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# CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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## FOR INFORMATION

**Title:** Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan Update

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**Purpose:**

To update the Board on the achievements of the Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) and the direction for the LBAP in the next 3 years

**Recommendations**

That the Board acknowledges the continued progress and achievements of the Cairngorms LBAP and the contribution it makes towards the National Park Plan.

**Executive Summary**

The Cairngorms LBAP is a key delivery mechanism for the National Park Plan and UK Biodiversity Action Plan biodiversity priorities. This partnership approach to biodiversity conservation continues to deliver action on and raise awareness of biodiversity in and beyond the National Park. The focus of resources over the last 3 years on a small grant scheme resulted in 48 projects being delivered by local communities and other organisations.

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## Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan Update For Information

### Background

1. Biodiversity is the whole variety of life on earth from lichen to hare, hoverfly to pine tree, the common or the rare. People are a part of biodiversity and not apart from it. Biodiversity is the variety of different habitats formed through the interaction of plants, animals and their environment. It is the basis of everything we regard as special and important in the Cairngorms, and is the root of all natural processes that give us clean air, water, food, clothing, health, relaxation and recreation. Biodiversity underpins the majority of business activity in the National Park.
2. The Cairngorms is widely regarded as one of the most outstanding parts of Scotland, and supports a quarter of the 400 UK Priority Species and over a third of the UK Priority Habitats such as native pinewoods and upland heathland. The purpose of the Cairngorms LBAP is to help protect and secure the area's biodiversity for future generations by working with local people.
3. The Cairngorms LBAP was set up in early 1997 as part of a network of LBAPs across Scotland to achieve the UK government's international commitments to conserve biodiversity at both local and national levels. The LBAP was initiated by the Cairngorms Partnership and is based on a broad partnership of organisations from across the area (see attached Annex 1 with details of Partnership members).
4. The founding aims of the Cairngorms LBAP are:
  - a) To take forward national biodiversity priorities (UK Habitat and Species Action Plans) by helping to deliver them at local level;
  - b) To conserve locally important species and habitats;
  - c) Engage local people and visitors in the management and enjoyment of biodiversity and ensure that they benefit from biodiversity;
  - d) To bring together in partnership those working in the Cairngorms to better achieve biodiversity conservation;
  - e) To assist the delivery of key objectives in the National Park Plan; and
  - f) To set clear, achievable targets and be transparent about progress towards them.
5. In addition, the LBAP provides the biodiversity focus, and in many cases, the leadership to assist with the delivery of all four of the Cairngorms National Park's aims through the National Park Plan.

6. A LBAP Officer has been employed since 1998. The main tasks achieved in the early stage of the process included completing a biodiversity audit of threatened and endangered habitats and species in the Cairngorms, and developing and publishing the Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan. Later developments included initiatives to develop new practical projects across the area; the development of effective partnership working with organisations; improving links and developing actions with lead partners on UK and Park priority action; coordinating biodiversity activities with Ranger Services operating within the Park; raising awareness of biodiversity and the issues impacting on it; managing several successful projects aimed at specific issues; running a Biodiversity Grant Scheme and assisting in the development of many new projects supporting the involvement of local people.
7. The LBAP process is managed by a full-time officer (which is a job-share post) funded by CNPA (47%), SNH (35%), and three Local Authorities (Aberdeenshire, Angus and Highland) who each contribute 6%, costing approximately £40,000 per annum. The CNPA is also hosting the LBAP Officer and provides accommodation, office facilities, administration, IT & financial support (including banking), and day-to-day line management for the Cairngorms LBAP Officer as an in-kind contribution.
8. In addition to the costs of funding the LBAP Officer, the CNPA is contributing towards the costs of the Cairngorms Biodiversity Grant Scheme and supports a variety of specific biodiversity projects (see below for more details). This grant scheme has had between £25,000 to £65,000 per annum to spend on projects over the last 4 years (funding varied between years). The funding partners and their funding split for 2007/08 were SNH (49%), CNPA (39%), LEADER (6%), Aberdeenshire Council (4%) and Angus Council (2%). A similar contribution is expected for this financial year, and while Highland Council contributed in previous years they are unable to do so again this year.
9. The strategic management and direction of the Cairngorms LBAP is agreed by the Cairngorms LBAP Management Group (comprising the 5 funding partners) and the Cairngorms LBAP Steering Group. The CNPA line manager transposes this direction into a meaningful work plan for the LBAP Officer, and provides guidance and support on the implementation of the work plan on a day to day basis.
10. The Cairngorms LBAP was established to cover the whole of the Cairngorms Partnership area (see map at annex 2). This extends beyond the boundaries of the Cairngorms National Park to cover a larger part of the Angus Glens; Atholl and Glen Shee in Perth and Kinross; as well as additional parts of Badenoch and Strathspey, mid

