

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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### FOR INFORMATION

**Title:** Corporate Plan Report: Theme 3

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Development  
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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 states:

“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

### Background

1. This is the second report on the third theme of the CNPA's Corporate Plan for 2005-08. The Board considered the first report in May 2005.
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. It is important to remember the explicit reference to the special qualities of the Park. This should always be to the forefront of our thinking so that the Park Authority is able to focus in on economic and social development issues that are directly linked to the special qualities and does not get drawn into more general economic and social development activity. To further focus effort, 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 path provision, on co-ordination of ranger services, 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.

### Housing

5. The Heriot Watt housing system analysis study is now substantially complete, although it has still to incorporate information on household and population projections. The General Register Office is unable to provide this information for the CNP geography until later in 2006. However, they are providing the necessary datasets for independent projections to be made and we have commissioned Manchester University to undertake this work by the end of November.
6. Although not finalised, the Heriot Watt study has provided enough information on the housing market and levels of need to enable a review of the Cairngorms Housing Strategy and Action Plan and to inform the housing policies in the consultation draft of the Local Plan. A workshop session was held in June for members of the Cairngorms Housing Group to discuss and help shape the Park Plan strategic objectives and actions relating to housing. These have subsequently been refined further by the Group and finalised for incorporation in the draft Park Plan.
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 will be co-funding a feasibility study and design competition for the development of affordable housing on Forestry Commission land at Kincaig;

- 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 are funding a survey of landowners to be undertaken by the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association (SRPBA);
- c) The Cairngorms Crofting Communities Association is to undertake a wide ranging survey of crofters which, among other things, will gauge the views of crofters of the potential for crofts to meet affordable housing needs.
- d) A partnership proposal has been developed for a Rural Housing Enabler to work with selected rural communities in rural Aberdeenshire. Their role would be to support the communities in addressing their housing needs. Partners include Aberdeenshire Council, Registered Social Landlords, the SRPBA and the Rural Housing Service. A viable funding package is required before this initiative can proceed.

## Tourism

- 8. As was reported to the Board at its meeting on 12 August, the effort that the CNPA and its partners put into developing the Cairngorms Tourism Strategy and Action Plan has been rewarded by the award of the Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas from the Europarc Federation. As well as being an accreditation that tourism support and development is being undertaken in a sustainable manner, it is planned to capitalise on this in the way that the area is promoted. The draft Communications Plan for the Charter and the Cairngorms Brand, recently circulated to Board members, set out how this is intended to be achieved.
- 9. Most of the actions in the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan fall either to partners or to other CNPA groups, in particular Visitor Services and Recreation, although input is still required from the ESD Group in a support role. The main pieces of work where the ESD Group is in the lead include:
  - Co-ordination of the ViSIT Forum and of delivery of the Tourism Strategy and Action Plan;
  - Development of a monitoring framework for the Strategy;
  - Initiating and supporting marketing activity;
  - Development and roll-out of the Cairngorms Brand;
  - Dissemination of product knowledge about the Park to tourism operators via the 'Cairngorms Connections' courses.
- 10. The 'Tourism in the Cairngorms' conference on the 26 October will provide an important opportunity to engage with the tourism industry and other interested stakeholders in both providing information and obtaining feedback on marketing and the Cairngorms Brand.
- 11. If we are to achieve our tourism aspirations, it is vital that we continue to build upon our existing strong working relationship with VisitScotland. As Board members are aware, Ian Dunlop, the area director for VisitScotland Aberdeen, is our key point of

contact for VisitScotland. Area Tourism Partnerships (ATPs) for the Highlands, the North East and Angus/Dundee have all been established. There is no standard model for the ATPs although they have all been tasked with developing an Area Tourism Strategy. Clearly it is in the CNPA's and the ViSIT Forum's interest that there is an alignment between these and the Cairngorms Tourism Strategy and Action Plan. A discussion paper will be considered at the ViSIT Forum on this issue which will be followed up by a decision paper to the Board.

## **Transport**

12. A productive meeting was held in July with transport officers from the local authorities in the Park and the strategic transport planning bodies, HITRANS and NESTRANS. The focus of this was to help shape the Park Plan strategic objectives and actions relating to transport. Following on from this, we are jointly commissioning some research to identify opportunities for improving public transport to and within the Park. Local Authorities and the new Regional Transport Partnerships will be able to draw upon this information in developing their Local and Regional Transport Strategies. Consideration is also being given to how a cross-Park bus route might best be established on a trial basis.

