

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: CORPORATE PLAN REPORT: THEME 2

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Purpose

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

Recommendations

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

Executive Summary

The second theme of the Corporate Plan for 2005-08 reads:

“To promote sustainable resource, land and water management; and to protect and enhance our wildlife and landscapes”

Since the end of July the lead for delivery of Theme 2 has been shared between two groups derived from the re-organisation of the original Natural Resources Group. These are the Land Management Group led by Fiona Newcombe and the Natural Heritage Group led by David Bale. The work to date has concentrated on three main areas:

- Early priorities such as the long-term strategic work on integrated land management,
 - The delivery of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan, Land Based Businesses Training Project and the Moorland project; and
 - The development of the Park Plan and Local Plan.
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CORPORATE PLAN REPORT: THEME 2

Background

1. This is the second report on the second theme of the CNPA's Corporate Plan for 2005-08:

“To promote sustainable resource, land and water management; and to protect and enhance our wildlife and landscapes”
2. The lead for delivery of this theme has been shared between two new groups derived from the re-organisation of the Natural Resources Group. The purpose of the split was to provide additional resources to deliver the corporate and operational plan targets derived from the original group's wide remit.
3. The functions of each of the new groups are very much interdependent, requiring much collaboration between their member staff. Nevertheless clear lead functions have been agreed. In summary the Land Management Group has the lead role in developing integrated land management. This means co-ordinating and integrating the public sector action on land management in the CNP. The purpose of this is to direct action towards the delivery by land managers of public benefits such as biodiversity, access etc. Public sector action includes regulations, grant schemes, provision of advice and training. The Land Management Group also leads on improving the economic and social objectives of land management in the CNP. The third main area of work is improving the communication of, and consultation over, land management in the CNP.
4. The Natural Heritage Group aims to deliver more targeted initiatives to meet biodiversity and landscape objectives. Some of these will be led by the Park Authority; others will require partnerships with various public and private interests. This group will also lead on the provision of advice to other Park Authority Groups on the natural heritage implications of a range of proposed actions and initiatives.

Integrated Land Management/Land Management Contracts

5. Work has continued identifying the 'outcomes' or 'public benefits' of what we wish our land managers to produce. A draft priority statement for the Cairngorms National Park was produced in the autumn, in consultation with many partners and building on the previous work such as the LBAP and Spey Catchment management Plan. We now plan to refine this priority statement, and are now discussing next steps with the Scottish Executive.
6. Work continues influencing the policy development of land management contracts, and the opportunities they provide for a one-stop-shop providing support for land managers to deliver public benefits. The activities in the Cairngorms were discussed at a recent international Euromontana conference on public benefits and it is clear that this work is innovative and very topical. A paper will be brought to Board in January 2006 outlining next steps.

Catchment Management

7. Work continues with partners on Catchment Management Plans (CMPs) on the Dee, Esk and Spey. A key opportunity is to integrate the catchment management work into the integrated land management work, and build on the benefits of the Water Framework Directive.
8. We sit on the Management Group for the Dee Project Officer in a partnership with SNH, SEPA, Aberdeenshire Council and Macaulay Land Use and Research Institute. Many other partners including private and public bodies are also involved in the process. Much work has already been done, with a draft plan being ready for consultation in the spring. When finalised, the plan will assist in the delivery of a number of objectives in the Park Plan.

Land Based Businesses Training Project

9. The project has continued to grow over the last few months, with a record number of beneficiaries and businesses receiving training support through the project. There is a 250% increase in training support for 2005 so far, compared to the same period in 2004. A total of 99 land based businesses have received support in the first 3 quarters of this year, in comparison with only 29 businesses in the same period last year. These figures indicate that there is a continued demand for this support, but importantly that land based businesses are beginning to understand the benefits of training, and are gradually adopting a training culture.
10. Funding for the project in 2006 has been secured as the bids for Objective 3 and Objective 1 ESF funding for the continuation of the project until December 2006 have both been successful, in a competitive funding round. The advisory group for Objective 1 were extremely impressed with the application, and noted it demonstrated excellent value for money. A business plan for 2007 onward is currently being developed, and a paper will be brought to Board in February 2006. Options for extending the project include the provision for training for youths, and extending the public benefits courses to all those who live and work in the CNP.