Deeside, Strathdon, and Moray. Since the establishment of the National Park, the work of the officer has been concentrated primarily but not wholly within the area of the Park. However, projects, actions, grants and events continue to be carried out in the area around Atholl and the lower Angus glens.

11. The Cairngorms LBAP agreed funding package comes to an end in March 2009 and funding for the Officer post is required from the key partners (SNH, CNPA, Highland, Angus and Aberdeenshire Councils) up to March 2012. There is widespread agreement from the partners that the LBAP process is the most effective way to continue the delivery of action on conserving and enhancing the biodiversity of the Cairngorms, and of involving communities in this process. SNH and the three Local Authorities have already confirmed that it will continue supporting the post. Additional funding partners are being sought from the public and private sector.

### **Cairngorms Biodiversity Grant Scheme**

12. The Cairngorms LBAP runs a small grants scheme to support biodiversity projects across the LBAP area. The Biodiversity Grant Scheme started in August 2005 through the CNPA's Small Grant Scheme and during that financial year supported 8 projects totalling £24,000. The grant scheme continued under the CNPA's scheme in the 2006/07 and supported 15 projects with grant-aid of £43,600. In 2007/08 the CNPA launched its Community Investment Programme that continued the Biodiversity Grant Scheme, and total of £66,500 was given towards 20 projects. In the first three years of the grant scheme a total of 43 projects were supported with over £134,000.
13. A wide variety of projects were grant-aided and where possible community involvement was incorporated into project activity (see annex 2 for a map showing the spread of projects). Projects grant-aided for the period August 2005 until March 2008 include:
  - a) Supporting Angus FWAG in 3 projects covering the creation of boundary trees, barn owl habitat and boxes, and tree sparrow boxes throughout the Angus Glens;
  - b) Trialling an innovative aerial photography technique to survey aspen woodland in Badenoch & Strathspey with Scottish Native Woods;
  - c) Creating wildlife gardens and ponds in 4 primary schools (Crathie, Braemar, Deshar and Abernethy schools) across the Park;
  - d) Providing assistance for the running of 18 public wildlife identification and survey training courses all across the LBAP area (topics included grasses, montane plants, aquatic plants, fungi,

- dragonflies, bumblebees, otters, amphibians and environmental education);
- e) Increasing our knowledge through survey work of several rare species including lichens, goldeneye, mason bees and fungi;
  - f) Undertaking habitat management for black grouse, Northern damselflies, dark-bordered beauty moth and calcareous grasslands;
  - g) Supporting new research into the genetics of twinflower to inform future management to help save this species;
  - h) Assisting the development of community led projects in Boat of Garten, Birse, Grantown-on-Spey, Nethy Bridge, Laggan, Glenlivet and Insh.
14. The Biodiversity Grant Scheme is supported primarily by funding from SNH and the CNPA with a small contribution from two Local Authorities (Angus and Aberdeenshire) and LEADER. (Highland Council no longer supports the grant scheme due to financial constraints.) The grant scheme is continuing during this financial year through the LEADER scheme and while uptake this year is more limited (due to changes in administration and eligibility), 5 projects totalling £12,500 are taking place. Additional projects are likely to be approved in the coming months.

