
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: CEO REPORT AND CONVENER UPDATE

Prepared by: GRANT MOIR, CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Purpose:

- I. To highlight to Board Members the main strategic areas of work that are being directed by Management Team. These are areas where significant staff resources are being directed to deliver with partners the aspirations of the National Park Partnership Plan.

Conservation:

- a) **Cairngorms Nature:** The Cairngorms Nature Action Plan will be used as a key criteria for the next round of Biodiversity Challenge Fund monies allocated in the Park, further cementing its role as the key strategic document for identifying and delivering conservation priorities in the Park. After the first 6-monthly review of activity, delivery of the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan is on track with few areas of work considered to be at any risk. The relatively short term nature of peatland restoration funding is a risk to achieving restoration targets and this is currently being considered by Scottish Government and SNH. The Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group continues to take a strategic overview and mobilise delivery on the ground.
- b) **Cairngorms Capercaillie Project:** The project to find ways in which people can play their part in capercaillie conservation is in the last three months of the Development Phase. The Delivery Phase application will be submitted in March 2020. The extremely positive results from the community listening work carried out by Dr Alistair Bath in Carr-bridge has given the community group a great boost and strong mandate to go ahead with drawing up a community-led action plan. The model for how to support further communities of place and interest through a similar process will form the basis of the 2nd round application; along with proposals for raising awareness and understanding, habitat expansion and enhancement, predator management and genetic analysis. Proposed communities to work with in the delivery phase include the (wildlife, activity provider and accommodation) business community, mountain biking community, visitors to Glenmore, a community in Strathspey and a whole-estate approach in Deeside.
- c) **Tomintoul and Glenlivet Landscape Partnership:** We are now in the final year of project delivery. There is still a huge amount of work to do and the staff and volunteer teams continue to do an amazing job. The TGLP Board are continuing to meet regularly, monitoring progress, guiding budget spend and focusing on ensuring the partnership leads to a valuable long term legacy. Jackie Taylor and the team

recently organised an important National event in Perth hosting other National Lottery funded projects to explore how best to ensure the projects leave long lasting worthwhile legacies. We are very sorry Lynn Cassells is leaving us at the end of the year, she has done a fantastic job, but are recruiting for a new Land Management Officer to take us to October 2020.

A quick summary of progress on some of the main TGLP projects:

- i. Stabilisation work on *Blairfindy Castle* is almost complete, with final aspects such as the path from the distillery and landscaping to be completed. The quality of the workmanship is astonishing. Completion expected in early Dec.
- ii. The *Discovery Centre* is now a well-established focal point for visitors. Now closed until Spring.
- iii. The *Speyside Way Spur* has now been completed, an opening event was held on 22nd September.
- iv. *Scalan Mills* is progressing well and on time with outstanding attention to detail from the local contractor leading the restoration work. Completion expected end of Nov.
- v. A very significant amount of work has recently taken place consulting the community on *Interpretation* of projects across the partnership. With this completed we will soon see more of the many projects accompanied by striking interpretive displays.
- vi. Some *Riparian woodland* projects are still being developed alongside the existing projects where tree have been planted in buffers alongside rivers.
- vii. A range of *training projects* are continuing to be made available through the partnership.
- viii. The *water-environment* works along the River Avon at Fordmouth have been completed. This was a complex project which is considered to be one of the most ambitious river restoration/sediment management projects of its kind in the UK.
- ix. New wader officer, Vicky Anderson, is in post. Hiring out the new rush cutter and creating more 'wader scrapes' are continuing as part of the *Peezie project*.
- x. An application to the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme has been submitted for creating a new area of *native woodland* above the River Conglass near the Lecht road. This and the recent felling of non-native conifers at the bottom of the Lecht will form part of a demonstration project.
- xi. Two *barriers to salmon* migration have been removed and replaced with sophisticated constructed channels.
- xii. The *natural heritage* grant for local projects helping wildlife and administered with the help of local volunteers is very popular and likely to be oversubscribed.
- xiii. A range of *cultural heritage* events have taken place for the community, the most recent being learning how to accurately map a lost farmstead.
- xiv. The recent *Wild in the Park* event in September was a great success.

- d) **East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership:** The Estate partners, with the help of Jos Milner our project officer have all now prepared muirburn plans which identify burn free areas to increase habitat diversity and protect vulnerable habitats and species. The partnership has worked with the Scottish Raptor Study Group and

employed a contractor to improve our understanding of breeding raptor distribution. Wader productivity monitoring has continued this year with a report due soon. Areas for woodland expansion and peatland restoration are still being developed.

