

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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### 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 states:

“To support and stimulate economic and social development within the Park that sustains and is sustained by its special natural and cultural qualities”

A balance has been sought between longer terms strategic work and the achievement of ‘early wins’. In addition the Park Authority’s work on economic and social development is continuing to become further focused upon activities that are directly related to the special qualities of the Park and which also contribute towards achieving the other Corporate Plan themes.

As is detailed in the report, positive progress is being made on a range of policy fronts but there is much work to be done and ensuring that we are engaging positively with partner organisations will be the key to success.

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## CORPORATE PLAN REPORT: THEME 3

### Background

1. This is the third monthly report on the five strategic themes within the CNPA's Corporate Plan for 2005-08. This paper concerns the third theme:

“To support and stimulate economic and social development within the Park that sustains and is sustained by its special natural and cultural qualities”
2. The CNPA's work to date on this theme has sought to strike a balance between longer term strategic thinking and associated policy development on the one hand, and developing or supporting activities or projects that can achieve positive impacts more immediately. As the Park Plan and Local Plan begin to firm up, the balance of effort is likely to shift further towards delivery.
3. The key to being able to achieve a supportive and stimulating environment for economic and social development within the Park will be through actively engaging with all of the key stakeholders to ensure that they are fully supportive and are prepared to take individual and collective responsibility for delivery. The work taking place at the moment with regards firming up the Park Plan actions with key partners is critical in this respect.
4. It is also important to note 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.
5. 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. This report, however, focuses only upon the work of the ESD and PDC Groups and has been structured around key policy areas.

### Housing

6. Now that the Heriot Watt housing system analysis study is at draft stage, discussions are taking place with partners from the Cairngorms Housing Strategy Implementation Group to consider its recommendations and the implications for housing policies within the draft Local Plan. Then, in June, a workshop will be held to discuss the draft Park Plan strategic objectives relating to housing and to work up the associated actions. This process should ensure that there is a firm foundation to, and collective ownership of, both Local Plan housing policies and the broader housing actions that emerge.

7. Work is continuing with regards to potential pilot projects with the Forestry Commission, the Crofters Commission and the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association, as was outlined in the March Board paper on housing.

## **Tourism**

8. The process of developing the Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism has involved extensive consultation and dialogue with partners. For this reason there is a strong sense of collective ownership of the document and we should be confident of attaining the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas in the summer.
9. The next step is to focus in on delivery and so over the coming months, dovetailing with the Park Plan work, we will be meeting with partner organisations individually and collectively (via the ViSIT Forum) to ensure that specific actions are being or will be taken forward. Further work will also be progressed on putting in place a robust monitoring framework for the Strategy.
10. One area that we are carefully examining at the moment is that of the Park Authority's role in tourism-related marketing and events. In line with our role as an enabling body, the thinking is that marketing should be led by VisitScotland and the private sector. The Cairngorms is an ideal rural 'product' for promotion within the VisitScotland themes of 'Active Scotland', 'Freedom of Scotland' and 'Culture and Heritage'. At a sub-Park level, we are in discussion with ABSC Marketing Limited about potentially part-funding their 2005 marketing activities and we would want to identify similar opportunities to market the Park, either by sub-area or on a thematic basis, e.g. the recent collaborative marketing of the walking festivals within the Park. These points will be elaborated upon in the June Board paper on the proposed Marketing and Events strand of the Integrated Grant Scheme.

## **Transport**

11. Early achievements include the development of a public transport timetable for the Park, with some information on linked walk and cycle routes, and the introduction of cycle racks on buses in part of the Park.
12. However, it is important to define the CNPA's role in transport and to start a more strategic engagement with Local Authorities and the strategic transport planning bodies, HITRANS and NESTRANS. The timing is particularly critical as Local Authorities are currently developing local transport strategies and, after the current Transport (Scotland) Bill has been passed, Regional Transport Partnerships will be established and regional Transport Strategies will be drawn up.

## **Community Development**

13. In June 2004, an interim policy framework for community development was presented to the Board. It was agreed that a Community Development Strategy should be developed for the Park but after subsequent discussion with partners it was decided that the Park Plan should provide the strategic framework rather than having a

separate strategy. At the moment the focus of effort is upon putting in place a strand of the Integrated Grant Scheme to support the capacity of communities to deliver the Park's aims. A Board paper on this grant strand is planned for June. Discussions are also taking place with the Association of Cairngorms Community Councils with regards their future development plans.

14. The discussions with partners have also identified issues that could potentially be addressed by taking a more collective and strategic approach to community development. Further discussions in this regard will take place as part of the process of developing the Park Plan actions.

### **Cultural Heritage**

15. We are currently in discussion with partners both to clarify the Park Authority's potential role in relation to cultural heritage, and to identify draft actions for the Park Plan. It is intended that a Board paper on cultural heritage will be presented in September.

### **Social Inclusion**

16. A separate Park for All Board report covers progress and future activity with regards social inclusion issues.

### **Development Control**

17. As Members are aware we have been calling in applications faster than we have been able to determine them. We now have to submit performance returns to the Scottish Executive. As with other authorities there is consequently a tension between quantity and quality, but in the National Park context it is paramount that quality is the driving consideration. Applications are not brought to Committee unless all of the relevant information is available to make a sound decision. Having said that we are endeavouring to improve the speed of determination. Mary Grier is now in post as the third development control officer and this is already making a big difference. We have always endeavoured to be positive and try to work with applicants to make proposals fit with planning policy and the Park aims. This has led to extended dialogue in many cases and we are currently reviewing the way in which discussions and consultations take place with a view to introducing a more realistic timescale thereby enabling applications to come before Committee as soon as possible. You should see the results of this in the coming months. We aim to provide a high quality and efficient service to Members, applicants and the wider community. At the end of the day, however, the quality of decision and quality of development approved are the overriding factors and they will not be sacrificed for the sake of statistics.

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**April 2005**

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