

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: CAIRNGORMS TOURISM ACTION PLAN

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Purpose

To seek the Board's approval of the Cairngorms Tourism Action Plan for submission to Europarc as part of the re-evaluation process for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.

Recommendation

That the Board approve the Cairngorms Tourism Action Plan for submission to Europarc.

Strategic Context

- I. In 2005 the Cairngorms National Park became the first National Park in the UK to be awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (ECSTPA); in 2011 our approach in the Park was re-evaluated and awarded again. The Charter was originally developed in 1995, following the ground breaking report "Loving Them to Death" which called for sustainable tourism in Europe's protected areas, and is based on these five Principles:
 - i. Giving priority to protection
 - ii. Contributing to sustainable development
 - iii. Engaging all stakeholders
 - iv. Planning sustainable tourism effectively
 - v. Pursuing continuous improvement

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2. The Charter is awarded on submission of a re-evaluation application report with supporting materials, including strategy/action plan for sustainable tourism, and after an independent site verification visit. An accessible guide to the benefits, conditions and guidelines to the Charter can be found here http://www.europarc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/ECST_2015.pdf.
3. We have agreed to re-apply in December 2016 and would have a verification visit in late Spring 2017.

Delivery of Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2011- 2016

4. The Sustainable Tourism Strategy had 6 Strategic Objectives, 8 Action Areas and 53 individual actions. A mid-term review of the strategy was undertaken in 2013. At the same time the National Tourism Strategy 'Tourism Scotland 2020' was published and the Cairngorms Economic Strategy was being developed. As a result, in 2014 we created a much shorter Tourism Action Plan identifying a series of key priority actions for tourism which reflected the mid-term review, Tourism 2020 and the Economic Strategy.

Highlights

5. A great deal has been delivered over the past five years against the objectives and actions within the Tourism Strategy. A few of the key highlights include:
 - a) Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP) – the CBP continues to grow and has its highest membership to date. They are also working pro-actively with neighbouring destination management organisations and are drawing in income from a wider range of sources both Public and Private sector.
 - b) Marketing – A new Regional Marketing Strategy is now in place for the Cairngorms National Park. The Strategy has been developed by VisitScotland (VS) and in conjunction with the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership (CTP). Collaborative marketing campaigns delivered with CNPA, VS and CBP.
 - c) Make it Yours – project developed to grow and develop the National Park brand as an entity beyond the brand image to raise awareness of the Park's special qualities, build the brand as an asset for businesses and create a connection to the Park so people care about it. Presentations and materials delivered and increased number of businesses signed up to brand.
 - d) Outdoor Access and COAT – COAT has grown and developed completing the Mountain Heritage Path project and securing £5m of funding for the Mountains and People Project. The Speyside Way extension to Newtonmore has been

approved and completed as far as Kincaig. Preliminary work on extending the Deeside Way is underway. Work on upgrading, signing and promoting the community path network including 17 community path leaflets and two guides to all abilities routes.

- e) Food and Drink – The ‘Food For Life’ Project was completed in 2014 and delivered a range of initiatives including a Cairngorms Food and Drink Trail, Cairngorms Larder, a Producers Guide, and marketing initiatives as part of the VS ‘Year of Food and Drink’ in 2015. A number of food festivals and events now take place in the CNP including the Deeside Food and Fiddle Festival.
- f) Monitoring indicators – Over the period of the Strategy:
 - i. Tourism spend in the CNP has grown at a higher rate (13%) than for Scotland as a whole (9.3%) (*Great Britain Tourism Survey (GBTS) domestic overnight visitors only*)
 - ii. There has been a higher percentage change in visitor days than visitor numbers, so visitors are staying longer. For staying visitors, average length of stay has increased from 3.2 nights to 3.5 nights. (*STEAM data*)
 - iii. Visitor satisfaction has increased from an average of 8.46 out of 10 to 8.76 out of 10 (*CNP Visitor Survey*)
 - iv. 91% of visitors know they are in a National Park compared with 82% 5 years previously (*CNP Visitor Survey*)
 - v. 97% of visitors think that the National Park is well cared for compared with 88% 5 years previous (*CNP Visitor Survey*)

Challenges

- 6. Whilst much has been achieved, there have been a number of challenges, these include:
 - a) Sustainable Tourism Forum – the mid-term review of the Strategy identified a number of issues with the existing Sustainable Tourism Forum in terms of a lack of partner engagement and joint action, and the need for the Forum to be seen as the lead body for tourism in the area. The structure of the Forum was reviewed and a new ‘Cairngorms Tourism Partnership’ established in its place. The term ‘Tourism Partnership’ is well understood in other areas in Scotland and joint working has improved. The new CTP, however, still needs further development to ensure it is fully representative of all elements of sustainable tourism.
 - b) Europarc Engagement – Active engagement with the Europarc network is challenging due to the distances involved in travelling to European network events. The UK National Parks’ network provides a valuable alternative.
 - c) Resource management and conservation – A great deal of investment has been made in the path network in the CNP but there are no long term mechanisms in place to support the ongoing maintenance. Both visitors and businesses have indicated a willingness to give something back in terms of caring for the asset,

both the infrastructure and conservation of the area. Some initiatives have been put in place but this continues to be a challenging area in which to make a difference.

