

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: RESPONSE TO FLOODING FROM STORM FRANK

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Development**

Purpose

To consider the issues associated with flooding from Storm Frank (29 - 30 December 2015), particularly the steps CNPA has taken to assist the response and to look forward to implications for future management.

Strategic Context

Storm Frank caused unprecedented levels of flooding in parts of the National Park but especially in Deeside, in Aberdeenshire. Flood management responsibilities are set out in the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009. The two National Park Authorities in Scotland were designated as responsible authorities in 2012 following consultation by the Scottish Government. The National Park Authorities work with SEPA, local authorities and Scottish Water to help develop Flood Risk Management Strategies and Local Flood Risk Management Plans. They also play an important role in land use planning, thereby carrying out activities and granting permission for activities that can play a key role in managing and reducing flood risk.

Recommendations

That the Board note the paper.

1. The significant damage associated with Storm Frank, caused by unprecedented rainfall across Aberdeenshire, has already been widely publicised. In Deeside, Ballater was particularly badly affected when the river breached an embankment causing many houses and businesses to be flooded and the caravan park was partially washed away. The destruction of static caravans caused extensive debris to be distributed along riverbanks downstream of Ballater. Further west, the main road between Ballater and Braemar was completely washed away and the main road-bridge seriously damaged. A significant cultural heritage feature, Abergeldie Castle, was very nearly lost and, across the whole area, extensive lengths of fencing, paths and tracks were damaged.

Policy background

2. The Flood Risk Management Strategy for the NE Local Plan District (as required by the 2009 legislation) was published by SEPA in December 2015, just two weeks before the floods, and covers the whole of the catchments of the Rivers Dee and Don:
<http://apps.sepa.org.uk/FRMStrategies/norh-east.html>
3. A number of Potentially Vulnerable Areas (PVAs) are identified within the Strategy including Ballater and at Aboyne (partly within the National Park). Each PVA has an associated Action Plan. Ballater PVA Plan:
http://apps.sepa.org.uk/FRMStrategies/pdf/pva/PVA_06_22_Full.pdf
4. Once a major incident is declared the Response and Recovery phases are led by the emergency services and specialist teams in Aberdeenshire Council (AC). Responsibilities of the respective public bodies for flooding have been clarified and are set out here: <http://www.sepa.org.uk/environment/water/flooding/responsibilities-for-flooding/>. It is the responsibility of each local authority to prepare Flood Risk Management Plans and to implement and maintain flood protection measures and clear and repair watercourses to reduce flood risk.

The Response

5. The immediate response phase was handled very effectively by the emergency services and Aberdeenshire Council, given the unprecedented circumstances and the loss in Ballater of several key facilities including the police and fire stations. CNPA were able to assist at short notice by providing office space and the services of administration staff (Julie Jarvis).
6. Immediately following the incident, a CNPA Action Plan was prepared to ensure that all parts of the organisation were playing their part to assist with recovery. The main approach was to focus on core CNPA statutory responsibilities in relation to outdoor

access and planning functions and then provide assistance to communities and partner organisations as required and as resources allowed. The Community Development Manager (Lee Haxton) was seconded to work from Ballater temporarily to assist with community issues. A group of key staff met as a Flood Response Group on a weekly basis throughout January and early February and a specific communications plan was prepared. In addition, staff participated in a number of key coordination groups including the Ballater Community Flood Liaison Group and significant meetings with fishery managers, the National Farmers Union and tourism businesses.

7. Aberdeenshire Council have now shared their Flood Recovery Plan and this provides very useful context for the key aim of “returning the area to normality”. The main elements of assistance provided by CNPA are summarised in the following short sections from the CNPA Action Plan.