### **Cairngorms LBAP Summary of Achievements 2006 – 2008**

15. **Species Conservation**

- a) Involvement with SNH Species Action Framework project development including pine hoverfly, red squirrel, wildcat, water vole and intermediate wintergreen.
- b) Assist the Highland and Grampian Red Squirrel Groups and initiate the production of a red squirrel survey postcards and poster to help monitor/control grey squirrel spread across the north.
- c) A key driver in the establishment and development of the Cairngorms Water Voles Conservation Project that is working to conserve and enhance water vole populations in the LBAP area.
- d) Negotiating and advising Robertson Homes in Aviemore to create an artificial sand martin colony.

16. **Habitat Conservation**

- a) Continue to support the Highland Aspen Group with the development of its aspen nursery, the production of an aspen habitat network (based on an innovative aerial photography) and the organisation of a large conference on "Aspen in Scotland, its biodiversity and management" taking place this October.

- b) Assisting in the development of the Cairngorms Forest Habitat Network Project. This project aims to enrich the biodiversity of the Cairngorms forests by the enhancement and creation of woodland networks.
- c) Initiated the development of a Wetland Project (in partnership with SEPA) to produce an up to date inventory of wetland sites and identify areas for potential wetland restoration.

17. **Raising Awareness & Community Involvement**

- a) Leading on a number of “biodiversity themes” to engage the public (working closely with Ranger Services across the area) including swifts nest survey, amphibians survey, non-native species and dragonflies supported by a series of LBAP leaflets.
- b) Coordinated and assisted in the running of over 28 training courses on biodiversity organised through either the Land Based Business Training Project, the Grant Scheme or by LBAP officers.
- c) Presentations given to all Badenoch and Strathspey Community Councils during 2008 to raise awareness of biodiversity and involvement in the Grant Scheme.
- d) Co-ordinated the Cairngorms Butterflies & Moths Mean Business Project in partnership with Butterfly Conservation Scotland during 2006 – March 2008. This project has delivered over 30 awareness raising and training events Park-wide, involving more than 300 volunteers, members of the public and private businesses. Outputs also include leaflets on montane moths and birchwood moths.
- e) Representing the LBAP Network and the Cairngorms LBAP on several national forums such as the Scottish Action Plan & Science Group, the UK Biodiversity Action Plan Wood Ant Group.
- f) Help in the organisation and running of the UK Biodiversity Conference in Aviemore.
- g) Produced the first Cairngorms LBAP Newsletter and proactively produced articles for a wide range of national and local media on Cairngorms biodiversity.

18. **Research and Survey**

- a) Lead on the building of an inventory of the important moorland habitat known as *arctostaphylos* heath, and the associated rare netted mountain moth, using GIS.
- b) Established the Cairngorms Twinflower Project to increase genetic diversity within the Park’s twinflower population. Research highlighted the lack of seed production and seed viability, and the isolation of twinflower clones as a significant threat to the future viability of this rare flower.
- c) Coordinated the collection and management of survey data for dragonflies, swifts and amphibians.

- d) Working closely with fishery interests on non-native species surveys and developing actions to limit the impact of non-native species.

19. **Policy**

- a) Reviewed the Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan document published in 2002 and developed a list of key LBAP Priority Species (attached at annex 3). This list helped inform the Park Plan Priorities for Action and also the SRDP Species and Habitats Priority list for the Cairngorms.
- b) Created the SRDP Species and Habitats Priority Lists for the 3 RPAC areas represented in Park.
- c) Developing the LBAP's priority species list as an indicator for the Corporate Plan and the use of LBAP habitats to monitor habitat status for the future State of the Park Report.

20. **Funding**

- a) Managed highly successful Biodiversity Grant Scheme including providing advice and assistance with project development. The LBAP has sustained the financial commitment to the grant scheme from Aberdeenshire and Angus Councils and SNH over three financial years.