- d) Geographic Diversity – tourism monitoring statistics show that the visitor economy of the CNP has grown overall during the period of the Strategy. There is some indication, however, that some areas of the CNP have in fact reduced. There are various factors that may have influenced this including the closure of major hotels and loss of visitor attractions in Deeside in particular.
- e) Statistical Monitoring – gathering statistical evidence by which we can measure change can have its challenges. The 5 yearly Visitor Survey results are extremely useful but the costs of carrying out the survey are extremely high. The tourism volume and value data is taken from the ‘STEAM’ model which has a number of inaccuracies and flaws and is not used for all areas of Scotland meaning that it cannot be used as an effective comparison tool. A project to develop a new model ‘DREAM’ unfortunately stalled. The Great Britain Tourism Survey is also a useful monitoring tool and VisitScotland provide a useful breakdown of these statistics but not necessarily in such a way that allows us to gather specific information.

Europarc Re-application

- 7. Europarc identify a set of 5 Principles and 10 topics with associated actions which should be covered by a Sustainable Tourism Strategy to achieve Charter status. For our two previous applications to Europarc we have submitted a stand-alone Sustainable Tourism Strategy and associated Action Plan for the Park which addresses all of these. We have found, however, that the Sustainable Tourism Strategy had a high degree of cross-over and connections with the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) and associated Strategies (e.g. Active Cairngorms and Cairngorms Nature).
- 8. For our third application we are putting forward the NPPP as the document providing the Strategic context for tourism in the National Park. A new Action Plan has been developed to accompany the NPPP which identifies the key tourism related actions required to support delivery. The Action Plan is shown at **Annex 1** and the strategic context for the Plan is shown in Figure 1 on page 3 of the Plan.
- 9. As we are now on our third application, there are many existing initiatives that are underway which address many of the topics and actions required by Europarc. We have not included all of these within the new Action Plan; rather the Action Plan focusses on the new priority areas. The table in **Annex 2** includes the Europarc Principles, Topics, and Actions and identifies how these are addressed by either:
 - a) the new Tourism Action Plan; and/or;
 - b) existing initiatives, plans and strategies.

Developing the Tourism Action Plan

10. The Tourism Action Plan (**Annex I**) has been approved by the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership (CTP). The CTP is chaired by Paul Easto (CNPA Board member and tourism business owner) and is facilitated by CNPA staff. In preparing the Tourism Action Plan we have taken account of:
 - a) delivery against the previous Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Tourism Action Plan (see above);
 - b) the National Tourism Strategy, 'Tourism Scotland 2020' and the mid-term review undertaken in 2016 which identifies revised key priorities focused on Leadership, Influencing Investment, Quality of the Visitor Experience and Digital;
 - c) preliminary analysis of the feedback from the NPPP consultation as set out in a separate Board paper;
 - d) Europarc principles, topics, and actions required for award of Charter;
 - e) discussion with the leadership of the key destination organisations in and around the Park (e.g. Cairngorms Business Partnership, Visit Aberdeenshire , Moray Speyside, etc.); and
 - f) discussion at the CTP where there was a particular desire to simplify both structures and strategies, improve focus by reducing the number of specific actions, and clarify and emphasise the importance of the partner lead for specific areas.
11. The Action Plan sets out the key Themes and Actions and the process for delivering, monitoring and reviewing the Action Plan. The Cairngorms Tourism Partnership (CTP) will coordinate delivery of the Action Plan and the CNPA staff who support the Partnership will make appropriate cross-linkages with other relevant strategic areas of work and Forums.
12. Our re-evaluation application will be made on the basis of the policies and issues identified within the NPPP Consultation Report and consultation feedback. The strategic policies will be updated once the National Park Partnership Plan is signed off by Ministers in Spring 2017.

Strategic Risk Management

13. There is a very minor risk that in applying for re-verification for the Charter we will not be successful. However, we are very confident that we are undertaking the right work in way that is suitable to our particular circumstances and have all of the necessary work planned out. We have discussed our particular approach with senior Europarc staff who have indicated that we will need to explain carefully the appropriate cross linkages between strategic areas of work in the application report and during the Verifier visit.

14. As with all our partnership work we are dependent for delivery on the staff and financial resources in organisations that we do not directly control. As the financial climate tightens some work may need to be delayed or reprioritised. By reducing the number of actions in the Action Plan, ensuring good linkages with partners' priorities, and identifying partners to lead key elements of work we can manage this risk effectively.

Financial Implications

15. Re-application for the Charter requires that CNPA be members of the Europarc Federation, which is in hand, and an upfront cost of €3000 to cover the costs of assessment and a verifier's visit. We have generally found these visits to be invaluable in the past in helping to develop our approach to delivery and in securing partner commitment.
16. The ongoing financial costs in delivering the Tourism Action Plan are in predominantly staff resource costs both for CNPA and partners and are covered by the Corporate Plan. A key financial cost within this area of work is in maintaining the visitor infrastructure which is already in place and there is a specific action within the Action Plan to try and grow awareness of this and develop approaches to future funding.

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