Agri-waste Project

11. The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) were contracted in October to carry out an audit of the quantities of plastic agricultural wastes on farms throughout the CNP and to consult on the level of interest amongst the farming community for uplift to a recycling facility in November or December this year.
12. Thirty two farmers responded indicating an interest in an immediate uplift of an estimated total of between 80 and 100 tons. Consequently FWAG have again been contracted to co-ordinate arrangements for the uplift, transportation and recycling of the waste in December. Farmers have been asked to contribute to the costs

Forestry

13. The Cairngorms Forest and Woodland Framework (CFWF) was the first local forest framework document produced in the country and many in the field regard it as the

best. It is however out of date and does not account for the now important influences of the CNP and the CNPA. We are in the process of commissioning some work to ensure that the CFWF is reviewed and updated to a standard that does not diminish the strengths of the existing document.

Food Marketing

14. Making the most of the Cairngorms Brand is seen as a vital element in the marketing of local food produce. Draft criteria for the use of the brand by food producers have been developed and are available for comment upon request.

Communication & Consultation Grant Scheme for Land Managers

15. Adding to the wide range of grants available through the Integrated Grants Scheme and building on the work of the Land Based Business Training Project, a Communication and Consultation Grant Scheme for Land Managers will be launched soon. This will encourage land managers to communicate and consult over their delivery of public benefits, which could include biodiversity, access and jobs. The scheme is currently being finalised, and grants could support newsletters, open days and websites.

Deer Management

16. Recent publicity of developments in the Caenlochan area has highlighted the importance of deer management issues within the CNP. There are many angles in the various arguments surrounding this, at times, highly controversial issue. The line we continue to take is to aid open dialogue amongst all the interest groups and consistency amongst the relevant government agencies. This approach has proved effective in ongoing work related to the priority areas within the CNP. We are currently finalising the establishment of a Cairngorms Deer Advisory Group.

Local Biodiversity Action Plan

17. The Cairngorms LBAP Officer is currently revisiting the Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan. This is being done to identify the key priorities for early action based on threat and opportunities for delivery. The identified priorities will help to focus the project over the next three to five years and give direction to the development of realistic and achievable delivery plans by the various partners. A report on the outcome will be submitted to the Board in the New Year.
18. Recent LBAP initiatives include:
 - a) running workshops to help interested community members in the Park develop skills in the recording of butterflies and moths. This work will help them participate in the delivery of LBAP targets. Similar workshops for dragonfly, amphibian and reptile recording are planned for next season.
 - b) preliminary work to set up a project to conserve the remnant populations of water vole in the Park. Water voles are in serious decline across Britain, but the Park retains a number of isolated populations mostly in upland areas. These populations are very vulnerable especially to predation by mink. Initially the project will seek to develop active partnerships with Estates to

control mink in the vicinity of these populations using tested methods. A more ambitious plan is also being drawn up to help to increase the range of water voles in the Park by mink control and habitat management so that the population is strengthened. This larger project will depend on the success of a bid for external funding beyond the initial partnership of SNH, Aberdeen University and CNPA. A Memorandum of Agreement between the above 3 parties is almost ready to be concluded with the expectation that a project officer will be able to start work before the end of the financial year.