- e) **Deer Management and Moorland Management:** SNH have completed assessments of Deer Management Groups and their delivery of 'public benefits'. A report from SNH is due soon. We are still awaiting the outcome of the Scottish Government's Deer Working group and the Grouse Moor Management Group. The Cairngorms Upland Advisory Group met in October.

Visitor Experience:

- a) **Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum:** The October meeting covered access issues that are primarily raised by users and showing no significant change; 'Tread Lightly' promoting responsible access and a spring 2020 Seminar bringing together partners and interest groups to look at responsible access round ground nesting birds with a focus on Capercaillie. SNH is bringing together public partners including Forestry & Land Scotland and both National Park Authorities to develop ways that we can better encourage responsible outdoor access for a range of benefits from health to CO2 saving.
- b) **Long Distance Routes:**
- i. **Speyside Way:** The initial study on a 20 mile extension of the Long Distance Route from Aviemore to Newtonmore started in May 2004 and the route as designated by Scottish Government will be completed by the end of this year, and officially opened in spring 2020. This has required two Scottish Government 'enquiries', six planning applications and five funding partnerships to raise the £1.2 million required to construct the route. This year we have supported Kingussie Development Company in upgrading the existing path between the shinty pitch & village and are in discussion with them about options for an off road solution from Ruthven Barracks north. We are developing new maps and interpretation boards to be installed at key sites along the route and working with Newtonmore Business Association to develop a start/finish sculpture in the village.
 - ii. **Deeside Way Extension:** Planning consent for the path line from Braemar to Invercauld Bridge has been granted. However, our principle community link funding support Sustrans are now only funding multi-use tarmac paths so other sources of funding will need to be secured to build this section & to date we have been unable to source such additional support.
- c) **Mountains and People Project:** The five year Mountains and People project within both National Parks in Scotland is now nearing completion in summer 2020. Some 82% of paths identified in Cairngorms were complete by October including the well-used and well seen Beinn a Ghlo path in Highland Perthshire opened by John Swinney in September. The focus over the next nine months is completing the project and maintaining the legacy of paths and volunteers.

- d) **Active Travel:** Securing funding to take the concept design for **Active Aviemore** to a detailed costed build design is proving challenging and we are in discussion with Scottish Government about how best to progress this next stage. **Glenmore** supported by the Visit Scotland managed Tourism Infrastructure Fund still requires Highland Council Roads Authority permission with build scheduled for Spring/Summer 2020. **Kingussie** and **Dulnain** communities have secured Sustrans support to develop costed designs for their active travel work. The Dulnain desire to create a multiuse path link to Grantown is further supported by funding from the Grantown distillery. **Laggan** has secured funding from Sustrans for a stage one work looking at options to improve active travel in and around the community.
- e) **Volunteering:** We now have 26 trained volunteer rangers supporting the work of ten ranger services and other partners. Training for the next intake, already 'recruited', is scheduled for early spring 2020.
- f) **Education and Inclusion:** Cairngorms Youth Action was launched by Mari Gougeon, Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment, in October with the team of young people sharing their stories of last year's work and their vision for the future on how better to meaningfully engage and work with young people. We are now recruiting for 12-15 young people (14-26 yrs. old) to take forward this work in 2020. The **John Muir Award** continues to be popular with some 2,477 mainly young people discovering, exploring, & conserving this area and then sharing their experiences. Backbone, with support from Cairngorms National Park Authority and Scottish Natural Heritage. The **'Writer in Residence'** celebrates its completion on 21 November with an event in Grantown sharing the stories that people in and around the National Park have written to celebrate the outstanding culture of this area. A book has been published of this work that will be widely available. This work has been supported by Creative Scotland, with Woodland Trust. We will now look at options for supporting 'a writer in residence' in future years.
- g) **Information and Interpretation:** Ten local information centre (**LIC's**) partnerships are now in place across the National Park. Staff have participated in the **'Make it Yours'** training and all the centres are branded, have visitor leaflets and are promoted on our website and maps of the National Park. Through this winter we will look at how to improve our support and meet with communities that are interested in expanding this network into their area.
- h) **Snow Roads Scenic Route:** The CBP secured Visit Scotland Growth Fund support that continues to use the SnowRoads to target international buyers in France, Germany, Scandinavia and North America for the first time, encouraging them to list the Cairngorms for travellers who design their own itineraries and arrange their own travel plans.

