

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: Entry Point Signage For The Cairngorms National Park

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Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to inform the Board of the progress made since it was last raised in December 2004.

Recommendations

That the Board:

- Note the progress on the continued developmental work for the permanent granite markers, including the revised estimated costs, work on the funding package and the next steps for this project.

Executive Summary

The paper summarises the developmental work that has been undertaken since December 2004 following the commissioning of specialist consultants for landscape work and further design of the granite marker. This has allowed revised cost estimates and timescales for the production and installation of the granite markers in the 26 locations identified in the original scoping report.

A summary of the known outcomes of the planning and funding applications is provided, and the next steps for this project are detailed.

ENTRY POINT SIGNAGE FOR THE CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK

Background

1. Since the Board's endorsement of investigative work into the installation of high quality granite markers at the entry points to the National Park boundary, significant developmental work has been required to advance the project while minimising risk and costs.
2. The use of granite means that the design process has had to be flexible to accommodate factors that have only been revealed as the project evolves. From the original schematic design presented to the Board in July 2004, the design has undergone several developments, most significantly withdrawing the use of glass as an option and the incorporation of the new Cairngorms National Park brand. This Paper summarises the substantial developmental work that has taken place since the December Board Paper and identifies the work that is still required.

Progress Report on Installation of Interim Road Signs

3. Now that signs are in place at the railway stations, arrangements have been made for the installation of interim metal road signs (a rectangular metal sign on two posts) showing the new Cairngorms brand at 10 road sites, (these sites are annotated with an asterisk in Annex 1). The installation is being taken forward by a number of different contractors and the signs are scheduled for installation during May 2005.

Progress on Developmental Work on Permanent Granite Markers

Landowner consultations

4. All affected landowners have been contacted and are content with the development process for the permanent signs to date. The exception is the site at Dinnet where, due to complications with the preferred site for the permanent marker, further discussion with the community and landowner will be required once the interim metal sign is in place.
5. Advertisement consent has been sought for sites from the four relevant local authorities, except Dinnet. Annex 1 shows that approval has been received for all sites apart from the four trunk road sites within Highland Council. Further discussion with the Trunk Roads Department is required.
6. As part of the process of deciding where each marker should be located, ecological advice has been sought from the Natural Resources Group.

Interim Report from Landscape Consultants

7. In December 2004 the Board authorised funding to commission consultants to produce detailed landscape designs for the entry point marker project. The draft final report of the work was presented to CNPA on 15 April 2005 and a brief summary of the design intentions at each site is included at Annex 1.
8. The December Board Paper (Paper 1, on 3/12/04) noted that the estimate for the installation of the entry point markers alone with minimal landscaping (phase I) had

been revised downwards to £908k (including VAT) from an initial estimate of £998k (including VAT) from the Scoping Report, and the reasons for this were outlined in the Paper.

9. The current estimates, which incorporate revised costs from both landscape architect and design consultant show a further downward revision to £630k including VAT. This is due to:
 - the erection of permanent railway signage at five stations undertaken by the Park Authority within the last financial year;
 - significant changes to the scale of works required at some sites;
 - rationalisation of the design to incorporate the Park brand; and
 - more detailed cost estimates as the planning stages advance.
10. The landscape architects also estimate that from commencement of the installation contract, a period of 41 weeks will be required for the installation of all 25 granite markers, with the first marker appearing after approximately 6 months.

Further Design Work and Sourcing of the Granite

11. Funding in December was also authorised for further design work on the granite marker. This included the incorporation of the new Cairngorms brand which required significant revisions from the initial schematic design (involving a layered granite structure) to a single slab of granite. The revised design is shown in Annex 2.
12. Board members should note that at Category B and C sites the markers will show the “osprey” only. At these sites it is not possible to include any wording on the granite markers which could be read by passing vehicles without making the markers so large that they would be incongruous on a minor road in a rural setting. These entry points have either very low numbers of vehicles passing per day (and a large proportion will be local and commuter traffic) or visitors on foot, horse or bike. In any event we anticipate that over time awareness of the brand through exposure on print, websites and other pre- arrival signage will be sufficient to ensure that many visitors associate the figure with Park when they see it at the boundary.
13. Detailed investigations have taken place into the availability of local granite in blocks of an appropriate size, with an emphasis on working granite quarries in, or close to, the Park. Discussions about the most appropriate granite have also taken place with British Geological Survey. Analysis of the properties (to test issues such as friability) is in hand. If the test results prove satisfactory it is hoped that a single working quarry within the National Park will be able to meet all the granite requirements of this project.
14. It will not be until the granite extraction is authorised that the suitability of the granite can be finally assured, and as a result alternative options are being investigated.

Production of trial marker

15. The estimated size for each marker at each location has been provided at Annex 1. Trial markers for each of the proposed sizes will be produced as part of the design work. The value of this experimentation is important, to minimise risk and confirm that the estimated sizes are accurate and appropriate for the surrounding landscape and road speeds.

Funding

16. The Cairngorms National Park is currently 'split' between two European Funding Programmes; broadly, on the west the Objective 1 Highlands and Islands Special Transitional Programme (managed through the Highland and Islands Partnership Programme (HIPP)), and on the east the Transitional Objective 2 Programme (managed by the East of Scotland European Partnership (ESEP)).
17. A number of agencies and partnerships were formally contacted with a view to securing match-funding for EU applications including the local enterprise companies, and the local authorities.
18. An application for Objective 1 funding with confirmed match funding from MBSE and Moray Council was submitted to HIPP in January 2005. This application was unsuccessful. However, HIPP did intimate that a more favourable response might have been forthcoming if Phase 1 (the Entry point markers only) had been submitted with Phase 2 (the landscape upgrading, interpretation, and provision of other visitor facilities). The External Funding Officer plans to review this application, and submit a revised application for the September round. Moray Council's contribution is conditional upon receiving Objective 1 funding.
19. An application for Objective 2 funding, with match funding from Scottish Enterprise Grampian, was submitted to ESEP in February 2005 and was recommended for approval by the Programme Management Committee on the 31st March.
20. As part of this funding application process the assumption was that approximately £150k per annum would be contributed by CNPA over the two year period 2005/6 - 2006/07 towards the erection of the entry point markers with a further £150k required for the installation of the visitor facilities. With the present shortfall in Objective 1 funding an additional £150k may be required for the entry point markers if these are to be progressed over the proposed 2-year period.

Next Steps

21. The two current contracts for the landscape architects and product design consultants are due to be completed by the end of June. In the meantime, work will continue to develop the project brief for the installation of the granite markers so that options for the installation programme within the known funding package can be presented to the Board for a decision in September.
22. The very recent successful recruitment of a Visitor Information and Interpretation Officer in the Visitor Services and Recreation Group (the post-holder is likely to start in early June) will prompt reconsideration of the Project Team responsibilities. Care will be taken to ensure that the transition is as smooth as possible.

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