:

- a) Along with Highland Council and the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust, we have co-funded a feasibility study and design competition for the development of affordable housing on Forestry Commission land at Kincaig. This project is progressing well and an interim report has been received on the potential for 4 rural home ownership grant funded houses in the forest;
- b) In order to gain a clear picture of the barriers to landowners providing affordable housing and to assess the potential for improving existing stock, converting derelict/redundant buildings or providing new build, we have jointly funded a survey of landowners which has been undertaken by the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association (SRPBA). This project is now complete and the final report has been received. The conclusions and recommendations of the report are being discussed with partners and will be considered as part of the consultation on the Park Plan;
- c) The Cairngorms Crofting Communities Association has undertaken a wide ranging survey of crofters which, among other things, will gauge the views of crofters of the potential for crofts to meet affordable housing needs. The draft findings were presented, informally to the Planning Committee in February;
- d) A partnership proposal has been developed for a Rural Housing Enabler to work with selected rural communities in rural Aberdeenshire. Elaine Blane has been appointed and started in her role in early May. She will support the communities in addressing their housing needs. Partners include Aberdeenshire Council, Registered Social Landlords, the SRPBA and the Rural Housing Service. A funding package has been agreed for 3 years with a final tranche of funding currently being considered by a charitable trust to ensure the project runs for the full 3 years.

## **Tourism**

8. The annual update on the Sustainable Tourism 5 Year Action Plan was presented to the Board on 5 May. This is a requirement of the European Charter and will provide a sound basis for the mid term review which is due in 2007. CNPA staff are maintaining strong links with Europarc and the other members of the Charter Park Network and Ruathy Donald is due to attend the Charter Park conference in Alsace, France in June, where she will give a presentation on the development of the Cairngorms brand.
9. The main pieces of work where the ESD Group takes the lead for the actions contained within the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan include:
  - a) Co-ordination of the ViSIT Forum and of delivery of the Tourism Strategy and Action Plan;
  - b) Development of a monitoring framework for the Strategy;
  - c) Initiating and supporting marketing activity;
  - d) Development and roll-out of the Cairngorms Brand;

- e) Dissemination of product knowledge about the Park to tourism operators via the 'Cairngorms Connections' courses, and the development of an on-line version of the course.
10. Working Together is a key priority action, and providing information on tourism activity to all stakeholders, and therefore an easy read booklet on the first year's achievements has been distributed to all private businesses and other partners. Following on from the success of the first tourism conference, the second conference will be held on 1 November 2006, and discussions are on-going with the ViSIT Forum to agree the subjects for discussion.
  11. It is particularly important that we continue to develop strong working relationships with VisitScotland, and ensure that the National Park is a key part of the emerging Area Tourism Partnerships and their Area Tourism Plans. There is no standard model for the ATPs or for the Local Area Forums that feed into the ATP, but Park staff and Board and ViSIT Forum members are present on each of the three ATPs that fall within the Park area (the Highlands, the North East and Angus/Dundee). The ViSIT Forum was approached to see whether it would be willing to fulfil the function of the Badenoch and Strathspey Local Area Forum, and this has been agreed on an interim basis. Andrew Kirk from Carrbridge has been nominated as the private sector representative and attends the Highland ATP meetings with a CNPA member of staff.

## **Transport**

12. The transport audit is in progress and is assessing both the environmental and social benefits of modal switches to public transport and route demand. Funding for a pilot cross-Park 'Heather Hopper' bus service from Grantown-on-Spey to Ballater has been confirmed, with contributions from Highland and Aberdeenshire Councils. The service will run from July to September in its first pilot year and will be fully evaluated alongside information obtained from the transport audit.
13. The Cairngorms Explorer public transport timetable has been published for a second year with new cycling and walking routes. A meeting is being sought with Regional Transport Partnerships and councils to secure long-term public sector funding for the publication.

## **Strengthening Communities**

14. The Communities Scheme of the Integrated Grant Programme (IGP) focuses on developing the capacity of communities both so that they can better influence the actions of others and are able to deliver things for themselves. Until the end of March 2006, 17 small grants and 5 medium grants were awarded to a range of community organisations. Projects have ranged from Community Newsletter training and purchase of adaptive bicycles for disabled people to discussion groups for school pupils and the production of orienteering maps for villages in the National Park.