## **Strengthening Communities**

13. Though various meetings with partner organisations and voluntary/community groups, the CNPA's potential role in relation to community support and engagement is starting to be refined. The Communities Scheme was launched as part of the Integrated Grant Programme (IGP) at the beginning of August. This focuses on developing the capacity of communities both so that they can better influence the actions of others and are able to deliver things for themselves. Importantly, the other grant schemes within the IGP can support relevant community-led projects. e.g. access, cultural heritage, biodiversity, etc.
14. The CNPA continues to host the Cairngorms LEADER+ Programme. This has supported over 100 community-based projects across the Cairngorms, and part funds the IGP. We are currently looking at how this support can continue after 2006.
15. On the community engagement front, the Local Plan community facilitators have been doing an excellent job and have helped develop a strong voluntary network of community facilitators. Active consideration is being given to how this resource might be built upon and used across the breadth of the CNPA's work.
16. As was mentioned in the last report on Theme 3, there is clear potential for the Park Authority to work on a collaborative basis with partners on issues around community capacity and engagement. Related to this is the way in which community planning in the Highland, Moray and Aberdeenshire Council areas is evolving with plans for localised community planning in Badenoch and Strathspey, Speyside and Marr. It is clear that both the CNPA and the local authorities have similar objectives in relation to supporting and engaging with communities and it may be that, initially at least, this is where there is greatest scope for collaboration. It is also worth noting that further meetings have taken place with the Association of Cairngorms Community Councils, both to discuss how they can continue to improve and to demonstrate the value that

they add, and to consider whether there is scope for their role to evolve in the light of the developing Park Plan.

## **Cultural Heritage**

17. Given that the planned CNPA cultural heritage work was discussed at the last Board meeting, it is not covered at length here. The only points to note, over and above what was discussed in October, is that our Cultural Heritage Policy Officer, Rita Callander, will now be working on a part-time basis and solely concentrating on cultural heritage issues.

## **Education and Inclusion**

18. A full report on 'Park for All' activity in the year will be given next June. As has been explained in previous reports, social inclusion thinking needs to be threaded through everything that we do. One area of potential development that has not been highlighted previously, though, is that of an outreach programme which could provide access to the Park for those who might not otherwise be able to afford to visit. A proposal will be developed on this in due course.
19. Now that the Education and Inclusion Manager, Claire Ross, has started, the work on a Youth and Education Strategy will be progressed at the earliest opportunity. This is Claire's top priority and, given the strong linkages it will have with the work of other CNPA groups and external organisations, there will need to be extensive input from others into the process.
20. A Board paper on the Youth Apprenticeship Scheme will be put before the Board in March. By this stage it is anticipated that an option analysis of potential delivery models will have been completed and that a favoured option with outline costs will be presented. This will draw upon the results of a training needs analysis for school children and a skills audit for businesses, both currently being conducted and due to report in December.

## **Development Control**

21. Hopefully Members will have noted the increase in the number of applications coming forward for determination. The "call in" system has now bedded down and the call in rate has been falling as both officers and members gain familiarity with this distinctive process. The revision to the "commenting" process has contributed to the more efficient working of the Planning Committee. We have had our first batch of appeals and the CNPA decisions have been upheld. All in all it is therefore considered that the performance of the development control function is good and improving.
22. The quality of decisions and the debate that leads to them is generally of a high standard. Since the 3rd development control officer was recruited, the backlog of planning applications has fallen and we are steadily processing some of the difficult applications that have been around for some time. 27 of the applications in hand are essentially for 2 proposals and once they work their way through the system there will be a noticeable drop in the number pending. We will shortly be submitting our 3rd

biannual return to the Scottish Executive - the last one saw the number of determinations within 3 months rise from 20% to 36%. As ever we try to achieve a positive outcome within the context of prevailing policy and the aims of the Park: over 75% of applications are approved. Over 80% of applications in hand are waiting for information either from the applicant or from consultees.

23. As stated in previous updates, quality is the driving consideration and applications are not brought to Committee unless all of the relevant information is available to make a sound decision. We will continue to improve the speed of determination, but not at the expense of quality of outcome and we will not ask Members to take an ill-informed decision.
24. In addition to the day to day decisions on planning applications, it is a role of the development control function to respond to various consultations. To date this has included, for example, wind farms at Kildrummy and Dunmaglass, housing at Boat of Garten, and a quarry near Tarland. There are other wind farm consultations pending, and, of course, the consultation from the Scottish Executive on the Beauly - Denny overhead line. Reports will follow in due course.
25. As promised, a report on standing orders will be brought to the Planning Committee before the end of the year. This will provide an opportunity for Members to review their working procedures and make any changes that are considered to be necessary.

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