

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: CNPA's STRATEGIC APPROACH TO TOURISM

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Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to seek the Board's approval to the Park Authority's strategic approach to tourism.

Recommendations

- The Board are invited to approve the CNPA's strategic approach to tourism, as set out in this paper;
- The Board are invited to note the actions being taken to ensure that both of Scotland's National Parks benefit from the new national arrangements for tourism support;
- The Board are invited to endorse the revised Cairngorms Tourism Marketing Strategy.

Executive Summary

The recently commissioned Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy will provide an overarching framework for supporting and developing tourism in the Cairngorms to guide the policies and actions of all relevant stakeholder organisations, and as such is a key building block of the National Park Plan. In the interim, it is important to co-ordinate existing tourism activities, a function that is being fulfilled by the Cairngorms Tourism Development Working Group. A key early action of the Group has been to draw up a Cairngorms Tourism Marketing Strategy to guide the tourism marketing activities of both organisations that support tourism and of the tourism industry itself.

From April 2005, tourism support arrangements across Scotland will change, as outlined in the recent Ministerial review on tourism. These changes present potential opportunities to both of Scotland's National Parks. Both Park Authorities are therefore working together to draw up a set of proposals relating to the review for discussion with Ministers.

CNPA's STRATEGIC APPROACH TO TOURISM

Introduction

1. With regards to the CNPA's strategic role in tourism, there is a need to be absolutely clear as to how we are adding value to existing activity. The Cairngorms is an area with huge tourism potential. The creation of the Cairngorms National Park provides an opportunity to capitalise on this. However, the mosaic of public sector institutional arrangements on tourism, involving three tourist boards, three local enterprise companies and four local authorities, does not help to make that potential a reality. As an enabling body, we have a strategic role in terms of developing a consensus view with our partners as to the vision and objectives for tourism within the Park, the policies and actions that are required to achieve these, and what the respective partners' roles and responsibilities are. This is the purpose of the Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy that has recently been commissioned, and which will be a building block for the Park Plan.
2. Equally, we need to be clear what we, as an Authority need to be doing. In time, the policies and actions that flow from the Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy will determine this. In the interim, we need to be able to co-ordinate existing tourism activity and react to tourism-related opportunities or threats that may arise. Currently a key driver in this respect is the recently completed Ministerial review on tourism.

Background

3. Prior to the establishment of the CNPA, a Tourism Forum was established which subsequently became the Tourism Development Working Group (TDWG). The TDWG is a working group of the CNPA. It is an industry based group, comprising private sector businesses, the Area Tourist Boards, VisitScotland, and other relevant public sector organisations involved in tourism. Its purpose is to identify the priorities for establishing improved co-ordination of tourism related activity in the Cairngorms National Park area, and to develop and implement CNP wide initiatives as appropriate. The TDWG recognises that tourism is all encompassing, as it is affected by, and relevant to, all aspects of everyday life in the Cairngorms.
4. The current context to the Authority's work on tourism was set out in a paper 'Key Issues for Tourism in the Cairngorms', which was presented to the Board in January. This set out the key areas of activity identified by the TDWG that would have a major influence on the delivery of a high quality tourism product in the area, as follows -
 - The successful co-operation, integration and encouragement of cross-sectoral working for all those involved in tourism in the area.
 - The development and implementation of a Marketing Strategy & Action Plan for the Cairngorms.
 - The development of a Sustainable Tourism Strategy and the successful application for, and implementation of, the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism.
 - The delivery of quality standards that build on nationally recognised standards that are specific to the Cairngorms.

- The support for and continued development of quality assured products grown, made or available in the area.
 - The need for ongoing research, with easily accessible results, which assesses the needs, opinions and demands of visitors in order to be able to anticipate, meet and exceed visitor expectations.
 - The enhancement of visitors' experience while in the area, through improved information and interpretation provision.
5. An additional strand to the background context is the outcome of the Ministerial review on tourism. In November 2001, the then Minister for Tourism announced a review of the Area Tourist Board Structure in Scotland. Then in July 2003, a Ministerial Group was established to consider the future development of the tourism sector. It is worth noting that one of the drivers behind the review was a desire to increase the level of economic benefit from tourism within Scotland's rural areas. The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, Frank McAveety MSP, announced the outcome of the subsequent deliberations to the Scottish Parliament on 11 March 2004. The key messages of the review are as set out in Appendix 1.

The CNPA's Strategic Approach to Tourism

6. The seven key areas of activity identified by the TDWG provide a clear framework for the CNPA's strategic approach to tourism. Of these, the development of a Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy needs to be highlighted as being of particular significance. As was explained in the January Board paper, the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is a framework specifically designed for protected areas to plan, manage and implement sustainable tourism. In effect it is a 'checklist' to ensure that all the key areas of sustainable tourism development in protected areas are covered:

- *Protecting and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage*
- *Understanding and meeting visitor needs and ensuring quality*
- *Communicating the Special Qualities of the Area*
- *Encouraging tourism products relating to the protected area*
- *Training relating to the protected area and sustainable tourism*
- *Maintaining the local quality of life*
- *Increasing benefits to the local economy*
- *Monitoring and influencing visitor flows*

In effect, when completed, the Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy will provide the overarching strategic framework for tourism within the Cairngorms and will be a building block within the Park Plan. Consultants (The Tourism Company) have been engaged to take forward work on the Strategy. They have particular expertise in sustainable tourism and an in-depth knowledge of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.

7. With regards the other six key areas of activity identified by the TDWG, the following table sets out the specific strategic role that the CNPA needs to have for each.

