

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”

Previously, the CNPA’s work 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. More recently, a shift in focus has started to take place so that most effort is directed into programme and project delivery, primarily through others but in some cases directly by the Authority.

CORPORATE PLAN REPORT: THEME 3 – FOR INFORMATION

Background

1. This is the fifth 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 and November 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, land management 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. In line with the new Park Plan delivery arrangements, the Cairngorms Housing Group has been wound up. The actions set out under the priority for action on 'Making Housing More Affordable and Sustainable' are currently being worked up and their delivery will be co-ordinated by the new Delivery Team that has been established with key partners. Progress on the work of the Park Plan priority for action Delivery Teams is the subject of a separate Board paper.
6. There are also several Park Plan related initiatives being actively progressed by our Housing Policy Officer, Fiona Munro. These include:
 - a) Along with Highland Council, Communities Scotland 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 Kinraig. The project has outline planning permission and the site has been procured. Detailed planning will be applied for soon and costs are being negotiated that are acceptable to Communities Scotland;
 - 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 also identified properties which might have been suitable for renovation. Locally placed advertisements also raised more interest and Smiths Gore is now looking at approximately 60 properties. These will be discussed with Communities Scotland to identify if any will qualify for their funding. The consultant will report in late autumn;

- c) Work is being progressed to pilot a community needs engagement project in the Grantown on Spey/Cromdale/Dulnain Bridge area. Housingplus has been appointed to assist in identifying and prioritising economic, social and environmental opportunities as well as identifying housing needs at a local level to feed into the Badenoch and Strathspey community planning partnership. This project will complete around Christmas time.

Tourism

7. Considerable progress has been made on tourism, in particular excellent uptake of the Park Brand, increased coverage of the Park in consumer marketing by Visitscotland and Visitscotland.com, and a strong platform for growth mapped out by Destination Management Organisations.
8. Our tourism work is driven by the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan. Making tourism & business sustainable priority for action provides strategic direction and a mechanism to engage partners in our sustainable tourism aims.
9. Engagement with businesses is also critical for success and good progress has been made with over 120 approvals made for use of the National Park Brand and around 100 businesses in the Green Tourism Business Scheme.
10. The Authority is working with two Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) – Aviemore and the Cairngorms DMO and Royal Deeside and the Cairngorms DMO. These bodies provide the best way of communicating and working with tourism businesses on sustainable tourism projects.
11. The Marketing and Events strand of the Community Investment Programme is fully committed and is being used to support a wide range of events across the Park including 'the Book Day in Boat', 'Let There be Lecht' and 'Braemar Gala Week'.
12. In April the CNPA were highly commended in the Royal Destination Awards for Sustainable Tourism, finishing in the top 3 from 20 short-listed destinations across Europe.
13. In June, the Authority hosted delegates from across Europe to look at best practise in implementing the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. It is

encouraging to note that the Cairngorms is considered to be a leading example of working in partnership with others and in involving the business community.

14. June also saw the Outsider Festival in Rothiemurchus which proved a good opportunity to market the Park in partnership with the festival, hitting a large audience across Scotland and beyond with messages about the special qualities of this area.

Transport

15. The CNPA is continuing to work in partnership to address issues on assessing gaps & frequency in services, accessibility & affordability, and environmental impacts.
16. 40,000 copies of the Cairngorms Explorer were circulated this summer, and it is expected to be repeated in 2008/9 with more emphasis on highlighting cheap packages of access to, and days out around, Park areas.
17. The Heather Hopper 501 Ballater-Grantown service is running until 30 September and research results are due on its operation in October. Aberdeenshire and Highland Councils who jointly subsidise this service with CNPA, have both integrated this service into their 5 year contract programme.
18. Stagecoach again ran their commercial Heather Hopper 502 service between Banchory-Braemar-Glenshee-Blairgowrie/Pitlochry during the Summer holidays.

Strengthening Communities

19. The temporary arrangements that were explained in the last Theme 3 report, whereby the LEADER+ administrative team took on administration of the Authority's Integrated Grants Programme has been continued for this year's Community Investment Programme. This has helped streamline and standardise grant giving mechanisms and has proved a useful trial in considering the potential for integrating sources of grant funding. A paper on this issue and the future of the Community Investment Programme will be brought to the November Board meeting.
20. The Community Investment Programme has received a good number of applications for projects under the following themes:
 - a) Park for All
 - b) Events and Marketing
 - c) Biodiversity
 - d) Interpretation
 - e) Outdoor Access
 - f) Cultural Heritage

As demand has been lowest under the last two themes, consideration is to be given as to whether funds should be vired to those themes that are more fully committed.