Rural Development:

- a) **Local Development Plan 2020:** The Board approved the submission of unresolved representations and other relevant documentation on the proposed Local Development Plan to the Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) for examination by a Reporter. The documents were submitted at end of

September 2019. We are awaiting details of the timetable from DPEA and expect the examination to start early in 2020.

- b) **Planning casework:** The Planning Committee approved a new distillery and a second phase of affordable housing at Beachen Court, both at Grantown-on-Spey, a number of retrospective track applications and affordable housing in Dulnain Bridge. An appeal has been made against the CNPA's enforcement notice to remove a section of unauthorised track in Glen Clova. Upcoming casework includes land re-grading works at Cairngorm Mountain and another retrospective application for a track at Balavil estate.

- c) **Planning and the Natural Heritage:** As part of our Planning Service Priorities a workshop was organised with SNH for staff from our two organisations plus the five local authorities and SEPA. Discussion focussed on the new Local Development Plan, the new planning legislation and processes to make sure that planning process was working well to conserve and enhance nature.

- d) **Affordable Housing Delivery:** A number of communities continue to actively pursue community housing projects – in Dulnain Bridge, Boat of Garten, Tomintoul, Braemar and Ballater. BSW Timber and Seafield Estate have an active planning application for affordable housing near Boat of Garten. CNPA is assisting the Tomintoul and Glenlivet Development Trust with refinement of costs with view to submission of stage 2 application to Scottish Land Fund to redevelop the old school site. In Braemar, the community's proposals have recently received pre-application advice. All the projects are hoping to use the Scottish Government's Rural Housing Fund to progress their plans. Next meeting of Community-led Housing Group is in late January.

- e) **Economic Action Plan:** The Economic Action Plan is being presented to Board for approval in December along with a summary of the responses received during the consultation.

- f) **Cairngorm Mountain:** Staff continue to assist HIE & other partners with planning a sustainable future for the ski area. HIE have commenced work on a masterplan for the area, including significant public engagement. A planning applications is under active consideration for modification of terrain close to the base station and a further application to move snow-making equipment to a site above the mid-station is expected soon.

- g) **Tourism Action Plan:** The Cairngorms Tourism Partnership met in November, with Board member Janet Hunter in the Chair, and discussed: National Tourism Strategy, adventure tourism, campervan use and the mid-term results for Cairngorms Visitor Survey 2019/20. Overall, good progress is being made with delivery of the Tourism Action Plan with a mid-term review scheduled for summer 2020. Mid-term 'summer' results for the Visitor Survey have now been circulated to partners. So far the results show: an increase to visitors of the importance of the area being a National Park; an increase in the ratings by visitors of their overall experience; the availability of public toilets was identified as a priority for improvement.

- h) **Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund:** Muir of Dinnet project (car-park extension, new sewage disposal and motor-home provision) led by SNH is nearing completion. Glenore project (a path) is awaiting approval – see above. The RTIF scheme has been extended and Expressions of Interest are to be submitted by middle of January.
- i) **A9 Dualling project:** The CNPA is maintaining an objection to the Dalraddy to Slochd section on the basis that the provision for non-motorised users between Aviemore and Carrbridge is insufficient. In the meantime staff are assisting Transport Scotland with a study to identify a suitable off-road walking and cycling route between Aviemore and Carrbridge.
- j) **Badenoch Great Place Project:** The Badenoch Festival was used to launch the branding proposals for the destination around concept of “Badenoch: The Storylands”. Work is under way on wide range of projects including Gaelic place-names; attracting people off the A9; development of a web portal to link to community websites; development of a network of community heritage ambassadors. Badenoch has featured in a new VisitScotland marketing campaign. A work stream is about to commence with businesses and the Project has agreed to attend Expo next year along with the Cairngorms Business Partnership.
- k) **European Regional Development Fund:** The RSPB application for enhanced visitor facilities, car parking and interpretation at Abernethy was successful. Progress and plans were reported to the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership and implementation is planned for 2020.

