
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: CEO REPORT

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 Forest Strategy** – The Forestry Strategy consultation document will come to the Board in January 2018 for approval. This is a slight delay on the original timetable but the three month consultation period will still start in February 2018 as planned.
- b) **East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership** - The most recent partnership meeting involved agreement on a Work Programme for the Group. This includes wader monitoring, muirburn mapping, woodland expansion opportunities and creation of an interpretation facility. We have provisionally agreed the funding for a project officer to help make this happen.
- c) **Peatland restoration** - Peatland restoration projects are ongoing. Stephen Corcoran is currently managing seven projects with a total value of £760,786 targeting restoration work over 582ha on Invercauld, Balmoral, Glenfeshie, Abernethy, Mar and Candacraig Estates. This is a huge amount of work. As soon as we know whether or not additional funds may be available through Peatland Action we will be applying for additional project officer support.
- d) **Cairngorms Capercaillie Framework** - The bid to HLF was unsuccessful however we are maintaining momentum on the huge amount of progress that has been made and intend to resubmit in a revised bid in early December.
- e) **Tomintoul & Glenlivet Landscape Partnership** - All the staff are now in place, based in the office above the Discovery centre in Tomintoul; the most recent addition being Louise Stuart the new Training Officer. Local awareness of the Partnership and its role is increasing thanks to a range of excellent events that have taken place and are in the pipeline. The new Peesie project bird hide is now up, just beside the road junction at the south end of the village and nearby at Auchriachan some fantastic work has been undertaken to manage the river banks.

- f) **Wildlife Crime** - The CivTech challenge is progressing well with new technological advances in satellite tracking raptors. Announcements will be made on this in the New Year. We are progressing the plan to recruit new Special Constables (with a wildlife crime prevention role) with Police Scotland and Scottish Government.

Visitor Experience:

- a) **Long Distance Routes** - Speyside Way extension: final planning application will be submitted in early 2018. Funding discussions with a range of partners are progressing and we anticipate that completion of the whole route by 2019 is possible.
Deeside Way: planning for the first section from Braemar to Invercauld Bridge has required more natural heritage input than first anticipated. A revised planning application will be submitted in early 2018.
- b) **Mountains and People Project** - The project is on schedule with some 15.2 km (37%) of the Cairngorms Mountain paths identified upgraded. The allocation of paths in Drumochter needs revised because of ongoing vehicle use: OATS, SNH and CNPA will agree priorities in early 2018. The final path worker training scheme ends in November. The project is approaching the 'half way point' and so the outputs and legacy we be discussed at March board meeting.
- c) **Active Cairngorms** - The main area of activity is focussed on Active Aviemore with CNPA leading a partnership comprising Sustrans, Hitrans, NHS, Highland Council and Aviemore Community Council to develop costed proposals to redesign Aviemore to encourage greater active travel (walking and cycling). This work is linked to the new consultation on the Main Issues Report for the Local Development Plan.
- d) **Cairngorm and Glenmore** - Progress has been slow with delivery of the Strategy but Forestry Commission Scotland is now developing, in consultation with partners, a new visitor plan. An application to Leader, if successful, will obtain essential information on public transport option in 2018 that will allow future improvements in transport to be tested.
- e) **Volunteering** - CNPA now promotes volunteering across the National Park with over 30 volunteering opportunities on our website. Feedback from partners is positive. Eight volunteer rangers completed training in October and are now supporting local services. A further eight will be trained in early 2018. The project is approaching the 'half way point' and so the outputs and legacy we be discussed at March Board meeting.
- f) **Education and Inclusion** - The John Muir Award continues to be popular with 2,958 Awards delivered in and around the National Park so far this year. Grantown Grammar celebrated its 1,000th award this summer with national interest. The Backbone project continues to encourage 'minority groups' to enjoy the Scottish countryside and both National Parks. Despite foul weather in October the Blair Atholl Outdoor Festival for All attracted 212 visitors some 7% with a registered disability.
- g) **Information and Interpretation** - CNPA opened the Interpret Europe Conference in October in Inverness with a keynote speech to 208 participants from 27 countries. Half these delegates then enjoyed a day visit to the National Park to either; Tomintoul

and Glenlivet or Cairngorms and Glenmore to experience the area and discuss with partners the ongoing work in a world context. Work continues to upgrade Ballater VIC which is due to Open in Spring 2018. CNPA visitor leaflets for 2018 are being updated for distribution in Spring 2018.

- h) **Snow Roads Scenic Route** - Cairngorms Business Partnership have appointed the two year Project Manager and undertaken an extensive visitor survey over the summer. Outputs will be discussed with key partners along the route at three meeting at end of November. The Snow Roads and Photoposts project featured in BBC Countryfile in late November.

