
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DISCUSSION

**Title: CAIRNGORMS OUTDOOR ACCESS TRUST –
CONTRIBUTION TO THE 2012 – 2015 BUSINESS PLAN**

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Purpose

This paper provides a brief summary of works that have been delivered by the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust over the last 2 years and seeks approval of a contribution to the remaining elements of their Business Plan which runs to March 2015.

Recommendations

That the Board

- a) Notes the programme of works that have been delivered to date and the overall 1:5 leverage that has been achieved in the 2011/12 financial year;
- b) Approves the overall funding of £590,000 over three years to the work of the Trust. (This amount is subject to CNPA Board approval of the Corporate Plan.)

Executive Summary

The Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust is now entering its fifth year of operation and over that time has increased both the amount of work undertaken each year and the level of funding that has come from external sources. Total works carried out in 2011/12 amounted to £1,170,000 compared with £340,000 in 2008/09. The amount of funding that CNPA has paid as a percentage of overall costs have reduced from 44% to 20% showing genuine buy-in from a broad spectrum of partners.

The availability of funding over the course of the next Corporate Plan period has reduced and this is reflected in a significant reduction in grant being proposed for the work of the Trust. The funding sought will enable the Trust to continue to deliver the key elements of work identified in the National Park Partnership Plan but also recognises the need to manage partner expectations in what can realistically be achieved by March 2015.

CAIRNGORMS OUTDOOR ACCESS TRUST – CONTRIBUTION TO THE 2012 – 2015 BUSINESS PLAN - FOR DECISION

Background

1. The Trust is a key mechanism for the delivery of National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) priorities that relate to recreation, health, training and landscape improvements in the mountains. Since its creation in 2008, COAT work has been closely allied to the National Park Plan and this has included, large scale improvements to community path networks, expansion of the health walks scheme across the National Park, the first 18 months of a 4 year programme of mountain path repairs valued at £2.1 million, delivered a training skills project that has resulted in direct employment for graduates and maintained and improved the existing Speyside Way.
2. Over the last four years COAT has used CNPA and other funders' money to create considerable leverage using some of the large funders such as Heritage Lottery Fund, European Regional Development Fund, LEADER and the European Social Fund. Smaller funding sources have also been used for specific projects to good effect such as Climate Challenge Fund. Over the last 3 years CNPA has contributed £672,000 towards the £2,438,000 value of works that have been delivered across the National Park. This provides an overall leverage of 3.9. There still remains much to do and the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan points the way on a number of topics which are described below.

Delivering the National Park Partnership Plan

3. The work programme that COAT will continue to deliver will meet policy objectives layed in the National Park Partnership Plan and these are detailed in Section 4 below. The strands of work are described below.
4. **Active Cairngorms** – There are two aspects to this work. The first is a continuation and development of the work that has been delivered through the Health Walks project. We wish to see further consolidation of this with health walks under way, led by volunteers, and well-promoted in each community within the National Park. The second aspect is to see a more integrated approach to the promotion of active enjoyment of the Park for health benefits between the respective organisations. In particular, we want to see the National Park concept used to inspire people to be active and we expect to see more collaboration between health professionals, walking groups and other organisations such as sport clubs. This work will require a significant effort in co-ordinating these disparate

groupings and a partnership approach between relevant staff in our respective organisations.

5. **Developing cycling** – The development of an initiative to promote cycling, both on and off-road, will be taken forward over the next five years along with a framework for delivery. The latter element will be the focus of the CNPA along with relevant public and private partners but there will be a significant role for COAT in providing linking routes between communities that currently do not exist or require upgrading. Developing funding packages to support these infrastructure improvements is an area of work that is well suited to the current skill set within the Trust.
6. **Developing low-ground paths** – There remains a pressing need to continue with the work on improving paths in, around and between communities that has been delivered so effectively over the last few years. We have set up a simple monitoring process to see how much of the network is “fit for purpose” and whilst much improvement has taken place there still remains much to deliver in this area and greater difficulty in securing external funding with Leader Programme only able to offer a very limited source of funding over the next few years.
7. **Mountain paths** – The current Mountain Heritage Project is delivering very effectively in the Northern Cairngorms. There remains, however, much work to do in the Southern Cairngorms, including the hills around Atholl. We have been very supportive of the proposed joint funding application with our sister National Park Authority as the most likely way of ensuring a bid can be successful for HLF grant. Given the lead-time for such an application, we see merit in this potential programme following on directly from the current project.
8. **Speyside Way** – the existing route requires both maintenance and improvement within the overall approach of a route that is more accessible to more people. The recent work near Cromdale has been effective in this regard and provides an example of improvements that require to happen between the Moray Council boundary and Aviemore. The proposed extension south to Newtonmore is an area of work where we believe COAT could play a lead role in relation to survey, fundraising and implementation.
9. **Training** – supporting land-based businesses with training is another programme of work that will be taken forward and contributes directly to the long-term aim of a sustainable economy supporting thriving businesses and communities. The current three year, ESF-supported training programme is one that fits well with this National Park Plan objective and one that we would hope can be continued through to 2017.