Stakeholder Engagement:

- a) CEO attended a range of groups/events including Environment and Economy Leaders Group, CoHI, Cairngorms Funicular Response Group, Scottish Land Commission Conference, UKNP Conference, Europarc Conference, National Park Partnership AGM, SNH/LLTTNPA/CNPA joint meeting.
- b) CEO also had meetings with the following people & organisations – Mr Li Chunlian, Vice Administrator, National Forest and Grassland Administration, China; Dr José A. Herrera, Minister for the Environment, Sustainable Development and Climate Change, Malta; HIE; NLHF; Highland Council; Crown Estate Scotland; Forest and Land Scotland; CBP, Scottish Government Economy & Agriculture, VisitAberdeenshire, Tomintoul Community Associations.
- c) CEO spoke at the following events – NHI/NC500 Conference, Planning and Natural Heritage Seminar, CBP Annual Conference, Entrepreneurial Scotland Climate Event

Communications:

- a) **Cairngorms Nature Campaign:** The Cairngorms Nature BIG Weekend will take place 15-17 May 2020. Building on this year’s success, the programme will include a launch event, school arts competition, a community hub in Grantown-on-Spey working with local schools, care homes and local businesses, various specialist

inclusion events as well as the Park-wide programme of events run by rangers, estates and partners. A rural skills day will take place on Monday 8th June 2020 and two young people (16-30 year olds) have won a scholarship on a LANTRA Accredited Nature Identification course to be run by Speyside Wildlife in 2020. Xander Johnson, Cairngorms Nature Young Ambassador, continues to promote Cairngorms Nature through his video work winning two more awards and he presented on BBC AutumnWatch hosted in the Cairngorms National Park throughout 2019 and into 2020. Sustainable farming is promoted through the Cairngorms Nature Farm Awards won by Ballinluig Farm near Grantown-on-Spey.

- b) **Make It Yours Campaign:** The CNPA's 5 yearly all park visitor survey started in May this year and the first [six month data interim report](#) was presented in November with the full year final report ready in July 2020. A [summary of the 2015 data](#) is available on the Cairngorms National Park website. The 2018 STEAM data is now available and show that visitor numbers have increased by 4.7% from 2017 to 1.92M and that an estimated £270 million was generated within the local economy through visitor and tourism business expenditure, an increase of 12% on the previous year. Also worth noting is that 62% of the additional visitors in 2018 came to the Cairngorms in the quieter months of September and April.
- a) **Active Cairngorms:** The third **Wee Walks Week** was promoted across the National Park 9th – 15th September encouraging us all to take a short walk for health and enjoyment. It also promoted the great local path network shared on 17 community path leaflets, and celebrated local health walks. Promotion of responsible access continues to be a major focus of the campaign and work is underway to get a more collaborative approach in place across Scotland led by SNH and supported by both National Park Authorities and the Forestry & Land Scotland.
- b) **Corporate Communications:** The Cairngorms National Park Authority [Annual Review 2018/19](#) has been published on our website along with the Annual Accounts which were laid in Parliament during week commencing 11 November. A consultation on the [Economic Action Plan](#) is complete and the plan has been finalised for Board approval. The [National Park Partnership Plan Annual Review](#) was published in an e-storybook format and has been viewed 354 times between 14 June – 5th July.

To progress our Gaelic Language Action Plan we have recruited another Gaelic Language research student starting in January to help promote Gaelic Experiences in the Park through our digital communications. The [online 'Gaelic as an Asset' Toolkit](#) was published in July and a joint Gaelic Education project with Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park Authority was promoted with local schools in August.

Organisational Development:

- a) **Office Extension Project:** Our HQ extension won the Architecture Journal Architecture Award 2019 for best workplace up to 10,000m² with judges commenting that the development "achieves remarkable things on a limited budget". For more information see: <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/story.aspx?storyCode=10045328> . A new kitchen has been fitted in the old building and we are developing plans to upgrade

the meeting and social space in the old building. We are also reviewing the possibility of improving cycle storage facilities to promote active travel to work.

- b) **Staffing update:** Since September, staff turnover and recruitment has been as follows:
 - i. Caroline Stanton joined us as Landscape Adviser, replacing Graham Saunders.
 - ii. Vicky Walker joined the Authority in the Office Services Manager post, which is a variation of the recently vacated Corporate Support Officer role.
 - iii. Leavers included: - Kirsty Mackenzie (Leader Project Development and Support Officer) who came to us as an Apprentice several years ago and who has secured a new position with Scottish Government; Emma Rawling who's fixed term contract as the Cairngorm Capercaillie Project Community Ranger has come to an end.

