

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY FINANCE AND DELIVERY COMMITTEE

FOR DECISION

Title: PROJECT CLOSURE: CAIRNGORM & GLENMORE STRATEGY

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Purpose

To review the project which was to develop a Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy and formally close this phase of our work in Cairngorm and Glenmore.

Recommendations

The Finance and Delivery Committee is requested to:

- a) Agree to close the project.
- b) Note the lessons learnt and next steps.

Executive Summary

1. This paper is the formal project closure document for the project developing the Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy. Brief background to the project is provided along with a summary of activity over the last two years. Key project outputs are listed along with lessons learnt and next steps. The main risks associated with taking the work forward are outlined.

Background

2. The development of a new strategy for Cairngorm and Glenmore was identified as a key priority in the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2012-17 and as such was the focus of considerable amount of work during the period.
3. The area is exceptionally important for nature conservation and as such is highly designated. The landscape quality is high and for many typifies the National Park. The area is the most popular destination within the National Park receiving over one million visits per year and has such is a key component of both the visitor experience and the visitor economy in the eastern Cairngorms. The area is a most used setting off point for the central Cairngorms. Management of the area involves multiple public agencies.

4. To date visitor management across the area has been somewhat ad-hoc and it was quickly identified that a new co-ordinated approach was required to enhance nature, improve the visitor experience and to plan for increasing numbers generated by new operators at CairnGorm Mountain and improvements in transportation connections; A9, Highland Rail Line and Inverness Airport.

Summary of Project Activity

5. In March 2014 CNPA Board approved a formal partnership agreement with Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Highland and Islands Enterprise (HIE), Highland Council (HC) to take forward the work. Following this a project steering and project working groups were formed.
6. The working group sort involvement from key local partners including Natural Retreats CairnGorm Mountain (NR), Scottish Youth Hostel Association (SYHA), SportScotland Glenmore Lodge (GmL), Highlife Highland (HH) as well as other local tourism businesses supported by the Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP).
7. CNPA developed a project plan and associated equalities impact assessment, communications plan, environmental impact assessment and habitat regulations assessment to take forward the strategy.
8. In parallel FES, HIE and NR developed management plans that complimented the developing strategy for their respective land holdings, or tenancy in the case of NR.
9. CNPA Board was formally updated of progress in March 2015 and a public consultation on the draft strategy and action plans took place between 1st December 2015 and 8th March 2016.
10. The consultation elicited 60 written responses (17 from organisations and 43 from individuals), 50 people attended a public drop-in in Aviemore and 35 people attended a business breakfast discussion organised by CBP. Following the consultation additional meetings were held with local businesses and organisations.
11. In June 2016 CNPA Board discussed the consultation report and then formally approved the revised Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy in September 2016. The Strategy was also approved by the public sector partners: FES, SNH, HIE and HC.

Key Outputs

12. The following key outputs have been delivered:
 - a) Strategy for Cairngorm and Glenmore
 - b) Management Plan for HIE Estate at Cairngorm
 - c) Draft Visitor Improvement Plan for Glenmore (to be further refined by FES)
 - d) Detailed spatial plan for Youth Hostel/Visitor Centre site at Glenmore

13. As part of the process Natural Retreats produced an outline master plan for future developments at CairnGorm Mountain but this is now being superseded and we await a revised plan in spring 2017.

Lessons Learnt

14. Many of the lessons learnt came out of the initial work undertaken in 2013/14 where we did not dedicate enough resources to appropriately work and effectively communicate with the wide range of partners both with a local and national interest in the area. As a consequence we received justified criticism at the time.
15. Developing the strategy has been a complex and intricate process and key lessons gained during this process include the benefits of:
 - a) Developing a dedicated formal public sector partnership and associated steering and working groups focused on this single high profile activity.
 - b) Developing formal project planning processes including a very detailed communications plan to ensure that we are clear about the information we present, and to allow partners and consultees to have the opportunity to fully participate.
 - c) Providing detailed (face to face) briefings to the media in advance so that they can be clear about why we are doing the work and what we want to see improve as a result of the work.
 - d) Using clear diagrams and maps, plain English and common expressions to communicate strategies and plans. Despite our efforts to keep documents easy read we clearly still reverted to jargon at times.
 - e) Using our partners' strengths to support the processes; such as FES to provide project management expertise and CBP to support business engagement.
 - f) Organising additional meetings post consultation to gain further clarification. This was a particularly useful process with the organisations that responded that including many NGOs. Here we organised a dedicated half day follow-up to the consultation.
 - g) Maintaining communication with partners and consultees throughout the process to strategy approval and beyond.
16. A significant omission was our failure to understand that we should not 'take for granted' existing policies. This was particularly important in the area of nature conservation where in the draft documents our failure to both state and endorse existing policy led some to believe that we were ignoring such policy.
17. A significant disappointment is that we are still awaiting a master plan for the ski area leased by Natural Retreats. Following the consultation NR has decided to revise their plans and aim to represent in spring 2017. Nevertheless, NR remains 'bought into' the Strategy and their revised plans will need to compliment this work.

Next Steps

18. Our role will continue to be:
 - a) Co-ordination of the partnership, project management and reporting;
 - b) Contributing to delivery of actions;
 - c) Carrying out our statutory functions as planning authority
19. The current economic climate provides significant challenges to taking forward some of the more costly actions both in public realm and third sector – SYHA and Highlife Highland. This is further exacerbated by the uncertainty over the key improvements that Natural Retreats wishes to develop. Nevertheless, it is important that we start to implement improvements ensuring that these compliment future work.
20. The strategy identifies the likely timescale for implementation. Within the actions scheduled for 1-2 years partners are prioritising quick wins that can be delivered on the ground. During this period we will focus on actions in and around Glenmore, and bring together a group to look at options for improving public transport and active travel from Aviemore.

Risks

21. The significance of the partnership means the Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy is identified in our strategic risk register: (VI) Partnerships: competing priorities act to prevent or delay delivery of Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy and Active Cairngorms Strategy.
22. Ongoing project management structures that continue to bring partners together mitigate as far as possible. But reduced organisational capacity and resources among all partners remains a significant risk to delivery. There is no current budget allocation for many of the actions identified and partners will need to co-ordinate resources and identify funding options.

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