
CAIRNGORMS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FORUM

- Title:** ECSTPA Verifiers Feedback Report
- Prepared by:** Heather Trench
- Purpose:** To flag up those areas of the verifier's report where room for improvement has been identified.
- Advice Sought:** Are the verifier's recommendations justified? Do we wish to make changes to the Sustainable Tourism Strategy action plan as a result?

BACKGROUND

1. As part of the Cairngorms National Park's re-application for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, a Europarc verifier, Richard Partington, visited the area on the 1st and 2nd of March. His visit, together with the submission of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and an Application Report completed by CNPA, formed the basis of the re-application assessment. In July, we received a copy of the verifier's report and confirmation that our application had been successful.

VERIFIER'S REPORT

2. A full copy of the report is available on the CNPA website at www.cairngorms.co.uk/nationalparkplan/prioritiesforaction/tourismandbusiness/. The report was largely positive. Each element of our application was graded as following: *X - Not relevant; 0 - Not happening; 1 - Weak, little action; 2 - Moderate, action happening in this area, sufficient at present; 3 - Good, significant action, totally satisfactory.*
3. Overall, 78% of our scores were graded as '3'. Particular strengths were noted as:
 - Enabling approach, energy & commitment
 - Well-governed, managed and structured approach with financial leverage
 - Work with businesses (CBP)
 - Development of Cairngorms brand
 - Work on outdoor access delivery model (COAT)
 - Co-ordination of ranger services

VERIFIER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Within the report there are a variety of weaker areas identified and recommendations for future action made. These are flagged up below for discussion.

Visitor Payback

5. A scoping study in 2009 on a Park-wide visitor payback scheme concluded that there was little appetite for such a scheme - I was disappointed that more progress had not been made. More imagination/creativity is required during the next five years to really progress and generate support through "Payback Schemes" from visitors and businesses so that tangible contributions can be seen – perhaps new technologies such as Phone Apps (e.g. Text yes £5) could be embraced.

Lack of Charter Promotion

6. There was a notable absence of mention or promotion of the Charter as the premier European quality label for sustainable tourism in protected areas. This should be remedied as part of a new move to connect customers/visitors easily to sustainable destinations. E.g. A guide to Protected Areas and companies awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism – how to get there sustainably and what to do/stay/eat etc.

Park for All

7. The future strategy and action plan is not explicit on the intentions for provision of information and facilities for disabled people or economically disadvantaged people – this may be an oversight but equally may be considered mainstream as legislation and an inclusive approach is now common place.

CNPA Internal Training on Sustainable Tourism Issues

8. The CNPA say in their self evaluation questionnaire that as they do not employ front-line staff they have not undertaken or developed any training in sustainable tourism. They see themselves as an enabling organisation with no directly managed ranger service or visitor centres so they rely on working in partnership bringing people together and giving them the support they need to deliver sustainable tourism in practice. I wonder if this question is interpreted too literally as they do have core staff that do need to be aware of this work activity and to understand the principles of sustainable tourism and the approach taken in the Cairngorms. Perhaps, in the future, they need to look at this and ensure all staff and Members of CNPA are understanding of the approach to sustainable tourism particularly as they have an interesting model, excellence in outcomes which needs to be shared locally, nationally and internationally.

Visitor Management Plan

9. A comprehensive Visitor Management Plan was missing and I would ask the Cairngorms to consider whether they need a full plan incorporating a needs analysis, a strategic view and better evidence. The new tourism action plan (4b) goes some way to addressing this but perhaps, through the development of the Park Plan and using the concept idea of a sustainable destination a better visitor management plan should emerge.

Cairngorms Business Partnership

10. CNPA must ensure the CBP remains a key partner in areas such as marketing and training and in developing the Cairngorms Marketing Framework alongside the delivery of the 2011-2015 Sustainable Tourism Strategy.

Low carbon economy

11. The strong linkages between the Park Authority and the CBP must be used to start a conversation around how the Cairngorms can become a quality and sustainable destination within a low carbon economy. Higher costs of oil will present real challenges and diversity of views for much of the “conversation” will be around transport, its interconnectivity and how customers arrive.

Retaining buy-in

12. Co-ordination and retention of “buy-in” from national public-sector organisations, who have staff working on diverse issues and projects within the Park, is a major challenge as is the continual churn of business folk. Perhaps a simple “sustainable tourism story”, explanation or training about the past journey and the agreed destination of travel (for public sector and for new business people) to understand how they can get involved and contribute may be helpful e.g. to “walk the talk”!

Wider economic issues

13. To achieve a cohesive and functioning community CNPA must work with partners and stakeholders in four key socio/economic areas: (i) Broadband; (ii) Transport links; (iii) Housing and; (iv) Jobs.

Transport

14. An easy, integrated method of making reservations to and in the Cairngorms for accommodation, activities, rail and bus travel should be developed. Also action to upgrade and secure modern rail sleeper services should be a priority if the concept of a “sustainable destination” is to be realised.

Heather Trench

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heathertrench@cairngorms.co.uk