19. The LBAP grants scheme has been launched as part of the Integrated Grants Programme. The LBAP officer has visited over 20 potential applicants to discuss schemes and to assist applications. To date 6 applications have been received from a variety of groups. These will result in grant offers to the value of just over £22,000. We are looking to see if there are additional funds to support other anticipated applications.
20. Discussions have been held with the North East Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) to investigate the possibility of establishing coverage for the whole Park. The proposed coverage will extend to the wider Cairngorms LBAP area set up by the Cairngorms Partnership Board. While CNPA has taken a lead role in this initiative, other partners are being sought from the additional Local Authorities, East Highland Area of SNH, and the North Conservancy of FCS. NESBReC already involves a partnership in its coverage of the former Grampian Region. A more detailed paper will be submitted to the Board in the New Year as progress allows.
21. The CNPA has been invited by SNH and Grampian Police to join the establishment of a Grampian partnership to combat wildlife crime. This will cover that part of the Park that lies within Aberdeenshire and Moray. The proposal is still at a formative stage with much scope for discussion and modification. It seeks to establish an informal partnership comprising representatives of about 25 organisations who have a common interest in combating wildlife crime. It is proposed that the partnership would provide a strategic overview of wildlife crime in Grampian in order to pursue two main objectives, which at present are:
 - a. To work in partnership to combat wildlife crime, principally through supporting the police.
 - b. To develop and implement a rolling 3 year Enforcement Plan targeted at improving the detection and prosecution of wildlife crime, raising awareness of wildlife crime and promoting positive conservation management of key wildlife habitats and species in Grampian.
22. CNPA participation would seek to cover a wide range of wildlife crimes, including game poaching, and the active involvement of local and land management communities in achieving the objectives. A more detailed paper will be presented to the Board for consideration as the discussions progress. If this partnership is effective, plans will be made to introduce a similar initiative to the rest of the Park.

Freshwater Pearl Mussel Reintroduction

23. Phase 2 of the freshwater pearl mussel reintroduction project is complete. The project was organized by Pete Cosgrove with funding from SNH and LEADER +. A small proportion of mussels have been removed from existing beds under license by a qualified contractor and placed in suitable locations. These are locations with favourable habitat and where evidence suggests that their absence has been caused by past pearl fishing activity. Monitoring of the relocated mussels has indicated a high rate of survival, and will continue for a year in order to identify evidence of breeding. Much positive publicity has been generated by this project.

Development Control

24. Work continues to support development control colleagues in dealing with called-in planning applications. Inputs were made to the report presented by CNPA to a planning committee of Highland Council with respect to the Boat of Garten woodland development. Comments have also been made on outline proposals for the re-development of the Laurel Grant site in the centre of Aviemore. Much effort will be required to support the CNPA assessment and response to the proposed Beaully-Denny Power Line over the next few months.

Landscape

25. A case has been presented to the Chief Executive for the employment of a Landscape Adviser as part of increasing the capacity of the Natural Heritage Group. The landscapes of the Cairngorms are an expression of the interaction between its natural, historical and cultural heritage. Generations of land management practices, and built development have influenced and modified the character and distribution of natural habitats developed in response to climate, topography, geology and geomorphology.
26. The landscapes of the Park are a key aspect of its nationally important special qualities and coherent identity which underpins its designation. The conservation and wise management of the landscape is an integral part of achieving the Park's aims, not just within the two National Scenic Areas, but throughout the Park. A professionally qualified landscape adviser will be able to formulate and implement a robust landscape strategy to further the objectives of the Park Plan. The post holder will also be able to provide expert and rigorous landscape advice for the Local Plan, and in support of development control.

Park Plan

27. Developing the Park Plan has been a major area of work over the past few months. We have been discussing and priorities, objectives and actions with a wide range of partners. These discussions have influenced our contributions to the drafting of policies and actions that will help to deliver the aims of the Park in a way that safeguards and enhances its special natural heritage qualities, and supports land managers in their efforts to deliver all four aims. We will continue to support the Park Plan team as they launch the consultation and respond to representations. Assistance is also being given to the Plan Officer in undertaking the Strategic Environmental Assessment. This enables all the draft policies across the Plan to be assessed with respect to their likely impact upon the environment. This is a statutory

requirement and is very helpful in ensuring that the Plan safeguards the special environmental qualities for which the Park has been designated.

Local Plan

28. Assistance has been given to the drafting of the Local Plan policies and Settlement Statements. As for the Park Plan, assistance has also been given to the Strategic Environmental Assessment. Of special note has been the effort to check all significant draft settlement statements on the ground to assess their possible impacts on biodiversity interests. This effort complements the use of settlement capacity assessments, commissioned by the Local Plan team, to assess opportunities for development with respect to landscape implications. This approach will help to ensure that the priority areas for development will be able to be used without detriment to the character of the Park and will achieve the co-ordinated delivery of the four aims.

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