Outdoor Access

- a) Path damage was quickly assessed and assistance provided to land managers to close paths where necessary. Information was provided for visitors on websites and social media channels about the status of paths and bridges. Special signage was provided to land managers free of charge.
- b) Paths damage was then surveyed as part of a partnership exercise with land managers, rangers and the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust. Information was collected on standard format and analyses to assess costs. In the period immediately after the flooding event, 249 km of core path and wider network were surveyed. Within Aberdeenshire 100km of the 241km of the core path network (i.e. 41% of the total network) were affected in some way by the flooding, including:
 - i. 10 core paths (66km) that were severely damaged,
 - ii. 6 core paths (13km) that were damaged, and:
 - iii. 7 core paths (31km) that experienced minor damage.
- c) The Polhollick, Cambus O’ May and Easter Balmoral suspension bridges were severely damaged - the three bridges are closed resulting in significant disruption to the path networks. Detailed surveys are to be undertaken shortly but it is anticipated that repairs will be in the region of £1.5 – 2 million. The total estimated costs for path and bridge reinstatement are £2.6 million – or £612k if the significant bridges are excluded. This information has been passed to Aberdeenshire Council and will form part of the plan to be submitted to Scottish Government.
- d) The relevant community path leaflets are being re-designed and reprinted for the visitor season ahead and there are plans for enhanced distribution.

Planning

- a) Planning policy issues were assessed and there is no need for any short term changes. The policy framework will be comprehensively considered as part of the development of National Park Partnership Plan and there will be a focus on natural

flood management as part of catchment management. Further review will take place through drawing up the next Local Development Plan.

- b) For development management issues CNPA assisted Aberdeenshire Council and SEPA develop a suite of pragmatic, fast-track processes for planning applications for flood related activity.
- c) Advice has been provided on a proposed aerial survey of the Dee by Hutton Institute, SEPA and Aberdeenshire Council to assist with future river management as part of catchment initiatives
- d) Meanwhile staff are continuing to advise and provide input to the preparation of the new Flood Management Plans, led by the relevant local authority. Strong emphasis will be given to the information available as a result of the recent flood.

Community issues

- a) Staff provided significant assistance to the Ballater and Crathie Community Council to organise a public meeting with key agencies in Ballater followed by a drop-in session to collate information about the flood and the response. Peter Argyle chaired the public meeting which was attended by 230 people. Key concerns raised were about flood warnings, the Ballater flood protection measures, the reinstatement of key community facilities and businesses and the community resilience plan. The information collected from the public is currently being collated and will be passed to the relevant agencies – the images collected about flood levels will be part of a citizen science project being led by Aberdeen University Department of Geosciences. A further public meeting is planned for 23 March.
- b) An audit of damage to community assets was undertaken and shared with partners.
- c) Staff advised on establishment of Ballater Community Resilience Group and on recovery and mid-term planning at the Ballater Caravan Park which is managed by a community enterprise.
- d) The CNPA office in Ballater was made available to staff from the local driving test centre and this avoided the cancellation of several weeks worth of driving tests.
- e) A team of 16 CNPA staff volunteered for a day in mid-February to assist with river bank clear-up and large amount of waste was collected for disposal and recycling.
- f) The CNPA Charitable Staff Fund made a financial contribution to flood recovery.

Tourism and Business

- a) CNPA assisted financially with a survey commissioned by Cairngorms Business Partnership and Visit Royal Deeside on the impact of the floods on businesses on Deeside. The report is produced in full at **Annex A**.
- b) CNPA also helped fund and chaired the “After the flood” event organised by Visit Royal Deeside and Cairngorms Business Partnership in mid-February for tourism businesses. The meeting, attended by over 70 participants, was filmed and shared on social media. The strong steer for future marketing of the area was to focus on positive messages and the quality of the destination.

- c) As part of the recovery phase CNPA is influencing the key Spring marketing campaigns to focus on Deeside. In addition, key events such as the Cairngorms Nature Festival in May have been modified to ensure an even stronger focus in Aberdeenshire.

Looking ahead

- 8. In the short term the key focus for attention continues to be in Ballater where the combined effect of the flood damage on homes, businesses and community facilities (on top of the earlier fire damage to key visitor facilities) is very significant. We have shared the report on the costs of path repair with Aberdeenshire Council and Scottish Government and will press for an early decision on resources so that repairs can be made.
- 9. In the medium term, provision has been made for flood related activity in the Operational Plan. The consultation on the National Park Partnership Plan will focus on natural flood management.
- 10. The internal Flood Response Group will meet in March to identify key lessons learned and report back to Management Team.

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