21. The Cairngorms LEADER+ Programme is now fully committed and effort is being put in to ensuring all claims are made and final project reports received. This will enable a close down of the programme after the end of December, which is the final deadline for expenditure to be made. The planned future LEADER programme is the subject of a separate Board paper.
22. Both the Community Investment Programme (previously the Integrated Grants Programme) and the Cairngorms LEADER+ programme have now been externally evaluated. The evaluation report is helping to inform both the bid for a new Cairngorms National Park LEADER Programme and consideration of the future of the Community Investment Programme and can be made available to Board members on request.
23. There has also been a lot of effort put into developing linkages with community planning processes and partnerships with a view to developing a more integrated approach to community based issues. As was explained in the June information paper on 'Developing Links with Community Planning', these linkages will be important in helping to shape the way in which future grant programmes operate and in identifying priority local actions and projects. Further consideration is being given to the way in which the proposed rolling programme of community needs assessments might be most effectively delivered, drawing upon the pilot work currently underway in Grantown, Cromdale and Dulnain Bridge. Again, this will be the subject of a future Board paper.

Learning and Inclusion

24. This year there has been a mandatory requirement for the Authority to develop equalities schemes packaging both its general and specific duties (with regards to disability, gender and race) into an overarching strategy and action plan. The schemes are public documents with the Park Authority being accountable to the public for delivering the action plans set out in the schemes. To date the Board have endorsed both the Disability (DES) and Gender (GES) equality schemes developed by CNPA staff, Inclusive Cairngorms and the Highland and Islands Equality Forum. The scheme on race will come to the Board for endorsement in November 2007.
25. This year's "Park for All" Conference in November will focus on transport issues for young people, people with disabilities and those living on low income. A sub group comprising of members from Inclusive Cairngorms, along with local and national transport organisations are currently developing an agenda for the day. Predicted outcomes include: sharing good practice and networking as well as linking into other national transport initiatives from the community/social inclusion perspective.
26. The Joint National Park/SNH Outreach project is now underway. The first phase is a desktop exercise building on existing data collected from partners identifying barriers to certain groups accessing the National Parks. The second phase (2008) will be more active focussing on urban based schools and excluded groups coming to the

parks and reporting on their experiences. The findings including recommendations on how to most effectively to develop a sustainable outreach programme for the Parks will be launched in early 2009.

27. In relation to work with young people, the CNPA is working closely with its partners to stage two youth conferences in November - one on either side of the National Park. These events will highlight young people's issues, showcase successful youth projects, and highlight local young talent. The event in Deeside will also be used as a vehicle to consult with young people as a part of the Community Planning process in the Marr area. In addition the events will host the premiere of the "Schools Media" project (phase two) where most of the local secondary schools have made video films focussing on the key priorities for action within the Park Plan.
28. On the skills and training front. The CNPA is currently involved with the development and piloting of an SVQ 2 in rural skills. LANTRA are taking the lead on this project with the qualification initially being rolled out in the National Park area. The SVQ will cover primary areas such as forestry, agriculture and estate management, as well as incorporating other key elements such as sustainable tourism. The Cairngorms Action on Training and Skills (CATS) project, which aims to address financial barriers to young people undertaking vocational training in Park-related employment sectors has to date awarded 10 bursaries. The greatest interest has been in obtaining outdoor instructor accreditation but more recently two young people have been supported in undertaking training linked to pursuing farming careers.
29. The Land Based Business Training project has increased its partner funding this year and has continued to build on the success of the past three years. We have also piloted a new project Cairngorms Awareness and Pride (CAP) - a "public benefits" training programme for people living and working within the Park area. Early indications show the project to be an outstanding success. The Board has recently agreed in principle to funding both projects (subject to finance committee) for the next three years, and the project manager and the Education and Inclusion Manager will be developing a long term business plan at the end of the year.

Development Control

30. In the quarter ending 30 June 2007, the "call-in" rate increased from the 14% in the quarter ending 30 April back up to almost 17% by the end of June. At that point the number of active applications had decreased from 54 to 52. Although the number of "call ins" increased from 19 to 22 in the same period, determinations doubled from 12 to 24. Since then, there have been several further determinations and a relatively modest call in level, bringing the number of active applications as at 7 September 2007 down to a total of 43. Average determination time has also improved between the two quarters. The trend is therefore going in the right direction and efforts are being made to further improve the standard of service that is provided."

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