15. The CNPA continues to host the Cairngorms LEADER+ Programme. This has supported over 100 community-based projects across the Cairngorms, and part funds the IGP. We are currently looking at how this support can continue after 2006.
16. On the community engagement front, the role of the Community Liaison Officers became more formalised and from the beginning of April broadened out to be a resource for all the groups within the CNPA. This work is internally co-ordinated by a community engagement steering group (overseen by the Head of Communications and line managed by the Learning and Inclusion Manager) Current work includes working on the “National Standards for Community Engagement” as the basis for a more standardised and inclusive approach by the Park Authority when consulting with local communities both geographical and of interest.
17. Consideration is being given to the linkages between the Park Plan and the Community Planning processes, co-ordinated by the local authorities. It is anticipated that there is scope for more collaborative approaches to local community engagement and to delivering elements of common interest within the Park Plan and the Community Plans. A paper on this issue will be brought to the Board in due course.

### **Cultural Heritage**

18. In October last year, the Board agreed a framework for action on cultural heritage matters. Work is progressing on several of the actions that were agreed including an Audit of the Historic Environment of the Cairngorms National Park, consultation meetings on the cultural heritage aspects of the draft Park Plan, and setting up a Cultural Heritage Group for the Park.
19. Current cultural heritage grant scheme projects include: oral history training, local publications, interpretation and small scale archaeological surveys. An Historic Landscape Assessment seminar was organised for CNPA staff at Mar Lodge. The leaflet on ‘Place-Names in the Cairngorms National Park’ will be published by July.

### **Learning and Inclusion**

20. A pilot Inclusion Outreach project is taking place in early June. In partnership with the “Big Issue Foundation” the visit, lasting four days will include the Big Issue Walking Club undertaking the John Muir Award and other confidence building activities. In addition there will be an evening barbeque for staff, board and the Big Issue to get together. The pilot will be carefully evaluated to inform the development of a broader programme of outreach activity.
21. Part of widening social inclusion activity is supporting the “All Abilities Communication Network” in broadening their current remit to include other hard to reach groups i.e.; people living on low incomes, young people, black and ethnic

minorities. A seminar for the group to review remit, membership and status is set to take place in June.

22. The work on "Learning and Inclusion" plans is well underway. Consultation has taken place with four main learning and inclusion stakeholder groups: key learning providers, learning users, CNPA staff and groups/individuals that traditionally find it harder to engage with the Park. The consultation process has generated information on current provision by other stakeholders in this area, on best practice in learning and inclusion in other National Parks. It has also clarified external views on where the focus should be for priority action in learning and inclusion and where this fits within the context of the park Plan. A draft action plan is currently being developed and will act as a basis for an informal discussion on these areas by the board in July, with a decision paper planned for August.

### **Development Control**

23. Members will have noted progress on development control from the report on the operational plan to the 5 May Board Meeting. The "call-in" rate has reduced from 17% to 12% over the last two quarters. The number of active planning applications currently stands at 33, a figure that is in line with a sustainable caseload in the order of 30. The Planning Committee on the morning of 19 May has 5 determinations on the agenda so it is anticipated that there will be further progress on caseload management.
24. The quality of decisions and the debate that leads to them continues to be of a high standard and this is borne out by the success of the authority in planning appeals. The length of time taken to determine applications is improving, certainly for those recently called in, but the figures last given to the Board saw an increase in time taken due to the distorting effect of a few complex and long standing applications. We continue to try and bring these to determination as soon as possible. We are taking a firmer stance with both consultees and applicants to ensure that information essential for the determination is supplied more quickly. The possible move to a monthly determination meeting for planning applications will assist in timetabling applications for specific meetings and allow us to ensure that all information is available to allow the decision to be taken at that meeting.
25. An Assistant Planner post has been established to provide support to both development control and policy making. The post is currently being advertised and when filled will have a specific remit to develop more formal systems for monitoring the implementation of planning decisions and the local plan once it is in place. This additional capacity will help to further improve the quality of the development control service.
26. The mechanics of the "call-in" arrangements with the 4 local authorities continue to operate relatively smoothly. We are working on the e planning project with the Scottish Executive and other planning authorities in the country. There has been an application to a central fund for assistance with its implementation, but in the meantime we continue to develop a web based system that will allow people to view

planning applications and assess their current status etc. This should become live during the summer.

27. Finally, it is worth commenting on the work that went into the consultation on the Beauly – Denny Transmission Line proposal involving both development control and policy input, but with a process that essentially followed that of a formal planning application. This took up a large portion of officer time and the process and deliberation by Members has been the subject of favourable comment. It is understood that a Public Local Inquiry is a likely outcome and this may take place in early 2007: we are awaiting confirmation.

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