## **The Ongoing Context for Biodiversity Action**

### **International and European Union Commitments**

- 21. The UK made a formal international commitment to biodiversity action in response to the Rio Convention by launching its Action Plan in 1994. The European Union developed its own European Community Biodiversity Strategy in 1998, which is intended to be complementary to biodiversity strategies developed in individual member states. In 2001 EU Heads of State and Government reaffirmed their commitment at the Gothenburg Summit by pledging themselves to "halt the decline of biodiversity by 2010".

### **The Scottish Context**

- 22. The commitment of the Scottish Government towards biodiversity is clearly set out in the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. This places **a statutory duty on all public bodies** to further the conservation of biodiversity. Section 1 of the Act states:

23. *"It is the duty of every public body and office holder, in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions."*
24. This biodiversity duty is linked with, and elaborated by, the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy – *"Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in Your Hands"* – published in 2004. This 25 year strategy presents Scotland's response to its obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity and to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, along with the Scottish Ministers' desire to put biodiversity at the heart of our national identity and culture. The Act places a duty on Scottish Ministers to report to the Parliament on the implementation of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. As part of this report, public bodies including CNPA will be asked by Ministers about their progress in fulfilling their duty on the conservation of biodiversity.

### **The Cairngorms National Park Plan Context**

25. The CNPA has a duty to ensure the delivery of the four Park aims in a co-ordinated manner. While the first aim specifically requires the conservation of the natural heritage, which of course includes biodiversity, the delivery of all four requires proper consideration of the Park's biodiversity if they are to be delivered in a manner that is sustainable, and if the Park Authority is to fulfil its statutory duty under the Nature Conservation Act.
26. The biodiversity duty is incorporated in the National Park Plan, which sets out clear policies for the conservation of the Park's habitats and species. The CNPA's co-ordination role through the Park Plan fits well with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy's agenda for action which requires increased integration between policies, programmes, actions and incentives across government to deliver coherent policy and incentives which enhance biodiversity. The existing Cairngorms LBAP partnership provides a sound platform from which to achieve such joined up action.
27. The National Park Plan's Strategic Objectives for Biodiversity identifies the Cairngorms LBAP as one of the key delivery mechanisms for biodiversity in the Park: it is involved in the majority of the 17 actions identified in the Biodiversity section of the 2007-2012 Action Programme of the Park Plan. The LBAP action plan also provides a clear statement, which is agreed by all partners, of the habitats and species that are important within the Park, and the issues affecting them. The actions and priorities in the LBAP have informed and shaped the biodiversity actions in the Park Plan.

### **The Partnership Approach and the LBAP Officer**



28. The existing Cairngorms LBAP partnership is a ready made forum for the co-ordinated planning, leadership and delivery of biodiversity objectives and priorities, and their incorporation into other areas of work to promote sustainability. It is a unifying framework within which the partners can best achieve their joint biodiversity duties.
29. Key to the success of the Cairngorms LBAP has been the employment of an LBAP officer funded jointly by a number of the partners. This post has enabled an officer to be devoted to biodiversity planning on behalf of all the partners across the Park and wider area. None of the partner agencies has the capacity to do this on behalf of the others as part of their own staff complement. The employment of the project officer provides definite advantages over the employment of individual biodiversity staff by each separate body. The officer's work is directed by agreement through the management and steering groups rather than by any individual organisation. This facilitates a unifying approach, and shared ownership and responsibility for the process based upon a common approach and agreed priorities. This avoids duplication of effort and helps to pool resources in the most efficient manner.
30. Of particular importance is the ability of the post holder to engage with local communities. Part of the post holder's job plan is devoted to assisting these communities to become directly involved with the enjoyment and appreciation of biodiversity as one of the Park's special qualities. Communities are also supported in participating directly in its conservation and enhancement through the Biodiversity Grant Scheme.

