

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: Corporate Plan Report: Theme 3

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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 is:

“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.

CORPORATE PLAN REPORT: THEME 3 – FOR INFORMATION

Background

1. This is the fourth 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 and in June 2006.
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. Given this focus, our work on economic and social development issues has focused on areas that are directly linked to the special qualities. Furthermore, 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 access, interpretation, 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. It does not seek to cover all of the work that is being or has been undertaken in these areas but rather draws out some of the key elements.

Housing

5. As was explained in the update report to the Board on 6 October, there has been a great deal of work undertaken in recent months in examining potential housing policies. The next steps were set out in that paper and we are still on track to achieve the timetable that it set out. Further meetings and discussions are taking place with all relevant stakeholders.
6. Following the latest meeting of the Cairngorms Housing Group on 27 September it is clear that its members are now comfortable with the specific outcomes and actions set out in the draft Park Plan priority for action on 'Making Housing Affordable and Sustainable'.
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.

The study is now complete and options for implementation are being examined;

- 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 jointly funded a survey of landowners which has been undertaken by the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association (SRPBA). The report's conclusions and recommendations have been discussed with partners and have informed specific actions in the draft Park Plan. A meeting is to be held with Local Authorities on 17 November to examine how they might best be delivered;
- c) Work is being progressed to pilot a community needs assessment in the Grantown on Spey/Cromdale/Dalnain Bridge area, although this is subject to the local Community Councils being fully supportive. As well as identifying housing needs at a local level, such an assessment would identify and prioritise economic, social and environmental opportunities to feed into the Badenoch and Strathspey community planning partnership.

Tourism

- 8. Work is continuing with partners on a broad range of tourism actions, in line with the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan. Effective engagement with, and support from, tourism businesses is the key to success in this area. It is therefore good to see that the annual CNP tourism conference at the Lecht on 1 November (on the themes of events and transport) is fully subscribed with an anticipated 120 attendees.
- 9. The Brand Management Group have now defined eligibility criteria for a range of sectors and uses and have turned their attention to promoting take up of the brand and communicating key messages in relation to the brand to both potential users and consumers. A communications plan and specific uptake targets have been agreed.
- 10. Related to the brand work, a range of actions are being progressed on improving the local tourism product and effectively marketing the Park as a whole, as well as sub-areas within it. In delivering these objectives, the emerging private sector led Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) – Aviemore and the Cairngorms DMO and Royal Deeside and the Cairngorms DMO, as well as the Tomintoul and Glenlivet Highland Holidays marketing group, will have key roles to play.
- 11. A detailed report on the Cairngorms Brand, our marketing activities and the DMOs will be brought to the Board in December.
- 12. We are also continuing to work with individual businesses in promoting high environmental operating standards and improving 'product knowledge' about the Park. As well as promoting free uptake of the Green Tourism Business Scheme in a partnership initiative with VisitScotland, we are working with a group of 20 businesses who are setting up a green business club, and are developing an on-line

version of the Cairngorms Connections course to make this training more widely accessible.

Transport

13. The Park wide transport audit, which has been funded in partnership with HIE Inverness and East Highlands, Scottish Enterprise Grampian, Scottish Enterprise Tayside, and Perth and Kinross Council, is now almost complete. Its findings and recommendations will be discussed with the Board in due course.
14. The pilot cross-Park 501 'Heather Hopper' bus service from Grantown-on-Spey to Ballater carried 1,769 passengers (23 per day) which is considered good, given that it was a new service with a short marketing lead-in time. The service also encouraged Stagecoach to put on the linked 502 service from Aberdeen to Perth, which has added to services through Strathdon and Deeside. An on-board survey of the 501 service showed –
 - a) Almost all the travellers were local, perhaps reflecting the short marketing lead-in time;
 - b) An unexpectedly large number of people used the bus from Inverness, as the D&E coach ran in-service from Inverness to Grantown-on-Spey;
 - c) 70% of users were aged 60+;
 - d) The split between car owners and non-car owners was 50/50;
 - e) A third of all users would use the service weekly or more often;
 - f) Almost all people travelled for pleasure, not business;
 - g) 80% of people were using a concessionary pass;
 - h) Half of users would not have travelled without the service in place;
 - i) 95% would use the service more if extended;
 - j) If offered under Demand Responsive conditions, most people would use the service more, demonstrating latent demand;
 - k) 1 person found the cost expensive, but most were using concessionary cards so cost was not a factor;
 - l) No-one used the cycle provision, but a quarter would if available in future;
 - m) Two thirds of people were not connecting to another bus service;
 - n) 80% of people would welcome earlier or later, or both, services;
 - o) 28% of people heard about the service from family or friends, and 28% from the CNPA flyer.
15. Work is underway to scope the format, cost and potential partner funding available to produce the Cairngorms Explorer public transport timetable again for next year.