- c) **Youth Employment:** : On-going commitment to supporting Youth Employment, as follows:
 - i. *Internships:* - We have appointed two interns – Bruce MacDonald who will collate research for a project bringing Gaelic Heritage to life for non-Gaelic speakers; and Cameron Cosgrove who will digitise unmapped woodland and trees in the Cairngorms National Park. We are also currently recruiting an intern to identify and digitise eroding and drained peatland.
 - ii. *Work Experience:* - We are supporting a young person from Grantown Grammar on a 10-day placement over the next 5 weeks, helping her to understand the role of the Authority and the various jobs and career paths to those jobs.

- d) **Shared Services:** Continued work to provide HR support the Scottish Land Commission has included the development of new policies, the development, staff consultation and submission of the 2019/20 pay remit, which has recently been approved and implemented.

- e) **Organisational Development Strategy 3:** We have now launched the next stage of our Organisational Development Strategy – ODS3, which has been consulted with the Board's S&RC and staff through the SCF. Working groups have been set up to deliver this strategy. The Best Companies Survey was completed in October, and the results are due early in January. The survey results will feed in to the evolving ODS3.

- f) We have secured funding to replace two of our diesel pool car fleet with electric vehicles and four more with petrol hybrid vehicles and these changes are being implemented over the final months of the year.

- g) **UKNP:** With the national charity now established, National Park Partnerships, in conjunction with the charity Trustees, have begun to seek charity funding from national organisations and national campaigns which would not otherwise be accessible by individual or smaller / regional groups of national parks. The initial bids for funding have been submitted over July and August. With respect to wider sponsorship activity undertaken by National Park Partnerships (NPP) the position for each NPA to be at worst cash-neutral in terms of comparison of each Authority's

annual contribution when compared with the cash return from corporate sponsors and funders for the 19/20 financial year. The value of clothing from Columbia is additional to this.

- h) **Cairngorms Trust and LEADER:** The Cairngorms LEADER Programme allocation of £2.97 million is now fully committed, with an additional £0.07 million secured from competitive bids into remaining national funds to finance additional activity in the Cairngorms. Estimated total project value including eligible match funding is currently estimated at £3.807 million excluding organisations' "in-kind" match funding in terms of staff and other existing resources contributed to project delivery. These in-kind costs are ineligible for the current programme and therefore do not feature in project values. The Trust is leading on a sustainable rural transport cooperation project, alongside Kilkenny LEADER (Ireland). Two successful stakeholder group meetings have now taken place. This project aims to implement improvements in community and active travel provision.

- i) The Trust has also made its first awards from charitable funds to support community projects following adoption of two campaigns and opening a small grants scheme of up to £1,000 supporting community led projects. Development of the voluntary giving scheme remains a focus for the Trust Manager, although the current uptake by local business into the scheme is relatively slow. However, some £2,200 has been raised in the year to date against a business plan target of £5,000 for the first year and therefore some early inroads are being achieved.

**Grant Moir
December 2019**

Board Convener Update – For Information

I have continued to work with Murray Ferguson, Director of Planning & Rural Development, on the consultation around the Economic Action Plan and as part of that we met with Jackie Brierton of Growbiz. We discussed the proposed plan and ways that Growbiz and the National Park might be able to work together in the future. There is the possibility to collaborate on a smart village's project in the CNP with three communities outlined as potential pilot areas.

Grant Moir, Chief Executive and I attended a meeting with all Chairs and CEOs from the Scottish Government Environment Directorate to discuss climate change and possible areas of future collaborative work. This was a positive meeting and further opportunities from this discussion for the CNPA are likely to come forward in the future.

Gaener Rodger and I attended the very successful launch of Cairngorm Youth Action with Mairi Gougeon MSP, Minister for Rural Affairs & Natural Environment. The young people who have steered the project since its inception did a great job of explaining the issues faced by young people living in the Cairngorms and some of the areas of work that the group intends to focus on going forward. The groups' work will build on the EUROPARC Youth Manifesto which the CNPA is committed to supporting.