Rural Development:

- a) **Local Development Plan 2020** - The consultation on the Local Development Plan Main Issues Report started on 17 November 2017 and runs until 2 March 2018. Appropriate adverts have been placed, correspondence has been sent to all key partners and a series of community events is planned. Discussion will take place with the Developers Forum and Planning Representatives Network during the period.
- b) **Planning casework** - Although call-in of planning applications remains at a low level, the team have been undertaking a programme of monitoring of hydro scheme developments undertaken over the past few years, with follow-up work to ensure conditions are complied with and restoration is done satisfactorily. The team have also responded to a steady stream of pre-application advice requests. Planning enforcement casework has increased with investigation of new or upgraded tracks on open moorland where works may have been undertaken without consent. A report on enforcement activity will be taken to Planning Committee in December.
- c) **Planning Service** - The Planning team has returned to full strength with recruitment of a Planning Officer and two new Graduate Planners. CNPA has won awards in the “Place” and “Peoples’ Choice” categories Snow Roads Scenic Route project at the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning (SAQP) in November 2017. Planning Officer, Katie Crerar, was recently jointly awarded the title of Scottish Young Thinker of the Year (Runner up) as part of a national development programme for young people.
- d) **Digital Communications** - A comprehensive paper on broadband was presented to CNPA Board in October. With the development of the Scottish Government’s Reaching “100 project” that plans to deliver high speed broadband to 100% of Scottish properties, Cairngorms Community Broadband has decided to suspend its proposed project. CNPA coordinates the Digital Communications Steering Group and continues to press for improved communications about roll out of high speed broadband. There will be a Planning Committee update paper on telecoms upgrades in early 2018.
- e) **Tourism Action Plan** - Following a verification visit in early June by assessors from Spain and Latvia CNPA was re-awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas for the third time. The Award ceremony for the Charter will be held in Brussels on 7 December when awards will be made to 21 destinations. CNPA are the only participant in the event from the UK and have been invited to make a presentation

about their work. The Cairngorms National Park is the only accredited sustainable destination under the scheme within Scotland.

- f) **Housing Delivery** - Development on the ground of housing and affordable housing at sites at Beachan Court, Grantown-on-Spey and at Boat of Garten is progressing well and the CNPA Planning Committee will determine a planning application for a further phase of housing at Beachan Court in December. Work has been progressing with Highland Small Communities Housing Trust and Voluntary Action Badenoch Strathspey to review arrangements for community led housing delivery and meeting is planned in January to look at progress and identify next steps to take forward potential projects.
- g) **A9 Dualling project** – The Kinncraig to Dalraddy section was opened on 30 September 2017. The next formal public consultation stage for the section from Killiekrankie to Glen Garry started on 28 November and will be reported to the 15 December Planning Committee. Formal consultation on two further sections (7-Glen Garry to Dalwhinnie and 8-Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore) is programmed to start from late December and over January. The formal stage publishes preferred options, Environmental Statements and extent of compulsory purchase orders. CNPA staff have committed considerable effort into minimising the impacts of the works through informal feedback on Environmental Statements and advice on the significant and detailed challenges linked to habitat restoration and maintaining landscape qualities. In relation to planning for the tourism and business improvements associated with A9 project, HIE have developed a new proposed approach and CNPA are keen to see this work progress.
- g) **Economic Strategy** - Discussion has commenced with partners on the review of the Economic Strategy for the Park which runs until March 2018. Progress with delivery has been good in certain areas (e.g. tourism) but delivery in other areas has been slow. We have significant challenges gathering data about economic performance across the Park in a consistent way. A programme of work is being planned including stakeholder engagement and Board discussion.
- h) **Community-led development** - Liz Henderson started work as the Community Support Manager in October 2017 and has been making contact with community groups and stakeholders across the National Park. One of the role's priorities will be to help stimulate and support community housing projects.
- i) **Badenoch Great Place project** - The Badenoch Great Place Project was developed and a bid submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund's Great Places Scheme. The pilot fund is about celebrating great places and the project was developed to fit with the spatial priority area identified in the National Park Partnership Plan. We expect to find out whether the bid was successful by mid-December.

Stakeholder Engagement:

- a) CEO, Convener and 2 other board members attended the NPUK conference in the South Downs in October. In November we also welcomed the LLTTNPA Board to the Cairngorms.

- b) The CEO attended CoHI, EELG, SCDI event in Aberdeen, Natural Capital Roundtable, CBP Conference, Arctic Forum, Nature of Scotland Awards and spoke at the Civitech Roadshow in Inverness and the SNH all staff meeting in Perth.
- c) The CEO has also met with a number of stakeholders including Aberdeenshire Council, Highland Council, John Muir Trust, landowners in the Park and research providers.
- d) The Board had its latest evening in Braemar with the local community and discussion mainly focussed on the main issues and development sites around Braemar.

