

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: Operational Plan - Update to End of Quarter 4

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Purpose

To report on delivery of the operational plan for the year April 2004 to March 2005.

Recommendations

That the Board:

- a) note good progress overall with delivery of the CNPA's first operational plan;
- b) note the areas of concern, on which effort will be focused in the coming year, notably the delivery of work on theme 3 (developing clear cohesive strategies for stewardship of the natural resources of the National Park), and setting and meeting of targets for dealing with planning applications.

Executive Summary

The CNPA's first operational plan, for 2004/05 set 103 actions to deliver the six themes set out in the first corporate plan. Of the 103 actions, the majority have completed, or for those which were ongoing throughout the year, are successfully on track. Although a significant number were delayed, they are well in hand with completion scheduled and expected in the coming year. Of the six actions marked as "amber" in quarter 3, all but one are no longer amber and are back on track. Two areas of concern remain the delays in delivering the work on theme 3 (natural resources), and dealing with the workload of planning applications. The CNPA's annual report and accounts for 2004/05, which will be produced in quarter 3, will set out a comprehensive account of the year's activities.

Operational Plan – Update to end of Quarter 4

FOR INFORMATION

Background

1. This report provides an update on progress, at the end of the reporting year, with delivery of the CNPA's first Operational Plan. This operational plan derived from our first corporate plan, which set high level aims and objectives through the articulation of 6 themes. The operational plan homes in on the various actions which will collectively deliver these themes, and is a mix of those which are part of long-term strategy development with an end point beyond the current year, and the much shorter term "deliverables".

Issues

2. 103 actions are listed, for completion during the reporting year (April 04-March05). These are flagged up under three main categories:
 - **Completed** – the action/outcome has been completed.
 - **Delayed** - the action/outcome has not been completed by the date originally planned. The addition of "**in hand**" indicates that follow-up action and timetable is already in hand.
 - **On track** –this is applied to those actions with no specified delivery date, as they are on going throughout the year.
3. Of the 103 actions:
 - 56 - have been completed;
 - 33 - have been delayed but are in hand;
 - 6 - have been delayed with future action not scheduled;The remaining 9 are "on going" actions:
 - 8 - are on track;
 - 1 - an on going action is marked as "in hand"
4. Six actions were marked as "Amber" at the end of Q3, indicating some concern:
 - 3 – Gateway signage, which is high profile and on a very demanding timescale. Railway signs are already being put in place, with the interim road signs scheduled for April/May. We expect to meet that timing. Work continues on the permanent entry point markers, with the landscape architect and designers appointed.

No longer Amber.
 - 42 – Development of individual projects under the LBAP project umbrella. Good progress has been made since the last report, including a positive forward planning meeting with the Management Group.

No longer Amber.
 - 60 – Processing of planning applications within the national benchmarks has been difficult. New DC officer now recruited but will take several months for impact on determination rate to show.

Remains Amber.

70 – The State of the Park Report: early working drafts had not been up to the standard required, meaning a slight delay in completion of the Report. This is now resolved and back on track.

No longer Amber.

75 – Drafting of the Local Plan. Consultation has gone well, and the project remains on track. The task and timescale of drafting the Local Plan (first draft) remains demanding but is on track.

No longer Amber.

5. In appraising progress with delivery of this operational plan, one area of slower than expected delivery need to be highlighted. Although there are no actions marked amber within the third theme of “develop clear, cohesive strategies for stewardship of the natural resources of the National Park”, progress across this theme has been mixed. Some individual projects have made extremely good progress – notably the Moorland Project and the Land Based Business Training Project – and work on defining public benefits has started well. However, progress in other areas has been slower than expected. This partly because of human resourcing problems, and also a reflection of the fact that much of the work in this theme is complex and strategic – progress will always be difficult, and results will take some time to be obvious. In the next year’s work, a greater concentration of effort will be directed towards these areas, and a clearer set of priorities established so that we establish the right balance between the long term strategic planning and the shorter term project delivery.

Policy Context

6. Achievements during the year, shown under the three cross cutting themes adopted in the new corporate plan, are as follows:

7. Delivering Sustainability

- Work on National Park Plan on track for consultation early 2006;
- First consultation on Local Plan completed;
- Audit done of potential mechanisms for delivering affordable home ownership;
- Pressed case for improved water and sewerage infrastructure in Park;
- Contributed to Community capacity building ;
- Sustainable Tourism strategy and action plan completed – applied for European Charter for Park;
- Green audit completed on both offices.

8. Delivering a Park for All

- Entry point signage: interim signs and signs at stations in place; good progress with permanent markers;
- Cairngorms Local Access Forum in place;
- Contribution to projects: consultation on Speyside way extension; CORC at Laggan;
- Young Cairngorm Website developed;
- John Muir Aware project hosted;
- Cairngorms Brand developed;
- Calendar competition and small grants scheme delivered;
- Progress on developing Ranger service strategy; ranger events leaflet produced.

9. Delivering Efficiency, Effectiveness and Economy

- Organisational structure: Staffing complement largely in place; pay and grading system; performance review system in place;
- Culture of outward facing developed: Website development continued; 3 editions of Parklife; FOI systems in place;
- New Corporate plan developed;
- Training programme implemented across whole organisation, Groups, individuals and Management Team;
- Financial control systems, HR systems and other internal control systems in place and refined;
- Risk register established.

Implications

Financial Implications

10. These are not discussed here, given that they will be considered in detail by the Finance Committee as part of its quarterly monitoring of expenditure. Internally, we are continuing to review our project management and monitoring systems and skills, and implement any lessons from the last year's operational plan delivery.

Presentational Implications

11. In keeping with our desire to be open and transparent, this paper is an honest appraisal of how well we have delivered our first operational plan. It provides an opportunity to keep not just the Board, but also a wider audience informed about progress. A more discursive review of the CNPA's performance in 2004/05 will be provided in our annual report and accounts, which will be completed as soon as the accounts have been audited.

Implications for Stakeholders

12. It is important to note that some of the major projects that are "housed" in the CNPA, (in that the project officers are employed here) are funded by a range of partners, and in many cases overseen by a steering group. The credit for good progress therefore goes not only to those individual staff members, but to all the other partners.

13. Similarly, it is worth reiterating that much of the work in the operational plan is very dependent upon working with other partners and stakeholders. The role of the CNPA is clearly one of co-ordinating and enabling, and many of the actions on the operational plan reflect that - leading the preparation of the National Park Plan, and the Local Plan are two good examples. However, the end point of that work is for the whole of the Park and all the organisations operating within it; and the processes involved will inevitably only be successful if they effectively engage all other stakeholders and partners. The willingness of others to engage in this delivery is acknowledged and appreciated.

Conclusions

14. Building up capacity in the early days of an organisation is a challenge, with arrival of new staff, the need for familiarisation, training, and introduction of new internal control systems all mean that effectiveness and efficiency are not at the levels one could reasonably expect after 2-3 years. Nevertheless, delivery of this first operational plan has overall been quite successful. Of the 103 actions listed, the majority have been completed, or are confidently expected to be delivered in 2005 following some slippage.
15. Good progress has been made with the actions marked as “amber” in quarter 3. Two areas of work remain of concern: delivery over the area of natural resources, and dealing with the workload of planning applications. These will be the focus of attention in the new operational planning year.

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22 March 2005

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