I have just returned from National Parks UK Chairs Forum where it was agreed to take the final steps to dissolving the NPUK Company. A majority of directors agreed to proceed with the dissolution. Now all 15 National Parks, who are the only members, will be written to ask for their consent to dissolve it. A 75% majority of NPs in favour is required to enable the dissolution to happen. The Chairs endorsed the programme of work of the new Branding & Marketing Unit, subject to a few minor changes. This strategy has been formulated in consultation with CEOs and Heads of Communications of all 15 National Parks and will focus heavily on climate change and biodiversity loss. Dame Fiona Reynolds, Chair Green Alliance, spoke about future challenges and opportunities for National Parks, particularly in relation to climate change. Next year's Chairs Forum will be hosted by Loch Lomond & the Trossachs NP in Balloch.

Xander McDade
Board Convener

External Engagements (16th September – 27th November 2019)

In addition to scheduled Board meetings and internal meetings, I have attended the following external engagements in my capacity as Convener of the Board since our last Board meeting.

Date	Engagement	Venue
16/9	Meeting with Jackie Brierton, Growbiz and Murray Ferguson, Director Planning & Rural Development	Coupar Angus

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Formal Board Paper I 6th December 2019

1/10	Meeting with Roseanna Cunningham MSP, Cabinet Secretary and other Environment Directorate Chairs & CEOs	Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh
7/10	Meeting with Mairi Gougeon MSP, Minister	Grantown-on-Spey
7/10	Launch of Cairngorm Youth Action with Gaener Rodger	Grantown-on-Spey
28/10	Convention of the Highlands & Islands with Geva Blackett	Inverness
26/11	Meeting with Lorne Crerar & Carroll Buxton, HIE Chair and HIE Interim CEO and Grant Moir, CEO	Aviemore
26-27/11	UK National Parks Chairs Forum	London

Board Member Updates

Willie Munro

I was at the board of VisitAberdeenshire on 28th October. There was a presentation and discussion on the new national tourism strategy. It largely mirrors the discussions that we have in CNPA, particularly about the need for more to be attracted into employment in the sector and the subsequent challenges of recruitment and retention, affordable accommodation, training and quality.

I was also at a meeting of VisitAberdeenshire/Scottish Government about Adventure Tourism and VA project Extreme North.

Douglas McAdam

On 27th Sept I attended the Bein A'Glo path event representing the Convener. Along with John Swinney and project partners I made a short address on behalf of the CNPA to the guests which was well received and raised some key points on managing visitor impacts and visitor giving. John Swinney was very supportive of the project and a good turnout despite the weather. Some media coverage achieved.

19th November. I attended the WildScotland AGM and conference which was held in the LLTNP HQ in Balloch. I attended as both WS Board member and also CNPA Board member. A good turn out and good discussions focusing on growing the wildlife and adventure tourism market and also, importantly, focusing on the problems of littering in the NP and wider countryside/marine environment with a look at some interesting schemes to address the issue e.g. Basking Shark Scotland beach clean projects initially supported by Crowdfunding and now part of their commercial product.

Geva Blackett

Carolyn and I represented the Board at the Europarc Conference in Latvia. The busy week included fascinating presentations from two young entrepreneurs and the role of nature in health (including mental health) by Dr William Bird. Field trips were diverse from the restoration of wetlands, fishing and cultural heritage, cycling tours, gastronomy and a chance to discover the natural healing powers of Ķemeris National Park by learning about the natural curative resources of Ķemeris National Park looking at mud and mineral water...) to name but a few. The very long day ended with a delicious meal and open air musical evening in the Ķemeris National Park. I also attended the Park's Presidents and Mayors meeting. Carolyn attended a workshop about rejuvenating urban areas – she couldn't believe she had to go to Latvia to hear from Paul Barclay, telling us about the work he does with TCV Scotland, a Scottish community volunteering charity, that focus on healthier, happier communities through engagement with nature. All in all a fascinating trip which was also attended by other officers in different 'guises' and a fantastic representation from some of our young people who are not just amazing ambassadors but also great fun!

Amongst other meetings I have attended CoHi in Inverness as an observer; Murray Ferguson and I met with Angus McNicol and Mark Tate from the CBP in Tomintoul to discuss their response to the Economic Action Plan; At Derek Ross's request I attended a meeting in Tomintoul along with Eleanor, Pete Crane and Grant to listen to their concerns about rubbish and the future of the public loos; I attended a meeting at Glen Tanar hosted by VisitAberdeenshire which was also attended by the Scottish Government and Aberdeenshire Council and most recently Pippa Hadley, Deirdre Falconer and I attended the CBP Conference in Aviemore.