The successful co-operation, integration and encouragement of cross-sectoral working for all those involved in tourism in the area.

As has been explained previously, there are currently ten public sector organisations in the Cairngorms involved in supporting the tourism industry, either in providing funding or training support and/or marketing activity. The CNPA has a key role to play in brokering a collective approach to tourism development within the National Park. It does this via the work of the Tourism Development Working Group.

The development and implementation of a Tourism Marketing Strategy & Action Plan for the Cairngorms.

A key early action identified was the need for a Tourism Marketing Strategy and Action Plan to co-ordinate the overall Cairngorms tourism marketing effort. In effect, it is a strategy for those public sector organisations that are supporting or conducting tourism marketing, and for the tourism industry itself. A draft Marketing Strategy was presented to the Board in June. Several concerns were expressed about the Strategy, which has since been amended accordingly (see Appendix 2). It now makes it clear that it relates only to tourism marketing and the information in the appendices has been amended to ensure that it comprehensively covers all parts of the Park. The Strategy has also been checked by the Head of Communications to ensure that it is clearly presented and written in plain English. These changes have been discussed with the members of the Tourism Development Working Group who are happy with the revised Strategy.

The delivery of quality standards that build on nationally recognised standards, which are specific to the Cairngorms.

Driving up the quality of all facets of tourism - attractions, accommodation and service standards - is of critical importance in securing repeat and/or extended visits and in ensuring that visitors positively recommend the Cairngorms after they have left. The CNPA will need to examine the ways in which product and service quality can be improved upon. This could involve seeking to build upon and promote existing national accreditation schemes and/or the use of a bespoke Cairngorms quality initiative. It is envisaged that the Cairngorms National Park brand will have a role to play in the delivery of quality standards.

The support for and continued development of quality assured products grown, made or available in the area.

Local quality assured products present the non-tourism sectors with an opportunity to benefit from tourist spend. If they were to use the National Park brand, such products also play a role in reinforcing the Park image and marketing effort. The Food Marketing Working Group is progressing thinking in this area of activity but, in time, there may be scope for such an approach to be applied to other Park products such as local crafts.

The need for ongoing research, with easily accessible results, which assesses the needs, opinions and demands of visitors in order to be able to anticipate, meet and exceed visitor expectations.

Essentially this refers to the need to develop a clear evidence base to inform tourism-related decision-making. The CNPA has taken a lead in commissioning the Visitor Information Survey that has recently been completed and which mirrors a survey conducted in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. It is anticipated that this survey, which will be repeated on a regular basis, will need to be supplemented with additional separate pieces of specific research.

The enhancement of visitors' experience while in the area, through improved information and interpretation provision.

The CNPA will play a key role in this area, primarily through the work of its Visitor Services and Recreation Group. The Head of Visitor Services and Recreation sees the work in progress on an Outdoor Access Strategy, Visitor Information and Ranger Services as all contributing to this. He is keen to link these in to evolving Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy as work on it progresses.

The CNPA's Response to the Ministerial Review on Tourism

8. While the outcome of the review cannot be said to have been met with universal approval, it does undoubtedly present certain opportunities with regards to the Park. This is very much a transitional period for VisitScotland and the ATBs with much of the detail of the proposed changes still to be worked through. The CNPA, and indeed the Scottish National Parks collectively, are well placed to influence the final operational arrangements for tourism in their respective areas. Accordingly, Frank McAveety has extended an offer to meet with the Authority to discuss future tourism arrangements.
9. Potential areas of opportunity being explored relate primarily to marketing, quality standards and local tourism management arrangements, all in line with the CNPA's strategic approach to tourism, as set out above. Preliminary discussions have been held with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority to explore the potential for establishing a joint view on opportunities that the Parks' could capitalise upon. They have agreed that both Park Authorities should work together to produce a joint proposals paper, which would then form a basis for discussion with both Frank McAveety (and potentially Alan Wilson) and with VisitScotland. This work is being led by myself, with input from Carron Tobin of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority.

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KEY MESSAGES FROM THE MINISTERIAL REVIEW ON TOURISM

1. **VisitScotland should receive an additional £20 million funding, spread over 2-3 years**
Most of the additional spend would go on marketing Scotland in the UK and overseas to help attract more visitors to Scotland. Around £3 million of the funding would be spent on promoting and strengthening Quality Assurance schemes, with a view to increasing take-up by businesses.
2. **The private sector should match public sector support and contribute to joint marketing activities**
Recognising that 'Tourism is Everyone's Business', the group has laid down a challenge to tourism and tourism-related businesses across Scotland to match this public sector contribution with their own funding and support to fully capitalise on opportunities this additional funding would deliver.
3. **ATBs and VisitScotland should form an integrated network**
A network of 14 'hubs', integrated with VisitScotland, would facilitate a flexible, streamlined support service to meet the challenges of today's tourism marketplace. Each hub would be accountable to, and funded by, VisitScotland and would have responsibility for the delivery of the National Tourism Strategy in its area. These would effectively replace the current Area Tourist Boards (ATBs) from April 2005.
4. **There should be a customer-led approach to local service**
When the ATBs were wound up, membership fees would cease and tourism businesses would have more autonomy and the freedom to buy the specific support services they need from their local support network. The new hubs would have wide-ranging powers to respond to circumstances in their areas and would link with the growing number of private sector tourism action groups (TAGs) across Scotland. The maintenance of strong relationships with local authorities is also key, with each authority working with VisitScotland on the provision of tourism services required for its area, probably through the use of service level agreements.