10. COAT has been very successful in responding to new funding availability with projects that are “shovel ready.” This has been particularly useful as the Park Authority has been able to draw in additional funds at short notice on the clear proviso that they can be delivered quickly. Indications are that in-year budget adjustments at Scottish Government level are likely to continue to bring these short lead-time funding opportunities to the Authority and COAT remains a key delivery organisation for us in being able to respond and secure funds. Therefore we would expect COAT to develop a series of projects, with planning permissions in place if need be, and ready to tender to take full advantage of these windfall opportunities.

Strategic Fit

11. The work planned fits very closely with the areas of work identified in the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan and will deliver against all three long-term outcomes:
- a) A sustainable economy supporting thriving businesses and communities;
 - b) People enjoying the Park through outstanding visitor and learning experiences; and
 - c) A special place for people and nature with natural and cultural heritage enhanced.
12. More specifically, within the five year programmes of work that we wish to achieve by 2017 we have identified the need to : *Provide high quality opportunities for access and recreation, with a particular focus on:*
- a) Ensuring a high quality functional network of core paths and long distance routes;
 - b) Promoting the health benefits of outdoor recreation;
 - c) Identifying areas where particular management measures are needed in relation delivering a high quality visitor experience and safeguarding sensitive environments;
 - d) Promoting responsible behaviour in taking and managing access.

Option Analysis

13. The work could be done in-house by CNPA staff but, given current resourcing constraints, it would not be possible to make appropriate progress over the 3 year Corporate Plan period nor have any realistic expectation of delivery of the 5 year programme within the NPPP.
14. The Trust has a proven track record in securing external funding from a range of partners and there is no guarantee that CNPA staff would be as successful. This would result in less being achieved for the same CNPA investment.

Risk Analysis

15. Staff turnover in a small organisation is a potential risk with a consequential impact on delivery. The Trust is operating with a very small core staff. This risk has been identified by the Trust who has further developed the skill set of the Senior Projects Officer so that he is able to replicate much of the knowledge and skills of the Manager. In addition, all contract work is delivered externally thus utilising the open market to deliver the works.
16. Financial risks have also been considered as COAT operates with limited reserves. The CNPA Finance Manager has been working closely with the COAT Manager to plan cashflow accurately. This risk can therefore be managed by staging the CNPA contribution to ensure funds are available at the appropriate time.

Implications

Financial Implications

17. Over the last two financial years CNPA has contributed £185,000 per annum to the package of work delivered by COAT. We have also, through separate funding, used COAT to maintain the existing Speyside Way within the National Park. This has resulted in an overall contribution of £205,000 per annum.
18. The amount of funding available has reduced and is reflected in the draft Corporate Plan. The proposed level of funding is £82K less than was given over the previous three years and 11% less than is shown in COAT's Business Plan. COAT will therefore have to work closely with partners to manage the expectation of what can be achieved with this reduction in funding.
19. There are two lines in the Corporate Plan that relate to COAT. They are "Investing in COAT to deliver a wide programme of works" and "Speyside Way improved and extended." These are aggregated in the table below.

Table 1

Financial year	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Total
Proposed Grant	£170,000	£210,000	£210,000	£590,000

20. CNPA funding has already been approved for two elements of the work being delivered. These are the Mountain Heritage Project (£50K per annum) and the Training Project (£15K per annum). The total value of these two projects is £1,170,000 over the three year life of the Corporate Plan. Additional funding has also been secured from Paths to Health for an annual £10K contribution to Health Walks and SNH are contributing to both the Mountain Heritage Project and low

ground path works. Once CNPA funding has been approved, COAT will be able to secure funding packages, and further partner buy-in, for a range of low ground works which have been prioritised through the Core Paths Planning process. The existing COAT business plan is shown in Annex I.

Presentational implications

21. COAT has built up a very solid reputation amongst community and other groups for delivering high quality pieces of work on time and to budget. The further funding of their existing business plan will demonstrate to communities the CNPA's desire to see a broad range of access and health related work taken forward in a systematic manner over the next three years. The contribution of partners to the COAT business plan is a very good example of how agencies and others come together to deliver the National Park Partnership Plan.

Implications for stakeholders

22. The continued delivery of the current business plan will help meet the needs of communities, communities of interests and funders.

Funding conditions

23. The following funding conditions are proposed in addition to the standard grant conditions:
 - a) The Cairngorms brand will be used on all promotional material. For the avoidance of doubt this will include such items as path leaflets and interpretation facilities. (It will exclude way-marking and sign posts.)
 - b) Directional path signs and waymarkers installed as part of the business plan should follow the Directional Paths Signs Guidance developed by CNPA.
 - c) CNPA will be included in any promotional material and press releases about the project; and
 - d) Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust will make available on request copies of all eligible expenditure, including surveys and reports relating to the work programme

Next steps

24. An annual update on progress will be provided to the Board as well as the reviews provided four monthly to the Board on progress against the Operational, Corporate and National Park Partnership Plans.

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