Communications:

- a) **Cairngorms Nature Campaign** – work is underway to develop a programme of events for the Cairngorms Nature Big Weekend 12 & 13 May 2018 which will be launched before Easter. Cairngorms Young Presenter short-list of 8 went out for public vote and the winner will be announced on 4 December. There were three Cairngorms National Park entries for the RSPB Nature of Scotland Awards and Jim Simmons won in the Food and Farming Category.
- b) **Active Cairngorms** – a review of Wee Walks Week 2018 is underway and recommendations for improvement are being implemented including how to better monitor participation through online pledges. Social media activity reached 49,000 on Facebook (6.8% engagement rate) and 60,000 on twitter (1.8% engagement rate).
- c) **Make It Yours campaign** – we received very favourable feedback following the EUROPARC sustainable tourism award assessment. The development of a more detailed learning experience alongside the one hour presentations for tourism businesses was suggested and a half- day session aimed at outdoor activity providers will be prepared and trialled in the spring 2018. Ellis Brigham has offered to sponsor the ‘tear-off’ map pads again for use during the next season. Branded Merchandise sold at the Grantown Museum was successful and led to their supplier to sign a Branded Merchandise Agreement to produce branded products which will contribute 5% of net sales to the Cairngorms Trust for conservation projects. VisitScotland has taken an order to sell these products at the Aviemore VIC over the winter and if sales are successful they will extend this to Ballater, Braemar and potentially Pitlochry VIC as well.
- d) **Corporate Communications** – public consultations launched for the LDP Main Issues Report (ends 2 March 2018) and the Gaelic Language Plan (ends 15 December 2017). A second iteration of our Gaelic Language Plan will be submitted to Bord na Gaidhlig for approval by 5th March 2018. Our [Annual Review & Accounts 2016/17](#) is available online and our social media activity has increased to reach 12,000 followers on Facebook (19.6% engagement rate) and 11,400 followers on twitter (1.5% engagement rate). A Communications & Engagement plan to support the new Corporate Plan is being prepared for approval by the Board in March.
- e) **Europarc Conference 2018** – a draft programme including workshop topics and study tours for the EUROPARC Conference are being developed and a website and booking system built to allow online bookings and payment to commence before the end of March 2018. The conference is expected to attract 500 delegates consisting of around 300 EUROPARC delegates, 100 Youth delegates and 100 day delegates.

Organisational Development:

- a) **Office Extension Project** –the CLT (Cross Laminated Timber) panels have now been delivered and work is ongoing to get the building wind and water tight. A temporary roof has been erected to provide some protection from the weather whilst this work continues. The electrical work is largely complete and the next stage will be to fit the glazing, the larch cladding and then commence the internal fit out. Completion is still anticipated to be July 2018.
- b) **Staffing update** – We have recruited two Graduate Planners, both of whom are in post – Luke Vogan and Colin Bradley. The Planning team is now fully resourced. We have also appointed a Landscape Officer, Graham Saunders who joins us in January. The Admin Support Officer post was also successfully recruited, with Vivienne Roach joining us in January. There are currently no vacant posts.
- c) **Youth Employment** – Further to our recently launched Youth Employment Strategy, we have in the last few months supported the following activities:
 - i. We successfully supported a 13 week Project Scotland volunteer placement, which ended in November. We will continue to work with Project Scotland to support additional volunteer opportunities within the Authority.
 - ii. We are currently recruiting an Intern to deliver a 3 month project that will involve research into available resources that promote Gaelic as an Asset particularly in terms of heritage, tourism, visitor interpretation and experiences within the Cairngorms National Park.
- d) **Organisational Development Strategy 2** – ODS 2 is now well under way with a great deal of activity across all 4 work streams. We aim to collate all the activities that have been implemented and will take this to the S&RC for information in due course. The Best Companies Survey was conducted in October. There was a 90% response rate. Results our due in mid-December. We will analyse the results, identify both highlight and shadow areas, and an action plan, which will be fully consulted with staff. The action plan will further inform the evolving Organisational Development process.

Future dates for diary

- Draft Scottish Budget will be published on Thursday 14th December.

Grant Moir

December 2017

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Board Member Update

Carolyn Caddick

Cairngorms Business Partnership Conference - really positive experience, providing an opportunity to meet with lots of businesses and people employed in the CNP. There were also some interesting speakers covering digital marketing to the NC500.

On-Board NP Training – This provided high quality training on Board Member responsibilities and also an opportunity to meet and share ideas with new LL&TNP Board members.

LLTTNPA Board Visit - I also was one of the hosts on the LL&TNP Board visit - I thought this was really positive and enabled me to meet up with LL&TNP members again and share information on potential projects, compare and contrast how the two NPs work and discuss challenges common to both areas. I look forward to visiting LL&TNP next year when we will hopefully have a return visit. I found this is particularly valuable to me as a new NP Board member.

Judith Webb

Erasmus+ - With CNPA recommendation & support (but no cost!) I attended a week long Erasmus+ study tour to South West Norway looking at various land use issues - including montane woodland. Part of the arrangement is that I disseminate information gained on the trip, so at some stage in early 2018 I will give a short presentation to Board Members on this. Linked to this I also attended a day long ICF seminar at Glenmore on Montane Woodland.

LLTTNPA Board Visit - I attended the visit by LLTNP Board members and can confirm that it was a constructive and well received event - with both Parks benefiting from the experience.

Aviemore Community Trust – I attended the drop in session to look at their proposals for a potential Community purchase of HIE land at Cairngorm Mountain.