

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: GRANT PACKAGE FOR 2005-06 & 2006-07

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Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to report back on the Small Grants Scheme run in 2004-05; propose an approach for delivering grants during 05-06 and 06-07; and to seek the Board's approval for the expenditure involved.

Recommendations

That the Board:

- notes the successful outcome of the Small Grants Scheme last year;
- approves the approach to delivering grants during 05-06 and 06-07; and
- approves the expenditure of £315,000 on these grants over the next two years.

Executive Summary

During 04-05, the CNPA spent £195,000 on grants to support projects led by others. These grants helped to build the National Park on the ground and engage individual and groups at a local level in the Park.

Building on, and learning from, our experiences last year, we are now proposing to distribute £315,000 of grants over the next 2 years to deliver specific goals within the Corporate Plan relating to community capacity building and networking; local marketing and events; local biodiversity; local interpretation planning and implementation; and small-scale access infrastructure. Just over a half of this money will be delivered through a Small Grants Scheme matched by LEADER+ (subject to approval on 2nd June) and other public money, and run in house. The remainder will be used to support medium-sized projects and will be channelled to specific projects through the Cairngorms LEADER+ Programme.

Over the next two years and beyond, we aim to increase the level of public funds co-ordinated through this approach and broaden local community and business involvement in making funding decisions.

GRANT PACKAGE FOR 2005-06 & 2006-07– FOR DECISION

Background

1. In Board Paper 5 of 08/04/05, we set out our intention to develop an integrated grant scheme that would regularise procedures and allow us to take more strategic decisions on what categories and types of grant we award.
2. This paper sets out our proposal for the next 2 years, and the Board are invited to consider it and approve the level of expenditure involved.

Grant Giving in 2004-05

3. In 2004-05, the CNPA awarded grants worth £195,000. Of this, £55,000 was delivered through the Communities Small Grants Scheme to 49 community-based applicants, and a further 25 activities USED £140,000 worth of grants to achieve other Operational Plan targets. This expenditure represented just under one fifth of our programme expenditure.
4. Last year's Communities Small Grants Scheme worked extremely well. It engaged community groups across the Park and helped them to begin to link their activities with the aims of the National Park. A full assessment of the scheme is enclosed in Annex 1.
5. The 25 other grants that we gave during the year were a mixture of responses to ad hoc inquiries and activities which we actively promoted. In all cases, we undertook a careful justification for expenditure, giving particular scrutiny to larger or more risky projects.
6. Our average contribution to the small grants was about £1,000, while for the other grants it was about £5,600. Where we contributed larger sums, these tended to be on a partnership basis rather than a grant. Our normal practice is to assume that the larger our stake in a project, the closer our involvement needs to be so that we can manage any risk more actively.

Issues and Discussion

What did we learn from our grant giving in 2004-05?

7. Our experiences were generally positive. Grants to third parties are clearly a useful tool for achieving some of the goals within the Corporate Plan, and if administered carefully they are an effective, efficient and economic way of doing this. They are also popular with groups within the Park; there is a huge appetite amongst communities of place and interest to engage with what the Park is trying to achieve, and money and advice are often the two ingredients required. As important, they demonstrate to residents and visitors that the National Park is making a difference.

8. However, grant giving is not without its challenges. For community-based groups, it is often unclear what public bodies are willing to support, how the CNPA's grants fit with those offered by other public bodies; and the effort of filling in complicated applications and finding match funding can deter or sap the energy of these groups.
9. From our operational perspective, dealing with ad hoc inquiries for grants can be very time-consuming and raise false expectations about the support available.
10. The SGS was effective in meeting many of these challenges – it was simple to apply; had clear guidelines on eligibility; gave part funding in advance; and did not require match funding. It also succeeded through supporting groups in both the developmental and management phases of their activities.

What are the challenges?

11. Our long-term challenge is to use grants effectively and efficiently to deliver the Park Plan. This means working towards a system that is more open and locally controlled, and which joins up streams of public funds, targeting those at projects which will make a real difference to building the Park. This in itself contains a number of challenges:
 - a) helping local groups to realise the full benefits of their ideas;
 - b) building the capacity and skills of external groups to deliver local projects;
 - c) involving local interests in the targeting of funds;
 - d) bringing together funds from different organisations to maximise effect and minimise duplication;
 - e) operating a system that is accountable yet flexible and which does not place disproportionate or unreasonable conditions on funding; and
 - f) generating convergence in the aims of both the Park and the communities associated with it.
12. Our immediate challenge is to support those community-based activities which help to deliver our Corporate Plan for 2005-08, building on our successes in 04-05; and to begin to tackle some of the longer-term challenges.

What are the opportunities?

13. The main opportunity is the enthusiasm and eagerness of locally-based groups to develop and deliver projects that help meet local need and which also contribute to building the Park. Supporting and promoting appropriate projects will help us to deliver our Corporate Plan, show that the National Park means business, and build ownership of the Park amongst local groups.
14. We have funds to support this, and well tried and tested mechanisms. For small grants, the system used in 04-05 proved every popular and effective; whilst for medium-sized projects, we currently run the LEADER+ Programme. Both of these mechanisms balance the need for a customer-friendly approach with support and auditable procedures that are appropriate to the amount of public money involved.

15. The LEADER+ is a well-established and broad-based mechanism for supporting activity in the Park and its neighbouring communities. Its objective “to help local communities to make the best use of natural and cultural resources” fits neatly with the aims of the Park. Decisions on applications are made by a Local Action Group (LAG) comprising a broad mix of public agency (including the CNPA), business, community and voluntary sector representatives. This mix ensures a degree of local input into the running of the programme, and helps to make connections between projects and avoid duplication. The Programme is run by a small team based in the Authority and has well-established and rigorous procedures for managing grants.