## **Future Outputs**

31. The outcomes over the next 3 years in which the Cairngorms LBAP will play a key roll are as follows:
  - a) Effective and co-ordinated delivery by partners of Priorities for Action identified in the Park Plan, including targeted projects for species and habitats requiring particular actions beyond those connected with general land management.
  - b) Increased involvement of communities and visitors in the enjoyment and understanding of their local biodiversity, and more assistance in actions to promote all aspects of local biodiversity. Will use promotion of LBAP themes, Rangers, events, newsletter, leaflets, and press work.
  - c) Continuation of the biodiversity grant scheme led by the project officer, with an emphasis on the involvement of local communities and the delivery of actions for priority species and habitats.

- d) Development of several medium scale biodiversity projects with partners targeted at species requiring specific actions (i.e. twinflower and dragonfly projects).
- e) Assist in the development & implementation of 3 large scale projects on Cairngorms habitats and species (i.e. Cairngorms Forest Habitat Network, Cairngorms Invertebrate and Cairngorms Wetland projects).

### ***Financial Implications***

- 32. The current Corporate Plan for 2008-11 includes a commitment to contribute towards the costs of the LBAP Officer post. The current Operational Plan for 2008/09 also includes a commitment to support the post. The financial costs for the CNPA are approximately £16,000 per annum. Further funds will be required from the CNPA in 2011-12.

### ***Presentational Implications***

- 33. The continued support of the CNPA to the LBAP process demonstrates its commitment to biodiversity and the importance of a partnership approach to biodiversity.

### ***Implications for stakeholders***

- 34. The continued LBAP approach offers the most effective mechanism for assisting in delivering the biodiversity priorities identified in the Park Plan and also delivering UK and local biodiversity priorities. It will continue to benefit from an established partnership of organisations working together and avoiding duplication of effort as well as maximising resources.

### **Consultation**

- 35. This paper was drawn up with the involvement of the Cairngorms LBAP Management Group, members of the Cairngorms LBAP Steering Group and the CNPA's Heritage & Land Management Group.

### **Policy Context**

- 36. The Cairngorms LBAP is relevant to all 5 strategic themes with theme 1 and 2 being the key areas where it will deliver.
- 37. The Cairngorms LBAP has a fundamental role in assisting with the delivery of many of the policies and actions included in the Park and Local Plans.
- 38. The Cairngorms LBAP helps deliver on awareness, understanding and inclusion for local people and visitors.

39. Assists with the CNPA's contribution to the EU, UK & Scottish biodiversity strategies, Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture, Scottish Forestry Strategy, Scottish Rural Development Plan, Local Green Space Strategy, Best Value, and the Cairngorms Woodland & Forestry Framework.

### **Delivering Sustainability**

40. By raising awareness and engaging with communities, the Cairngorms LBAP will help to ensure that all partners take a consistent approach towards the biodiversity implications of all their functions with respect to farming, forestry, moorland management, water, sporting activities, recreation and development. This will help to ensure that all economic activity is undertaken in a sustainable manner.

### **Delivering a Park for All**

41. Many Cairngorms LBAP actions are about involving communities and visitors in conserving/ understanding/appreciating their local biodiversity irrespective of their background.

### **Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency**

42. The Cairngorms LBAP partnership allows the pooling of resources to achieve the best economic approach to achieving collective biodiversity obligations towards the Park. Without the partnership, each would have to spend more of their own resources on devising an individual approach to biodiversity with the risk of duplication and the possibility of conflicting priorities and actions. The partnership approach increases consistency and effectiveness as all are working from a common understanding of the biodiversity issues to be addressed. This is very much in line with Government's efficiency agenda.

### **Beyond 2012**

43. While the LBAP process is called a project, the LBAP duties and related Park Plan actions will help direct and influence the work of the CNPA and other relevant public bodies well into the future. The LBAP will also help to shape and inform the biodiversity objectives of the next Park Plan. In particular, the LBAP is likely to continue to be an effective mechanism for delivering statutory obligations on biodiversity in a way that adds value for the Park.

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Annexes:

1. *Steering Group membership*
2. *LBAP area and grants map*
3. *LBAP priority species*