

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

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Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to seek board approval for the proposed Communications Strategy.

Recommendations

- The Board is invited to approve the proposed Communications Strategy.

Executive Summary

As public body with an enabling role, good communication is fundamental to our ability to achieve our objectives.

The objective of the Communications Strategy is to develop our reputation as:

an enabling organisation that is trusted and respected

We will do by communicating what we are doing to deliver the first 5 aims of the corporate plan in a way that is open, clear, responsive and proactive. These values apply to how we communicate about the Park as well as about the work of the Park Authority.

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Objective

1. The objective of the Communications Strategy is to develop our reputation as:
an enabling organisation that is trusted and respected
2. We will do by **communicating what we are doing to deliver the first 5 aims of the corporate plan** in a way that is open, clear, responsive and proactive. These values apply to how we communicate about the Park as well as about the work of the Park Authority.

Introduction

3. As public body with an enabling role, good communication is fundamental to our ability to achieve our objectives. This applies to everything that we do, from the approach we take to meetings and public inquiries to the issue of publications and press releases.
4. Good communication is not only part of how we achieve our objectives, it is also part of our responsibility as a public body. Put simply, people have the right to be listened to and kept informed about how we are spending taxpayers money.
5. Communication is not about ‘spin,’ it is about informing and engaging in a conversation with people about the Park and the Park Authority. Nor is good communication an alternative to getting the substance right – it is an aid to it.

Communications Principles

6. We have stated that we wish the CNPA to become a new kind of public body, in that it is an enabling body, promoting joined up government, building on the best experience of public and private sector.
7. In communications terms, this means that we must aim for, and attain, high standards of openness and accessibility in all of our communications. In order to signal our commitment this objective, it is proposed that we adopt 4 principles that will guide our approach to communication at all levels.

Openness

8. We will continue to set high standards of transparency and access to information, for example by making documentation available on the web. We recognise that in dealing with difficult or controversial issues the best approach is to be direct and upfront about our position.

Clarity

9. In addition to openness, we will endeavour to present information about ourselves, our work and the complex issues in which we are involved in a way that is easily understandable to a general audience. As far as possible, our public documents will be written in plain English, or else an accessible summary will be made available.

Pro-activity

10. We will be positive in our efforts to inform people about our work, taking the initiative to provide information rather than always waiting for a crisis or a request to do so.

Responsiveness

11. We will listen to and engage in a continuous dialogue with our audiences. Effective communication is not a one-way process, and so it is an objective of our communications strategy to engage in a continuous dialogue, or conversation, with our key audiences.

Key Themes

12. In planning our communications, it is important to have a clear idea of the key messages and themes that we want to get across. The information that we are communicating falls into 3 key themes:

Role

13. As a very new organisation, we need to continue to reinforce public understanding of our role and values, what we can and cannot do.
14. The National Park Authority's role is to promote partnership, give leadership, and help all those involved in the Cairngorms to deliver the aims of the Park together. We are an enabling body – delivering by working with others, not by going it alone.
15. The Authority also has direct powers over planning and the management of outdoor access. Given the sensitivity, we need to take every opportunity to explain how these relatively new powers work.

Delivery

16. It is particularly important that we communicate what we are doing and why, and why many of the things we do cannot be achieved overnight. We also need to show, when appropriate, how our work fits into, supports, or leads the way for Scotland-wide policy objectives. In communicating our work, we need avoid misunderstandings of our priorities by maintaining a balance between the different objectives set out in our corporate plan, namely:
 - a) **A Park for All.** The Cairngorms is a *National* Park – it is not a park just for the fit and the few, for the better off, or just for local people. It must be able to be enjoyed by everyone.
 - b) **A Park to be understood and enjoyed.** For a sustainable future, it is essential that visitors, local residents and businesses can understand, respect and enjoy the special natural and cultural heritage of the area.
 - c) **A Park to be cared for.** Effective stewardship of the Park's natural resources will ensure that it can be enjoyed by everyone and protect the special qualities of the area including key landscapes, species and habitats.

- d) **A Park of thriving communities.** Vibrant, balanced and stable communities are key to the success of the National Park. That means sustainable businesses, affordable housing, and a place where young people can see a good future for themselves.

Appreciation and understanding.

17. The Cairngorms area was made a National Park because it is a unique and special place that needs to be cared for – both for the wildlife and countryside it contains and for the people that live in it, manage it and visit it. A key communications theme is to explain why the Cairngorms is special in ways that can bring it alive for people – locals and visitors alike.