Strengthening Communities

16. The Integrated Grants Programme and the Cairngorms LEADER+ Programme continue to support a broad range of primarily community-based projects. We have been assessing the future requirements for grant funding mechanisms and this is the subject of a separate Board paper. It should be noted that, following the Programme Manager, Dicken Higgins, leaving the Authority, arrangements have been put in place for the LEADER+ team to handle administration of the IGP. This is a temporary measure pending a broader review of the organisational structure.
17. There has also been a lot of work in developing linkages with community planning processes and partnerships with a view to developing a more integrated approach to community based issues. Again, this is the subject of a separate Board paper.

Cultural Heritage

18. In October last year, the Board agreed a framework for action on cultural heritage matters. One of the key pieces of work that flowed from this is an audit of the historic environment of the Park, which also is looking at recommendations for action. Overseen by a steering group comprising representatives from the Authority, Highland and Aberdeenshire Councils, National Trust Scotland, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, the Highland Folk Museum and Laggan Heritage, this work is nearly complete. Its findings and recommendations will be discussed with the Board in due course.
19. Cultural Heritage was also the focus of the Economic and Social Development Forum meeting on 1 September. This provided an opportunity to update people on progress of the audit and to get some broader input with regards the report's emerging recommendations. There were also presentations from community based cultural heritage groups to share best practice, along with recitals of traditional music and poetry.
20. Plans are now underway to conduct an audit of the cultural activities and traditions associated with community life, so that we have a picture of the full range of the Park's cultural heritage assets.
21. Following the Cultural Heritage Officer, Rita Callander, leaving the Authority, our External Funding Officer, Quentin McLaren is co-ordinating the above work. Again, this is a temporary measure pending a review of the organisational structure.

Learning and Inclusion

22. We are continuing to pilot and evaluate a variety of Park for All outreach activities, where we broker visits between inclusion groups and providers in the Park and help shape the activities they undertake. Building upon this, we have started to work with SNH and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority to look at developing an overarching programme of outreach work.
23. Other pipeline initiatives include a pilot Park volunteering scheme to be administered by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and a meeting with youth workers from across the Park to make them aware of opportunities that are already on offer, while identifying further opportunities to add value to youth work across the area.
24. On the skills and training front, discussions have been taking place with potential funding partners to secure support for the Land Based Training Project for 2007, as was agreed by the Board in August. Initial indications are promising with support being pledged from Local Enterprise Companies for the first time. Progress is also being made on the package of vocational training actions for young people, which the Board agreed in August to be progressed. Bursaries to help young people access Park-related training are about to be launched, while Lantra have successfully accessed the Scottish Executive element of the funding package for a post to provide Park schools with increased awareness of vocational skills career paths.

Development Control

25. Members should note that, in the quarter ending 30 September, the “call-in” rate has risen from 12% back up to 17%. At that point the number of active applications had also increased up to 40. Since then, there have been a further 13 call-ins and only 2 determinations, bringing the number of active applications up to a total of 51. We will need to keep a close watch on this position and work to reduce this caseload down to what is seen as being a more sustainable caseload of around 30 live applications.

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