The Proposal

16. To seize the opportunities highlighted above, we are proposing to offer a range of small and medium sized grants over the next two years in the fields of supporting community capacity building and networking; local marketing and events; local biodiversity; local interpretation planning and implementation; and small-scale access infrastructure. This will support activities that benefit the Park even though some of them may be located outwith its boundaries. We expect to support additional types of activity as other aspects of the CNPA’s work develop, and in the short term, we hope to bring forward plans for a cultural heritage strand later this year.
17. In addition to these open grant schemes, we will continue to target other funds from our Programme Expenditure at partnership projects and other larger-scale initiatives; as well as commitments continuing from 04-05.

Small Grants Scheme

18. For smaller projects with a total value of between £500 and £5,000, we propose setting up a small grants scheme run in-house. These grants will offer 90% funding to projects (45% from CNPA and 45% from other sources including LEADER+), with applicants expected to show their own commitment to the work by finding the final 10%. We currently expect the CNPA to contribute £85,000 in 05-06 and £80,000 in 06-07 and we would expect to support between 100 and 125 projects worth a total of £367,000.
19. In 05-06, we expect to draw most of the match funding from LEADER+. This is likely to reduce in 06-07 as we pull together other sources of public funds.
20. This will work in a very similar way to the Communities Small Grants Scheme last year but will be more tightly focused on the topics outlined above. We will set up a small panel of staff from across the organisation to liaise on emerging applications and ensure that we get maximum benefit from our investment.

Medium-sized Grants

21. For medium sized projects with a total value of between £5,000 and £20,000, we propose to offer a small number of larger grants focused on the same topic areas. These grants will offer up to 90% funding to projects (45% from CNPA and up to 45% from other sources including LEADER+), with applicants expected to show their

own commitment to the work by finding at least 10%. We currently expect the CNPA to contribute £70,000 in 05-06, and £80,000 in 06-07, supporting between 25 and 45 projects worth a total of £350,000.

22. These will be administered through the Cairngorms LEADER+ Programme, with the Local Action Group deciding whether to support applications. Activity development and promotion will rest with the relevant CNPA policy officer, working closely with the LEADER+ Programme Manager.

Timing, Administration and Publicity

23. Once the Board and Scottish Executive have approved this grant package, we will set about finalising LEADER+ match funding and a publicity schedule for launch of the scheme. In parallel with this we will develop the detailed scheme specification and finalise all standard templates, launching the package at the start of July.
24. As with the Communities Grant Scheme, we will keep the Board updated on progress on a regular basis. We will use the media to ensure that communities are aware of the scheme and good practice is shared. Like last year, we would appreciate the assistance of Members in promoting the availability of grants and the projects it funds.

Beyond 2006-07

25. This proposal takes us into the early months of 2007 by which time we would expect Ministers to have approved the Park Plan and the current LEADER+ programme to have largely finished. By that stage, we aim to have developed a more permanent grant-giving arrangement that is more integrated with other public funding streams and is based on the LEADER approach of wide ownership and broad-based decision making. This should then put us in a strong position to take advantage of European funds post 2006, particularly the LEADER element of the Rural Development Regulations, as well as being an efficient vehicle for pulling together and focusing public funds around the objectives in the Park Plan.

Consultation

26. We have consulted widely internally in preparing this proposal and as such it is CNPA-wide approach. The proposal will be discussed by the LAG on 2nd June and we will be able to report their views at the Board meeting.
27. More generally, we have begun to discuss with our public agency partners a more joined-up approach to pooling funds and then distributing these through a more broadly-based decision-making body. Discussions are at an early stage but are encouraging, not only for the types of grants covered by this paper, but also in other areas, such as support for land managers.

Policy Context

28. The grants proposed will be directly linked to the Corporate Plan; funds will only be awarded if the projects proposed deliver one or more of its goals, and that this is the most effective and efficient way to achieve those outputs.

Delivering Sustainability

29. All the projects that we support should contribute to the sustainability of the Park by helping to deliver the Corporate Plan goals and particularly through building capacity and confidence at a local level.

Delivering A Park for All

30. As with the Community Small Grants Scheme during 04-05, we will seek to publicise the availability of these grants widely and encourage a good uptake from across the Park, both from geographically-based communities and communities of interest.

Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency

31. The proposal outlined above is designed to deliver a grant-giving package that is economic, effective and efficient, both for the operations of the CNPA and for our customers. Our longer-term aim is to gain even more economy, effectiveness and efficiency by bringing together different funding sources on particular topics so that we get a more efficient use of public money; a more integrated approach to the delivery of public benefit; and a simpler and more streamline service for the public.

Implications

Financial Implications

32. This proposal will require the investment of CNPA Programme funds totalling £155,000 in 05-06 and £160,000 in 06-07. The funds for 05-06 are contained within the existing allocations of the Operational Plan.
33. We expect to run this scheme within existing staff resources.
34. If agreed by the Board, we will need to seek formal approval from the Scottish Executive for this grant scheme.
35. The proposal makes good use of other funds, particular European, and we would hope in time to use the scheme as a focus for other public funds.

Presentational Implications

36. We expect this scheme to be broadly welcomed by all stakeholders as it is specifically designed to help others to contribute to building the National Park. Publicity arrangements are outlined above. More broadly, the co-ordination of public sector funds will be an important challenge, but one which offers the significant prize of more joined-up and effective government.

Implications for Stakeholders

37. This scheme will be a welcome opportunity for potential applicants. This should create greater clarity of what funds are available and a simpler one-door port of call for applicants.

Next Steps

38. Assuming the approval of the Scottish Executive, we expect to launch the scheme in early July and we will report progress to the Board towards the end of the year.

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