Audiences

18. In planning our communications, it is important to know which audiences we are trying to talk to. The key audiences for the Cairngorms National Park Authority are:
- a) Local people – because the work of the CNPA impacts directly on the lives of people who live and work in the area – the proposed Interim Strategy for Community Development sets out some specific actions and principles for communicating with and involving local communities;
 - b) Opinion-formers and decision-makers (including other public bodies, politicians, and NGOs) – because the CNPA should be seen as a means to deliver Scotland-wide policy objectives;
 - c) The people of Scotland – because this is a National Park, designated on behalf of, and held in stewardship for, the Scottish people;
 - d) Visitors and potential visitors to the Park – whose enjoyment, understanding and appreciation of the area we aim to promote.

Withholding Information

19. Some public bodies have, however unfairly, a reputation for withholding information without good reason or being unreasonable or obstructive to those who seek information. The Freedom of Information Act aims to address this and how we implement it will be the subject of a separate discussion.
20. In addition, concepts such as ‘commercial confidentiality’ are sometimes thought to be used by public and private organisations as a way of restricting legitimate public access to information. The Cairngorm National Park Authority will endeavour to avoid entering into any formal contract or financial arrangement with another body that unreasonably restricts our ability to make basic information about that arrangement available to the public. Any such arrangement should only be entered into with Board approval.
21. This should not prejudice the fact that in the course of our work we are required and expected to handle confidential and sensitive information and that to do so with discretion is an essential part of being a trusted and respected partner.

Proposed Activities

22. We will take advantage of all the means of communication at our disposal, including free media, publications, events, electronic communications, and sponsorship/

advertising. In any particular case we will choose the method that will be the most effective to get across the information required to the audience concerned.

23. Particular actions that may interest the board or require approval are listed below – this is not an exhaustive list of activity.

Media Strategy

24. **Objectives**

- a) To ensure that key target audiences are kept informed through the media about the activities, decisions, objectives and views of the CNPA and its partner organisations
- b) To raise the profile of the Park and the new approach that is being taken to the management of the Cairngorms
- c) To ensure that journalists are well-briefed have quick and easy access to the relevant information and spokespeople
- d) To enable co-ordination of media work between partner organisations in the CNP

25. **Target media**

- a) Local media – community newsletters, local papers, P&J, local radio
- b) Scottish press and broadcasters, UK press
- c) Specialist media as appropriate – eg tourism, environment media

26. **Actions**

- a) Create a planning diary to ensure regular flow of news, with the target of at least one press release every week, and that the flow of information we are providing is balanced between our different areas of work.
- b) Organise media events when appropriate, such as press conferences, photocalls, and visits by journalists. Support training for community newsletter editors.
- c) Establish forum for working with communications staff of other organisations.
- d) Provide media training for board & staff as appropriate.

Public Affairs Strategy

27. **Objectives**

- a) To ensure that decision-makers and opinion formers are well-informed about the role and work of the Park Authority with its partners
- b) To highlight the relevance of the Cairngorms National Park for policy issues at a national level

28. **Actions**

- a) Establish system for getting information to MSPs, MPs, and others
- b) Briefing events at all 4 Scottish party conferences

Accessibility Strategy

29. **Objectives**

- a) To ensure that information about the Park is available in accessible form directly to local residents and others

- b) To develop high standards of clarity for information and documentation across the organisation
- c) To make it easy for people to respond and become involved in a dialogue with the CNPA

30. **Actions**

- a) Produce Park Life newsletter 3 times per year, distribute to residents and develop wider mailing list
- b) Establish monthly e-mail news bulletin to which people can sign up on the website
- c) Publish an annual 'Park Report' – combining key elements of annual report on the previous year and corporate plan looking forward
- d) Provide training on clear and accessible communication
- e) Develop the range of information on the website, in particular ensuring that high standards of disabled access are maintained and making clear how more information can be obtained
- f) Develop a publications protocol to ensure all sectors of society have access to our publications
- g) Take stands at Highland Games/shows across the Park in 2005.

NB: These actions link very closely with those proposed in the Interim Policy Framework for Community Development.

PR/Promotion Strategy

- 31. In addition to the separate work described in the Marketing Strategy, the CNPA needs to have a policy on advertising and other paid for promotion.
- 32. Given our wide range of direct communications with Park residents, we should adopt the policy of not undertaking local sponsorship or advertising for communication purposes, though obviously we need to continue to advertise board meetings.
- 33. Sponsorship, advertising, and promotion can be useful means of reaching other audiences, particularly specialist audiences, in order to raise the profile of the CNPA. It is proposed that a small budget be opened for this purpose.

Evaluation

- 34. The success of the Communications Strategy can be evaluated by measuring changes in how our target audiences understand and perceive the organisation, and whether we are indeed 'trusted and respected.' It is proposed that we should use opinion polling techniques to establish a baseline picture of people's opinions and that this should be followed up with further surveys to monitor change. These opinion surveys can also be used to gather information for other aspects of our work.

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